

## ABSTRACT

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  SCHOOLING, STATELESSNESS AND  
  SAFETY AT THE THAILAND-BURMA  
  BORDER

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There are approximately 1.5 million migrant workers from Burma living in Thailand. The majority work as day laborers on farms, in factories, in fishing and seafood processing industries, and on construction sites. They eke out a subsistence living, are vulnerable to trafficking, largely marginalized in Thai society, and often work in exploitative and unsafe conditions. They live in fear of detection by the Thai authorities because they're at risk of deportation and extortion due to their illegal status.

A vast majority of people in Burma negotiate their lives amidst decades of armed conflict between several ethnic armies and the repressive Burmese junta. The Burmese migrant community in Thailand, despite facing social dislocation and poverty, has established schools in Mae Sot, a town at the Thailand-Burma border accorded by the Royal Thai Government with privileged trading terms for

manufacturing exports. Mae Sot exudes a whiff of lawlessness, a frontier town emblematic of capital and labor flows across porous borders in an era of globalization. Ethno-nationalistic cultural politics also construct curriculum as especially contested terrain.

The migrant community schools provide schooling for students living outside the scope of state protection and services. These schools often act as intermediaries for children ensnared in exploitative labor situations, provide psychosocial support and provide cognitive space to envision and plan a future outside the scope of the immediate situation. This case study of migrant community schools documents these strategies and explores the significance of schooling for migrant parents, teachers and children. Migrant workers are too often treated as objects of circumstances and not subjects who can articulate histories—of flawed economic policies, colonialism, conflict, and displacement—but this case study captures their interventions to organize on behalf of their families and themselves.

Two overarching questions frame this study: what are the meanings and practices of education for poor, socially marginalized and vulnerable communities? How does the migrant community in Mae Sot negotiate and mitigate their vulnerabilities through the schools? This research investigates the types of protection strategies employed by the schools, assesses some of the schooling constraints facing the children, including poverty and lack of legal status, and studies the Mae Sot Burmese community against regional economic and conflict-induced causes of migration and globalization's yawning appetite for low-wage laborers.

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BORDER

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Today 800 million people suffer from hunger and are undernourished. Half of the world's population lives on less than two dollars a day. Ten percent of the world's population receives 70 percent of its income. An estimated billion people entered the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their names.<sup>1</sup> Such statistical demography litters the corridors of international development and financial institutions and frames policy initiatives and debates across all sectors. While they may have a purpose underscoring the dire straits of people living in poverty, it has also relegated the working poor into universal abstractions and placed them outside the discourse of social transformation. These demographic abstractions have become barometers of change and accompany the wide array of interventions of the last half of the 20th century, most of which have emphasized economic growth of developing countries as the elixir to stem poverty. Yet, despite decades of interventions, there have been staggering policy and program failures.

Education has figured prominently in development discourses as a critical ingredient in concocting the policy potion that would sever the cycle of poverty. Yet, despite decades of social and financial policies, according to an Asian Development Bank working paper (Motonishi, 2003: 6), income inequality has “significantly increased” between 1975 and 1998. Careful assessment of economic growth over time in Latin America, for example, has shown that in periods of strong economic

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<sup>1</sup> The World Bank and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2005. Definitions of absolute poverty and even the use of a universal poverty threshold have been contested and merits re-consideration.



growth, there has not in fact been substantial reduction in poverty or inequality (Korzeniewicz and Smith, 2000).

In 1990, the World Conference on Education for All (EFA), comprising of 155 countries and 150 organizations meeting in Jomtien, Thailand, committed to achieving universal primary education in ten years. In 2000, at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, a large-scale assessment that gauged the status of education and evaluated progress since 1990 of education in more than 180 countries revealed that many commitments remained unmet and tasks left undone. While enrolment may have increased, illiteracy, in particular among women, was pervasive, educational materials still scarce and qualified teachers too few (EFA 2000 Assessment, 2000). There was renewed commitment to provide primary education of good quality to all children, in particular girls, by 2015. The resulting Framework for Action included, among other declarations, a commitment to providing free and compulsory primary education of good quality to populations in difficult circumstances, people such as refugees, ethnic minorities, or displaced peoples. Furthermore, the Dakar Framework for Action (2000: 22) expressly states that “special measures...are needed while populations are still severely ‘affected by’ conflict, disaster or instability.” The Framework for Action (2000: 22) advocates “using both formal and non-formal approaches in order for countries to appropriately address the needs of the most disadvantaged.”

A series of activities have been developed in preceding years under the category of education in emergencies (EIE). Many of these activities relate to the early phase of the post-crisis reconstruction and, due to the severe logistical and

security limitations of such scenarios, include provision of schooling materials to facilitate rapid return to national or regional school systems. In 1999, UNESCO characterized EIE as a “crisis situation created by conflicts or disasters which have *destabilized, disorganized or destroyed* the education system, and which requires an integrated process of crisis and post-crisis support (Sinclair, 2002: 22, emphasis hers). UNICEF’s definition of EIE is similar to UNESCO as both organizations include human-made and natural crises to describe EIE, such as war, floods and earthquakes, but UNICEF’s more expansive definition includes social problems such as HIV/AIDS, children living on the streets and in extreme poverty (Pigozzi, 1999). Sinclair (2002), in her publication which is regarded as one of the primary resources in this field, joins many of her peers in largely using UNESCO’s definition.

Using UNICEF’s broader definition of an emergency as a starting point requires a preliminary if cursory consideration of what set of conditions constitute poverty. There is a glut of definitions and shifts over time. The poverty index has been variously determined by income thresholds adjusted by family size, number of children under eighteen years old, and farm or non-farm residence. Many international agencies use the one U.S. dollar per day as an international marker of poverty. The one dollar provides dramatic if real material effects but also tends to overly simplify poverty.<sup>2</sup> Other factors such as life expectancy, child mortality under five, food security and access to clean water may also categorize poverty. The main point to underscore here is that poverty is not relegated to money, but about the essential elements of sustaining well-being such as safe working conditions, earning a

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<sup>2</sup> Definitions of absolute poverty and the even the use of a university poverty threshold have been contested, but this is outside the scope of this discussion.

living wage, sound nutrition, shelter, or having easy access to clean running water. The education in emergencies literature, because it has assumed linear, temporally-defined constructs of programming phases, such as from emergency to reconstruction, falls short of grappling with protracted conflict situations in which migration grows increasingly complex and encompasses internally displaced persons, refugees and migrant workers. The literature on education in emergencies is, therefore, suitably buttressed by broader discussions of migration because they more forcefully introduce the types and conditions of poverty for people in different circumstances, despite, as is evident along the Thailand-Burma border, the shifting definitional categories of who is a refugee or migrant worker. These definitions are determined and cast by policymakers and policies that, while of practical use to agencies and governments, fail to capture the more fluid characteristics linking these categories of people.

Education has been a significant policy intervention mechanism in the development discourse and in particular for poverty reduction; education within this rubric has instrumental value—such as when investment in women’s education is treated as having returns beyond the scope of individual learners to benefits that positively affect the community and family life. Given the global policy environment of EFA which benchmarks a standard for educational access and acquisition of literacy, what are the meanings and practices of education in specific communities living in poverty? What are the processes or outcomes of education in the face of such structural inequality?

Taking these broad queries as starting points, this research seeks to deepen understanding of the broader social and economic circumstances of Burmese migrants who, facing social dislocation and poverty, struggle to create safe, viable community schools in Mae Sot, a border town in Thailand barely separated from Burma<sup>3</sup> by the Moei River. A multi-lane concrete bridge called “the Friendship Bridge” connects Burma and Thailand and allows passage of both sanctioned and black market goods such as timber and gems. Petty traders and laborers from Burma form a long queue on the bridge in the early morning awaiting permission to buy a day pass into Thailand. Decades-long civil war and repressive military rule in Burma further complicate the circumstances of migration. Mae Sot is a commercial frontier town emblematic of capital and labor flows across porous borders in an era of globalization and decades of emphasis on economic growth policies for developing countries. The theoretical conversation that engages with the broader query regarding the processes, practices and meanings of education are important frames to consider prior to introducing the Mae Sot migrant community.

The next chapter in this dissertation reviews literature that, knitted together from multiple disciplines and political perspectives, broadly sketches the various ways education has been conceptualized in the development discourses, the ways it stratifies and liberates, and, finally, how to critically engage with these unsettling dichotomies within the context of a globalized world economy that prizes increasingly technical skills while thriving on low-wage, menial labor. This chapter

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<sup>3</sup> The ruling military junta in Burma officially changed the country’s name to the Union of Myanmar after the 1988 pro-democracy uprising. Many people adhere to calling it by the original name as the name change is linked to a general move to disavow the ethnically heterogeneous composition of the country (Fink, 2001). The term Burmese is not used to signify ethnicity but nationality. It encompasses all people from Burma.

will show that relying on a salient and multi-faceted theoretical approach enables researcher and reader to consider how education may positively contribute to the learning and protection needs of a vulnerable population while also engaging with the complicity of the educational apparatus in perpetuating socio-economic inequity.

The third chapter in this dissertation sketches the political, economic and social contexts of migration flows from Burma to Thailand, in particular to underscore the ways in which economic causes for migration are often rooted in decades-long protracted conflict and political repression. This chapter outlines a brief history of military rule and civil war in Burma (1962-present) followed by a discussion of the social and economic impetuses for migration from Burma to Thailand. Civil war and economic survival are two important contexts against which to document and understand the vulnerabilities of the Burmese migrant workers and their families in a new country. The push of protracted warfare and the lure of the Thai economy, despite offering low wage work in sub-standard or dangerous conditions, underscore the plight of workers the world over as they negotiate a profit-maximizing global economy (Morrow and Torres, 1999). This chapter also provides an overview of Thai policies on worker registration, access to education for migrant children and the material conditions of life in Thailand. It also includes a discussion of Thai government policies and international instruments protecting refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP) and their implications for Burmese migrant workers.

The fourth chapter specifies the research design and outlines the methodology of the research, including the reasoning behind the site selection and approach to data

analysis. This chapter also considers ways of ethically and meaningfully conducting research while engaging with the nature and history of research and in particular of research on vulnerable populations that diminishes research participants into caricatures of third world victims. A significant aspect of this effort is the location of the researcher in the context of the research participants' community. A fair and necessary first step is to expect that the research process not exacerbate the community's vulnerabilities.

The fifth chapter moves us closer in the direction of the local community schools where the research takes place. This chapter describes the material and social conditions under which the migrant community schools function and operate, including the impetuses which underscore community efforts to establish the schools. The sixth chapter considers the two schools under study and their specific practices that uniquely provide safety and protection to mitigate the vulnerabilities of the migrant community in Mae Sot and evaluates the challenges facing educational provision for Burmese migrant children. The final chapter is a discussion of alternative approaches to systemic failures regarding migration and a summary of policy recommendations addressing the needs of migrant community schools in Thailand.

Throughout this paper I use terms such as "Third World," "Western," or "developing countries" but I do so with significant reservations. They are part of a contested vocabulary and are deficient in descriptive value. I echo many other writers and researchers who question and challenge these terms (Marchand and Parpart, 1995; Mohanty, 1991; Anzaldúa, 1990). I use these terms provisionally and fully

acknowledge that they essentialize and generalize a “broad canvas [of] racial, sexual, national, economic and cultural borders” (Mohanty, 1991: 5). Nonetheless, the very failure of language—of theory, of politics, of language—underscores the inherent inequity of relationships between nations and individuals, and in recognizing the provisionality of language we at least start to grapple with histories of colonialism, capitalism, raced and gendered relations.

I borrow Deleuze’s and Guattari’s concept of the rhizome as a metaphor to explain my approach to theory and research. “A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 25). The rhizomatic approach describes multiple, non-hierarchical access and departure points by which to represent and interpret data. Equally significant to this research project is what Deleuze and Guattari writes about displacement, multiple subjectivities and re-imagining social spaces in overtly political tones. Kaplan (1996: 87), writing about Deleuze and Guattari, describes that in “rejecting the classic Western humanist metaphors of... [theoretical] genealogies, the rhizome destabilizes the conventions of origins and endings.” This case study is but one dialogic entry into multiple conversations and continuous acts of resistance in borderlands the world over where workers, both child and adult, struggle to school themselves in survival.

## **Chapter Two: Education in Development Discourses**

This chapter will first provide a broad literature overview of the different conceptualizations of education drawn from technical development discourses as well as from practitioners and critical theorists. It will also consider education in the age of globalization of degraded negotiation powers for lower-wage workers and interconnected economies. This chapter discusses education as a mechanism for social and economic reproduction in a global environment which, while championing technology and technical knowledge, is fueled by the labor of low-wage workers. It is against this broad canvas that in later chapters we are to delve deeply into migrant community schools and the people who live and work under constant threat of violence and effects of poverty.

There are many kinds of migration paths and experiences around the world. There are legal and illegal movements across and within national borders. These categories are easily trespassed: a journey can begin with state sanction, such as evident in the stamp of an exit or entry visa, but culminate as illegal activity if a person decides to stay past the date allowed or move again to another location without authorization. The factors influencing the conditions and types of migration include the individual's level of educational attainment, acquisition of certain skills, impetuses for migration, and access to resources—such as social networks or money. These factors speak to an individual's socio-economic location in the capitalist global economy even prior to migration and have powerful ramifications on the material well-being and security of a migrant.



### *Education and Human Capital*

The deputy director of a Burmese community-based organization at the Thai-Burma border, which supports one of the migrant community schools, while in conversation about the reasons education is a compelling issue for migrant parents, explained that “without education or literacy, the workers get the lowest paying jobs and the most labor-intensive, rough kinds of work.” During that same conversation, he elaborates that “schooling provides many benefits, some to the future development of our country. And even if only one out of one hundred becomes literate there are benefits; if even one student out of a thousand becomes a doctor, there are benefits to that as well.” His opinions echo the lingering treatment of education as it has been conceptualized in development discourses: first, as a necessary springboard for economic growth in human capital theory; second, the way education is conceived as an entry point for facilitating access to the economic sphere, in particular for those traditionally exempted from full participation.

The promise of education has been an important lure for governments seeking legitimacy. For people coping with tremendous cultural and political repression educational opportunities embodies the promise of liberation, of improved socio-economic circumstances and ethno-linguistic preservation. Between 1950 and 1970 the total number of students enrolled in schools has increased on a global level but the least privileged social groups, such as in the rural areas and women, were still without access. In the 1980s this trend in enrolment shifted downwards with a noticeable decline in educational quality, funding and access (Graham-Brown, 1991). There are numerous reasons for this although they are not equally destructive: the inequity

between industrialized and developing countries; global economic policies that have jeopardized critical social provisions for the poorest people; conflict or political strife; and social fissures between ethnic and religious groups that affect who receives education and for how long (Graham-Brown, 1991). Education has been relegated from a human right to human capital and this shift has had tremendous resonance for the most marginalized of groups.

While it has been recognized that people's abilities have mattered to economic development since the study of early classical economics (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985: 15), human capital theory was the first to treat "human resources...as a form of capital, a produced means of production, and the product of investment" (Harbison and Myers, 1965: ix). Capital is defined as anything that generates income over time (Arndt, 1987). Education became therefore both "consumption and investment" (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985: 15) and a pivotal intervention strategy to promote economic development.

Economic development is defined as a "sustained secular improvement in material well-being...reflected in an increasing flow of goods and services" (Arndt, 1987: 51). Others define it as technological progress but it comes at a cost; it requires "continual...accelerating change in social and environmental arrangements" (McMichael, 1996: 3). Economic growth was tantamount to economic development throughout the 1950s to 1970s (Arndt, 1987); as such, policies focused on increasing national income, improving living standards and promoting more consumption. To a large degree, per capita income and gross national product (GNP) were two important indicators, the former more specifically for gauging living standards and the latter for

assessing economic development. Thus, while the initial discourse was dominated by concerns about capital accumulation, the most significant shift occurred when policy discussions shifted from wealth creation to an individual's capacity to produce it. Human capital theory asserted the notion that enabling people to acquire skills is essential for economic growth; investing in education thereafter became a critical strategy to produce important social returns (Schultz, 1961a; Denison, 1962; Mincer, 1993; Becker, 1995). The human workforce became a critical intervention point for capital investment (Fagerlind and Saha, 1989).

Economists utilized and debated various approaches to measure the contribution of education to economic growth. Two well-known examples include Denison's (1962) reliance on the growth accounting approach which looks at GNP as a way of measuring productivity (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985); Schultz (1961a), on the other hand, looked to accounting individual salary, wages or income as indicators of productivity. Human capital theory argued that the state was a poor arbiter of ensuring that education meets the marketplace's needs for "educated labor" (Carnoy, 1992: 145). This economic rationale for educational investment was clearly translated into policy with the increased provision of Western technical assistance and capital to developing countries and invigorated interest in education (Arndt, 1987). This conceptualization of education as the means to economic development led to an interest in conducting "systematic analysis of human resource planning" or labor forecasting (Harbison and Myers, 1965: xii). Labor forecasting was an analytical shift to link occupations with education. Educational planning was to partner professional and academic training with occupational needs of the future. According

to Harbison and Myers (1965) there were seven key findings from labor forecasting research. (i) Increasing peoples' skills require on-the job training, adult education of all kinds, and formal education at all levels. (ii) Investments in technical education must include the right incentives to make certain people actually enter professions that are needed but may have less status, such as nurses. (iii) There is a great deal of political interest and social pressure to better education in developing countries. (iv) Investing in education facilitates economic growth and economic growth in turn enables countries to invest in education. (v) It is important to think about the appropriate incentives and kinds of education since inefficient investment won't produce desired outcomes. (vi) There has to be a balance created between "quantity and quality of education at all levels" because "most newly developing countries...can not increase both at the same time" (Harbison and Myers, 1965: xi). (vii) It is necessary to include labor forecasting in all economic development planning.

There are considerable flaws in labor forecasting; most economists took issue with the approach for basing their techniques on "unrealistic assumptions about the world, and ones that are completely counter to those of neoclassical economic theory" (Klees, 1994: 1812). Psacharopoulos (1978) argued that thorough evaluation is needed of public sector decisions to gauge the range of social benefits and cost. He also took issue with Harbison and Myers (1964; 1965) work, among several other points, for relying on an index of human resource development that is based on secondary and tertiary educational enrolment rates and excludes primary schooling.

More to the point, how useful is labor forecasting in a global world economy that thrives on profit-maximization and low wage, unskilled labor?

### Modernization and Development

To speak of human capital theory without looking at its theoretical genealogy in the modernization school belies their lingering echoes in the policy discourses and schooling practices today. European Enlightenment philosophies provide crucial frames for subsequent political and social theories and revolutions that ruptured the existing social order (So, 1990). The convergence of evolutionary theory, the industrial and French revolutions had profound effects on their contemporaries and still reverberates today (Fagerlind and Saha, 1989). The industrial revolution showcased the use of science and technology to maximize productivity; it both fueled expansion of world markets and was in turn fueled by them. The French revolution overthrew the existing political system and inserted forever into the political and social discourses the notion of equality and liberty among and between individuals. Individuals were determined to be both rational and able to make free choices (So, 1990; Carnoy, 1992). By the start of the 19th century, evolutionary theory theorized that society was advancing from primitive to civilized, and that this process was at once foreordained and necessarily good. These perspectives profoundly influenced the theoreticians and practitioners of the modernization school, the dominant strain of thought in international development discourse from the 1950s to mid 1960s (Mehmet, 1999; Fagerlind and Saha, 1989). The concept of linear, progressive change reveals itself clearly in policy discussions and research about mapping the impetuses and processes that promoted Western Europe's and United State's

economic development and to create similar conditions for Third World countries in the 20th century.

There is an important caveat to this discussion of theoretical genealogies. First, although I describe the modernization perspective in tidy categorical strokes it is only for purposes of clarification and definition. Outside the frames of this paper, it exists in dialogic fashion with and continues to influence other perspectives, such as world systems and dependency theories. “From 1945 to 1990, the international discourse did not so much evolve as accrete. Old ideas did not go away entirely as new ones were added on top, creating a great amalgam of good and not so good ideas, none of them fully implemented” (Grant, 1979 cited in Chabbott, 2003: 36). Finally, I have curtailed description of the modernization perspective to its earlier rather than more recent incarnations.

The modernization school of thought is multidisciplinary, with each discipline producing its own significant methodology and theories to the quest of Third World development. The multidisciplinary approaches do, however, share a common set of premises (So, 1990). According to these premises, the modernization process is, heavily influenced by evolutionary theory; next the modernization school argued that development occurs in incremental phases with societies moving from “primitive, simple, undifferentiated traditional stage [to] the advanced, complex differentiated modern stage”<sup>4</sup> (Portes, 1980; So, 1990: 33); third, a process of convergence in which societies are increasingly similar to one another is occurring; and last, the

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<sup>4</sup> There is a significant divergence between modernization and evolutionary theory in that early modernization writers did not theorize about the further advancement of the industrialized countries, only the developing world. Later modernization theorists addressed these issues more directly (for more discussion on this issue see Fagerlind and Saha, 1989).

modernization school implicitly presumes that Euro-American societies are exemplars of stability and economic affluence and therefore models to be mimicked. Once begun, the path towards modernization can not be stopped even if the pace of change is different for each country. Even where difficulties surface and hurdles exist in the process of modernization, it is both undeniable and desirable. A change in one sphere of the social system will profoundly reverberate through other spheres. Institutions such as the economy, the family unit, media, government and others will inherently yield to modernization.

It assumed that this march towards civilization is steady, will take much time to fully grasp the impact of change and it will unfold in measured steps. The societal shifts will occur in systematic fashion and affect all aspects of life. The transformation will be profound during which traditional, indigenous structures, beliefs and practices are substituted with modern values. This last point particularly underscores the role and responsibility of formal schooling to promulgate profound individual and therefore societal change. There are two exemplars of the modernization school's characterization of societal change. One exemplar lists the values and perspectives of a modern individual and another outlines the impetuses that lead to economic growth. The latter is evident in W. Rostow's (1964) model of five phases leading to economic development. He clearly regarded Third World development as an "extension of US foreign and military policy. [and] believed that the hearts and minds of the people of the Third World could be won over for American capitalism" (Mehmet, 1999: 70). Rostow (1964) believed that a Third World country in its preliminary, traditional phase experiences no social disruption.

This traditional phase ends when markets begin to expand and new industries and entrepreneurs emerge. The “precondition for takeoff growth” (So, 1990: 29), Rostow’s second stage, is marked by a drop in mortality rates and an increase in population. The population growth expends any surplus that may have been garnered by this preliminary surge in economic productivity, and thus, Rostow concludes that a catalyst is required to move a nation towards sustainable economic growth. In the third phase, a catalyst can manifest as a political revolution, a significant technological innovation or increased demands for export. In addition to this catalyst, capital and resources must be marshaled to boost investment. Once this take-off phase is achieved, the fourth phase, “the drive to maturity,” reveals that economic growth has “become an automatic process” (So, 1990: 30) in that at least ten percent of national income is automatically invested. This phase is soon followed by the fifth and final phase which is characterized by increased employment and national income, growth in consumer demands and domestic markets. The fifth stage is called the “high mass consumptive society.” Given the linear and progressive phases that Rostow has outlined, he believes that Third World countries require aid, such as capital, technology and technical expertise, to jumpstart economic takeoff and undergo the kind of modernization already experienced by Western Europe and the United States (Mehmet, 1999). Rostow’s linear development model has been soundly critiqued because it “implies that the entire world is and should be on the identical development path, a notion which economic theory and research has rejected” (Klees, 2002: 453). When “take off” did not occur, many economists and psychologists within the modernization school looked for explanation in individual attributes and



attitudes (Chabbott, 2003), thus leading to the second exemplar of research within the modernization school.

The second exemplar of research from the modernization school can be found in Alex Inkeles' (1964) cross-national research to determine what affect exposure to modern, Western values have on people in the developing Third World. He asked if people integrated these new beliefs and values into their ways of thinking and living. To survey this affect, he interviewed 6,000 young men from social categories designated as "peasantry," students, and urban industrial workers, to cite just a few. All the men were from countries that Inkeles believed represented different stages in the process of modernization, from non-industrialized to industrialized, non-democratic to democratic.<sup>5</sup> Inkeles concluded that a "steady pattern" (So, 1990: 43) of what constitutes modern men could be established across the spectrum of countries. He created a modernity scale ranging from 0 to 100 to gauge this pattern. The following are a small sample of modern traits (So, 1990: 42):

**Table 1: Modernity Scale**

Mobility Orientation	Modern men are highly ambitious; they want to climb up the occupational ladder
Activity in Civil Politics	Modern men participate in local community affairs [and] join voluntary associations
Use of long-term planning	Modern men always plan ahead and know what they will accomplish in the next five years
Belief in science	Modern men believe that human beings can conquer nature
Increasing independence from authority figures	Modern men are not under the control of such figures as parents, tribal heads, and emperors
Openness to new experience	Modern men are willing to try new activities or new approaches to tasks

<sup>5</sup> Countries included Nigeria, Israel, India, Pakistan, Chile and Argentina.

One of Inkeles' key conclusions in this study was in response to some of the other modernization school researchers who argued that modernization wrought harmful consequences such as alienation, social disintegration, and dejection. These arguments were made by some modernization researchers who contended that decelerated, measured change was preferable to abrupt social change. Inkeles argued that the use of a Psychosomatic Symptoms test on his participants showed "no difference between modern men and non-modern men on stress scores. Consequently, he concluded that modernization does not necessarily produce psychological stress among Third World people; modern men exhibit no more stress than do non-modern men" (So, 1990: 43).

Inkeles' other conclusion has tremendous significance on education. He concluded that education is the significant measure of modern values. It is not, in fact the study of specific subjects that create this impact but the "informal curriculum" (So, 1990: 43) that enables the exposure and acceptance of Western values. The informal curriculum includes the use of Western textbooks, classroom instruction by people who have themselves internalized modern values or introduction to Western culture through movies and song. In its various manifestations, there are messages and values being transmitted in schools and classrooms by teachers and school administrators. The notion of curriculum as a transmitter of values and messages has been discussed from a different political and theoretical vantage points in years since.

### Critical Theory, Development and Education

Functionalists, one strain of the modernization perspective, concerned about negative consequences of rapid social change and which conceived of institutions in society as interdependent, believed the family unit and schools transmitted values from one generation to the next which helps maintain cohesion and social advancement (So, 1990).<sup>6</sup> Conflict theorists argue, that, contrary to social cohesion, individuals and groups in society were in discord, in particular over social class, and each operated to maximize their benefits which led to social change. The state, as a political articulation of the class structure, is unrepresentative of the greater, common good. The capitalist state is but a mechanism of the dominant capitalist classes (Carnoy, 1992). Many critical theorists maintain, therefore, that the “hidden curriculum” is an integral component of the schooling endeavor and represents dominant or hegemonic values and interests (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 1981). Still others, such as Pierre Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), wrote about the role of education and culture in social reproduction. Criticism was not reserved only for education but as well on the modernization school; critical theorists injected into these theoretical conversations about education the notion of ideology and power, a point to which I shall return in greater length at the conclusion of this chapter.

According to Bodenheimer (1970), the “ideology of developmentalism” suffers from four fundamental flaws: it treats social science as though it were without

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<sup>6</sup> Society functions, in other words, as a coordinated unit or system with each part of institution fulfilling a unique role to achieve social cohesion. Functionalists stipulated that there are three other key functions for every society: it adapts to the environment (role of the economy); achieves objectives (role of the government); brings together institutions (role of the law and religion). Perhaps the most significant element of the functionalist perspective is that society seeks equilibrium at its core so that if one institution changes the others accommodate by changing as well to re-establish equilibrium (So, 1990).

ideological bias; believes that all the knowledge gained is without error; regards social science as universally true and applicable; exports these assumptions to other parts of the world. In other words, researchers writing from the modernization perspective did not reflect or acknowledge their own cultural and value systems; they worked as though their research did not have biases or unexamined assumptions about the West, developing countries or what constitutes “good” development. For example, describing local or indigenous cultures as primitive and arguing that “exposure to the West” will facilitate positive, gradual social change raises the specter of colonialism. Not only have natural resources and human labor from developing countries fueled Euro-American industrialization (McMichael, 1996), educational policies under colonial administration set the stage for the politics of development discourses after World War II.

Human capital theory’s conceptualization of education is a largely technicist approach in which the consequences of learning are measured by economic outputs. There is little recognition of other factors—such as uneven quality of schooling, of a classed, raced and gendered world which affects wages or access—that undermine education even if one conceded to describing it in such purely financial terms as “an investment.” Undoubtedly, education can be a vehicle for advancement and increased earning potential, but schooling returns are also undoubtedly highest for those first in the system. Very often the quality of education drops after expansion or even higher levels of educational attainment become requirements for higher-salaried jobs. People with historical access to schooling also “buy out” of the public system by placing children in private schools. Such inequity is reproduced and legitimated

by structures in society. Furthermore, even when school enrolment is high, the curricular content often conveys the socio-economic and historical interests of the privileged group(s). In such an unequal world, no technicist or rational choice will produce solutions that meet everyone's interests.

Human capital theory ignores the real possibility that capitalism, rather than producing greater satisfaction and happiness for everyone, results in creating and maintaining disadvantages of the many for the benefit of the few. Finally, it should be troubling to treat education in purely economic terms. By describing all social phenomena as "capital" we implicitly place value on them based on their relation to the broader context of capitalism and capitalist exchange (Cohen and Prusak, 2001) and thereby obstruct broader questions about alternative purposes or meanings of education.

### *Education in Emergencies*

Today the most disadvantaged groups, such as the poor, lag behind in schooling and while it may be true that interventions are necessary to address this inequity, there are considerable risks inherent in establishing the purpose and merits of education on purely economic outputs and national development outcomes. Even the strategies designed to address educational opportunities of some of the most vulnerable populations—such as the conflict-affected or internally displaced persons—frame education as a phased, linear process of national reconstruction or growth. Education in emergencies (EIE) is a rubric defined broadly to encompass both the traditional school setting and the implementation of specific programs targeted at specific populations sometimes for limited duration, e.g., vocational

training; peace education; landmine awareness classes; or adult literacy. It is a stop-gap measure; education in this context is a pipeline devised to deliver or increase the capacity of the vulnerable population, be it literacy, conflict zone survival skills, or HIV/AIDS awareness.

Education in emergency activities may be informal, non-formal and formal schooling opportunities. Triplehorn (2001), in his field guide to EIE for Save the Children, defines informal education as a “process of learning through everyday experiences and the transfer of knowledge, skills and attitudes through traditional culture, families, communities and media (3).” Non-formal education is an adaptable approach that may or may not lead to certification, and where the curricular content may either mirror that of a traditional school or include literacy programs, peace education, or popular educational initiatives. Formal schooling reflects an institutionalized, hierarchical structure that is organized chronologically with specific start and end points. Assessment and certification are components of a formal education system. It is important to note that certification and accreditation are not insignificant issues for parents and learners who often make great sacrifices to facilitate schooling. “With some hyperbole one might say that in non-formal education the tree is known by its fruits [and] in formal schooling by its pedigree” (Easton, 1996: 295). The key reasons cited for providing education in emergency settings are that it: provides psychosocial needs of affected populations; imparts survival messages (e.g. landmine awareness); enables economic and social development and paves the way for reconstruction; offers protection from harm;

promotes personal development and prepares for responsible citizenship; and is a fundamental human right (Sinclair, 2002: 27).

Many EIE activities are often organized and implemented in a phased approach; this is particularly true in emergencies related to armed conflict. The three phases are: (i) the onset of violence, (ii) the duration of the conflict and (iii) reconstruction at the conclusion of conflict. The demarcation of three phases is a provisional construct at best, however, as many conflicts remain unresolved for decades or as violence erupts again during the reconstruction phase. EIE activities at the onset of conflict may include organizing non-formal educational programs to provide protection or “normalcy” to otherwise displaced communities; as the conflict persists formal schools may be organized in camps or settlements. EIE activities may also include the restoration of community and national educational structures after the cessation of war. EIE is thus regarded as a long term, phased process that will eventually assimilate into broader development activities and programs (Triplehorn, 2001). EIE activities are varied and various: “Child Friendly Spaces” (CFS) which provides a safe environment for children to play and organizes recreational activities that promotes psychosocial support; teacher training that is geared to address psychosocial needs of the students, gender issues, specific subject content, as well as strategies to manage a multi-age, multi-grade classroom; youth centers which provide informal activities, structured learning and peer education; and bridging or accelerated learning programs that tackle the learning gaps of young people whose education has been interrupted by conflict and usually compresses six years of schooling into three. Formal education is also established for children and youth in

refugee camps with an emphasis on primary schooling although a few do provide secondary schooling. For internally displaced or returnee children and young people, formal schooling is often organized through community, government or religious schools with international donors and organizations providing teacher training, school renovation and much of the materials and supplies.<sup>7</sup> Some of these formal schools include post-primary vocational training either as part of the school curriculum or as a distinct program.

Schooling manifests as multiple objectives: it is a protection mechanism in that it is an alternative recourse for young people who, uprooted from home communities or sequestered for years in refugee camps, may otherwise become involved in exploitative sexual or labor situations or decide to join the armed forces waging war, a space for psychosocial healing and support (Sommers, 2002; Bethke, 2004; et al); and a space in which children and young people may be supervised and, perhaps most significant, they are allowed cognitive space to envision and plan a future outside the scope of this immediate conflict. All these manifestations attest that the provision of schooling is essential, therefore, to the social and economic development that is vital to reconstruction (Sinclair, 2002).

States have the responsibility of providing protection, but since refugees are by definition people who have been denied their rights in their country of origin, the international community assumes the role of ensuring that basic refugee rights are protected. International protection, as elaborated in the 1951 Convention relating to

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<sup>7</sup> Organizations providing formal schooling for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnee children and youth include: CARE International, Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), Norwegian Refugee Council, ZOA Refugee Care, and Plan International. For more information, see Thailand Burma Border Consortium (2005) Internal Displacement and Protection in Eastern Burma.



the status of refugees, includes non-discrimination, the right to housing, the right to education, the right to work, and the right to be protected from forcible return. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has the mandate to provide international protection to refugees and find durable solutions for them. In practice, the UNHCR often works in partnership with NGOs to address protection concerns. Protection activities in refugee camps include gender-based violence prevention and response training, legal assistance, and practical interventions such as providing well-lit paths, ensuring camp health facilities or water-collection sites that are safe for women to access.<sup>8</sup> Recently, NGOs have also had to alter and monitor food distribution procedures to verify if women are indeed receiving their share of the food and to safeguard against sex-for-food exploitative situations.

Education in emergency settings—even while a fairly recent and emerging policy field—still does not stray far from the post World War II discourse on education as a means to socio-economic progress. According to the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (2004), EIE stakes its legitimacy in the human rights discourse and various international and regional protocols that explicitly state education as a right: the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC); the Dakar Education for All (EFA) Framework; the UN Millennium Development goals (MDGs), and the Sphere Project’s humanitarian charter; Protocol to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1952); The American Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man (1998); the 1999 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Nicolai and Triplehorn, 2003). These laws and conventions, while important instruments with which to advocate for

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<sup>8</sup> UNHCR, Protecting Refugees: A Field Guide for NGOs

people's rights to education, also speak to a global and globalizing environment which enforces standardized practices and privileges uniformity. They are often relegated to being slogans of conscience rather than enforceable mandates.

The education in emergencies (EIE) programming will benefit from more tightly tethering it to critical theories that examine the reproductive functions of schooling. EIE too closely resonates with the numerous policy interventions which, since the end of World War II, were designed to achieve economic growth, poverty alleviation, and social development. The concept that everyone has a right to quality basic education reveals much about the significant ideological and policy trends of the 20th century. On one hand, it highlights the place education has been given in the broader processes of social and economic development following the Second World War. On the other, it reflects the significant shift from policies that pertain to a single nation to those that apply to all countries around the world (Chabbott, 2003). Given the festering legacies left by the orthodox mainstream of development policies since World War II, EIE literature may do well to revisit its theoretical trajectory and educational assumptions.

The Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE), consisting of donors, NGOs, practitioners, researchers, UN agencies, initiated a working group in 2003 to push forward the establishment of global standards for education in emergencies. The consultative process, which required national, regional and sub-regional meetings, resulted in the development of indicators, standards and "guidance notes" for the minimum level of educational access and provision in an emergency setting. The standards are universal and clearly communicate the minimum levels of

schooling access and provision affected populations must be provided with in situations of relief assistance. This move towards standardizing principles that matter to every human being across different languages, cultures, religions and ethnicities and nationalities is apparent in the range of non-binding international policy instruments, be they about education, environmental protection or gender equity. Implicit in this approach is the assumption that there are “appropriate development goals, appropriate means to translate these goals into policy and practice, and appropriate ways to target recipients for the benefits from development activities” (Chabbott, 2003: 2). In addition to homogenizing efforts the world over, it is glaringly apparent that international agreement about a principle does not in fact translate into fact. Take for example that the 1990 Jomtien EFA conference did not include mechanisms for funding in any of its documents (Chabbott, 2003). Without resources, the concept of education for all is a feel-good declaration, little more. But what is the historical and ideological evolution of a global policy environment that fosters such unenforceable commitments?

### Globalization

The 1945 Universal Declaration of Human Rights emerged out of the shadow of World War II as did its progenitor, the United Nations. Yet near midway in the 20th century, how united can nations be when there were less than 54 independent countries in 1940 (Chabbott, 2003) and the most powerful and industrialized nations acted on the notion that “progress in their own countries could come only at the expense of others” (Chabbott, 2003:3). Numerous colonies, territories and protectorates pocked the global map and were disallowed from representing

themselves in international fora. Chabbott (2003) describes three key characteristics of the post-World War II global environment. First, development activities over time increasingly blanketed more of the economic and social aspects of society with many of these activities directed at specific population groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, or children. Second, there was an overwhelming push for social and economic development and policies, practices and principles were increasingly discussed and implemented in increasingly similar fashion. A one-size-fits-all approach, if you will, prevails in development discourses. The third and last characteristic of the post-World War II global environment is the chasm that exists between principles publicly embraced and concrete action taken to produce the stated outcomes in those principles. Chabbott (2003:5) claims this “loose coupling” between action and principle may in fact be a necessary challenge to global hegemony and the affirmation of local beliefs and practices.

What are the norms and meanings of education, then, in a globalized world of increasing homogeneity and standardized practices? In this context, does education as conceived in the aforementioned theories hold true to their promise? Does education help workers avoid “the lowest paying jobs and the most labor-intensive, rough kinds of work [as well as] providing many benefits, some to the future development of our country?”<sup>9</sup> Against the backdrop of globalization and deepening folds of poverty for low wage workers, how do we make material the promise of schooling?

There are many broad descriptions of globalization and its characteristics, and definitions oscillate between treating it as the logical, productive outcome of

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with the deputy director of a Burmese NGO funded migrant community schools.

economic and development policies and the iconic symbol of homogenizing processes and multinational corporate greed. McDonalds, Nike, and Michael Jordan are often shorthand symbols for the homogenizing tendencies implicit in the many processes of globalization. Broadly speaking there are two primary categorical descriptions of globalization (Mittelman, 2000). The first category is a rather uncomplicated description of globalization and focuses on increased interdependence between people and nations, about cross-border flows and shifting social relations. It is often discussed, for example, as a collapsing of trade barriers and of expanded notions of identities such that they no longer remain tethered only to a particular country or region. This description includes key elements of globalization but fails to take account of “the nature of social relations and [remains] silent about hierarchies of power” (Mittelman, 2000: 5). The second categorical description is more theoretically grounded and emphasizes the winnowing of space and time. “Globalization is the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Giddens, 1990 quoted in Mittelman, 2000: 6). In other words, cultural representation and practices have changed; consumption and production of commodities have profoundly altered. Much of this literature include discussions about technology, capital movements, and cultural production (Mittelman, 2000).

Marginson (1999) details six specific characteristics of globalization: finance and trade; communications and information technologies; international movements of people; the formation of global societies; linguistic, cultural and ideological

convergence; and finally world system of signs and images. He also examines the impact that information technology has had on education, specifically distance learning, international academic conferences and research partnerships, as well as informing new pedagogical practices in the classroom. He further explains that much of the Euro-American hegemony began to proliferate in much earlier times, that, in fact, the cultural osmosis is centuries old. McGinn (1996) warns comparative educationalists to pay heed to four critical facts in a time of globalization: “The decline of democratic practice and participation in the industrialized world; our own confusion as to why education does not help resolve the problem; the impact of economic globalization on education and on democratization; and the urgency for comparative research on cultural diversity rather than individual differentiation and on social integration rather than political and economic homogenization” (342).

Globalization is broadly an arena of exchange, trade and transnational flows of goods, services and people (Marginson, 1999). It is not restricted to the purely economic sphere although this dominates much of the discussions on the subject (Monkman and Stromquist, 2000). Fundamentally, globalization speaks to increased dependencies between countries; despite capitalism’s growth historically being tied to the nation-state and national economic policies, a profound shift continues to occur in the present-day global economy; in the globalized world economy, there are more economic exchanges between individuals across national borders, more foreign investment, more migration, and more trade. Yet even assumptions about increased trade must be articulated with a caveat. The total upsurge in trade and investment

predominantly benefit a few countries and leave most others marginalized or excluded (Sutcliffe, 1998: 325).

Many researchers and economists argue that in globalization the state as a unit of analysis holds less sway, that market forces and private, corporate interests have increasing influence (Baker, Epstein and Pollin, 1998). As such and in this global regime, it is argued that the influence of international institutions, such as the World Bank, OECD, or UN grows. Many international organizations promulgate specific education policies and are in a position to enforce implementation given the weakened regulatory function of the state. Examples of such policies in vogue at various times include decentralization, promoting primary while impeding tertiary education, advocating for user-fees (Carnoy and Rhoten, 2002). The appeal of rhetorical use of globalization is that it is another avenue through which to direct and push for local education reform. Thomas Popkewitz (2000) writes that “in most nations, educational ‘reform’ is considered to be a strategic site for intervention that can promote the modernization of nations, enhance the viability of economic systems within world markets, and link macro issues of regulation with micro patterns of socialization and childrearing” (3). Reforms made locally and in response to globalization vary in important ways across countries, regions and localities (Carnoy and Rhoten, 2002).

In the era of globalization, the alleged demise of the nation-state as the “primary theatre of economic activity” (Marginson, 1999: 25) has more declarative than substantive value. Sutcliffe (1998) echoes this sentiment and argues the nation-state may not have lost as much sway as “our rulers would like us to believe” (325).

When the issue at stake is conceptualizing education in a globalized world, it necessarily involves investigating the role of the state (Carnoy, 1992). The state is itself conceptualized across a spectrum of ideologies. To regard the state as neutral, distinct from market and unaffected by efficiency-maximizing market forces is just one strain of thought. This version of the state was a revolutionary notion in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe when the economy was dominated by landlords, a mercantilist and feudal system and asserted a domain of individual rights, a fundamental restructuring of relationships between people and established new bases of power. Much of this ideology was subsumed into economics and articulated the role of the state as merely the “legal framework in which the market can best maximize benefits to mankind” (Carnoy, 1992: 144). The most recent incarnation is visible in neo-liberal neo-classical economics which displays a disdain for state intervention and believes the free market economy, driven by the choices of free, rational, self-interested individuals, best achieve material and social improvement. According to Colcough and Manor (1991: 7) “imperfect markets are better than imperfect states.”

This much touted global village has also shown startling increases in income inequality in the recent past and such “income and wealth inequality produces not only less equity and social solidarity, but can also engender less efficiency. Intelligently applied egalitarian government policies can therefore increase an economy’s production possibilities (Baker, Epstein and Pollin, 1998: 4). Polanyi (2001) asserted that competitive market forces, because they produce inequality and want of material wealth, must mitigate these outcomes by working in tandem with social structures that promote social cohesion and unity. Furthermore, the early post



World War II period, regarded as “the most prosperous era in the history of capitalism” is characterized by the presence of big governments and while there may not be definitive analyses as to how they played a role in this time of enormous growth, “it is at least clear that big government and strong regulations were not incompatible with successful growth under capitalism...big government was fundamental to the Golden Age, through promoting stability and reducing inequality within domestic economies, and through regulating international trade and capital mobility with relative success” (Baker, Epstein and Pollin, 1998: 19).

An evolving process in which to coordinate economic policies at a global level characterizes the decades following World War II. The will to produce a “well-ordered international economic system” (Pieper and Taylor, 1998: 38) was the impetus to establish the Bretton Woods institutions--the World Bank and International Monetary Fund--in 1944. The globalization of economic policies as evident by these international financial institutions (IFI) has proven to be “the intellectual backbone and political force” behind the disassembling of progressive ideas incubating since the 1940s (Pieper and Taylor, 1998: 38) and the priority placed on economic outcomes has produced unconscionable social consequences. It is not without irony to note Polanyi’s comment in 1944 that “nowhere has liberal philosophy failed so conspicuously as in its understanding of the problem of change. Fired by an emotional faith in spontaneity, the common-sense attitude toward change was discarded in favor of a mystical readiness to accept the social consequences of economic improvement, whatever they might be” (33).

Given the global climate that demonizes the public sector and exalts the private, it is critical to reassess the role and responsibilities of the nation-state and government in this globalized, post-Fordist era of international institutions and multinational corporations, but without devolving into nostalgia for the state, given that for many people who experienced history “from below” the state has also functioned as an instrument of social control and repression. The theoretical foundations of nation-state building is based on the active, often violent, creation of a narrative about a singular culture as it is about continually having to reify this sentiment, hence the concept of nation as an imagined rather than essentialized, “authentic” community (Anderson, 1991; Tilly, 1992). The mechanisms of creating a nation with demarcated borders are a modernist convention and culturally delineated who belonged and who did not (Wallerstein, 1990). Cultural belonging is not primarily an egalitarian or democratic reflex. There have always been challenges to the nation-state from within and without. Just consider nation-building in European history: it was not a “natural” progression; it involved wars, commercial interests, conscription, family lineages, and taxation schemes and took place over long periods of time (Spruyt, 1994; Tilly, 1992). Finally, it may prove necessary to question the integrity of a concept such as “culturally homogenous nation” given the process and discourses on nation-state building both in the former colonies and in Europe (Tilly, 1992; Anderson, 1991; Spruyt, 1994). These issues should be prominent in discussions about the role and presence of the state when analyzing border-crossings.

## Migration

The transnational movement of people is often touted as evidence of a globalized, interconnected world (Marginson, 1999). Inversing the usual vantage point from which discussions about globalization manifest, Mittelman (2000: 6) defines globalization in the following way:

As experienced from below, the dominant form of globalization means a historical transformation: in the economy, of livelihoods and modes of existence; in politics, a loss in the degree of control exercised locally—for some, however, little to begin with—such that the locus of power gradually shifts in varying proportions above and below the territorial state; and in culture, a devaluation of a collectivity's achievements or perceptions of them. This structure, in turn, may engender either accommodation or resistance.

To see globalization from below is to begin with an oft cited statistic in this “age of migration” (Castles and Miller, 1993) which is that 100 million people live outside their country of citizenship. This figure hides the fact that a vast percentage of this figure is refugees who have fled to a neighboring country (Sutcliffe, 1998). The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that as of 1993 there were 30 to 35 million migrants and an additional 40 to 50 million dependents (Radwan, 1998). There are numerous kinds of border-crossings: for example, tourism or immigration of a skilled professional. Then there are numerous and different circumstances encountered by refugees fleeing conflict or migrant workers crossing borders without consent of home or host governments to seek income-generation opportunities in

neighboring countries. In essence, people traverse national boundaries largely regarded as commodities or capital: they are either people carrying money or skills; or, people who need to work for low wages or as illegal imports that are trafficked or smuggled across the border. The distinction between economic versus non-economic migrants lacks clear definitional boundaries. “The number of intentional, if sometimes not exactly willing, migrants can be put at about 50 million, or about 0.8 percent of the world’s population...they may only represent up to one percent of the economically active population worldwide” (Sutcliffe, 1998: 326).

However significant the current economic and demographic data, there are families that stretch across countries, with each link in the migration chain having a social and commercial stake in the local community (Basch, Glick-Shiller and Blanc, 1994). For instance, migration, from the perspective of the Third World, would write a history that, under colonization, saw the voluntary and involuntary movement of workers, such as in the 19th century migration of people from India to the West Indies, Fiji and South Africa, many of whom were indentured to a labor contract (Patnaik and Chandrasekhar, 1998). This context underscores the myriad causes of migration and instigates a reconsideration of overly simplified assumptions about the cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic constructs of the nation-state. Furthermore, it has not been without contestation and nowhere is this more evident than in debates and challenges posed to the nature and type of education provided for people residing within demarcated borders, in particular for non-citizens or those without legal status. Moreover, despite grand statements decrying the end of homogeneity with the onset of globalization, sheltering an ethnically diverse population is not equivalent to

power-sharing and democratic practices. People have varying degrees of privilege due to particular constellations of race/ethnicity, gender, class and sexual orientation (Landry and MacLean, 1993; Uttal, 1990). These are not static categories but “dynamic social processes in which everyone is located” (Uttal, 1990: 42). The celebration of diversity in a globalized world has largely and rather problematically lingered in the realm of consumptive practices--where students nibble on traditional foods and watch traditional dances—rather than rigorous engagement with issues of geopolitical or socio-economic power.

The contestation over diversity is being waged in the language of “belonging” or “non-belonging” to the nation-state and migration policies are the terrain on which this battle is being waged. One common apprehension is that migrants take away jobs from the native labor force; another is that the living and working conditions deteriorate for the latter since the migrants, with fewer or worse income-generation activities available are willing to work in degraded conditions (Baker, Epstein and Pollin, 1998: 29).

There is a vast divergence of opinions among economists on the issue of immigration. Economist Henry Simon argued that “wholly free immigration...is neither attainable nor desirable. To insist that a free trade program is logically or practically incomplete without free migration is either disingenuous or stupid. Free trade may and should raise living standards everywhere...free immigration would level standards, perhaps without raising them anywhere” (Simons, quoted in Sutcliffe, 1998: 327). Most economists have not deviated far from this point of view, Gary Becker going so far as to say “Because of the expanded welfare state, immigration is

no longer a practical policy. These days open immigration would merely induce people in poorer countries to immigrate to the United States and other developed countries to collect generous transfer payments” (quoted in Sutcliffe, 1998: 327). Thus, while free market principles are advocated for all aspects of life, they are noticeably absent on the issue of cross-border movement of people. If a policy solution is occasionally advanced, it is frequently a cocktail involving fixed quotas and immigration permits and largely disengaged from the inherent contradiction of advocating for free movement of capital and goods but not humans (Sutcliffe, 1998).

In many respects what is going on is counter-globalization: while market, political, and cultural forces all make for increased migration, there is an unprecedented effort by governments to limit the movement of people. Actually existing globalization is characterized by very different levels of global mobility, according to which element of the economy is being referred to. And there is a tendency for mobility to be greater the more abstract and less human is the potential mover: finance is the most global part of the world economy, while workers, especially unskilled workers, are the least. (Sutcliffe, 1998: 326)

Progressive responses to and critiques of globalization have also not adequately addressed the spectrum of issues related to migration. According to Sutcliffe (1998), this issue is treated as largely fueled by the need for cheap labor and to therefore promote greater ease of movement for people signals collaboration with “a capitalist-supported measure designed to reduce wages and worsen conditions”

(328). Rather, a left-progressive critique of globalization on the issue of migration should shift the discussion away from the dominance of purely economic analyses and iterate instead a rights-based perspective that recognizes the right of movement as a fundamental freedom. An example of this failure can be found in the instance of European countries deciding to decrease the number of non-asylum seeking migrants—the so called “economic” migrants—since the early 1970s and since European Community (EC) began to actively promote the concept of the European Union ironically leading to increased surveillance and restrictions in freedom of movement: for example, soldiers increasingly replaced immigration officials along borders; increased use of computer records to track identities; and, in France, implementing regular checks of all foreign cars. “The frontier is no longer a wall or a fence; it has been melted and spread across the country. Human rights are at their weakest in the vicinity of frontiers, and if the contemporary frontier is no longer to be a barrier but a thin layer of control spread across countries, then we should all take fright” (Sutcliffe, 1998: 331). Furthermore, while European Union countries still legally allow immigration for humanitarian reasons, such as for refugees, there has also been increased negative reception to the “purely” economic migrant. The economic migrant, in other words, is seen as less “deserving” than a refugee. This has, ironically enough, resulted in a backlash against both groups. “A more humanitarian migration policy will exist only when other avenues for migration remain open and other migrants are not demonized” (Sutcliffe, 1998: 331). In later chapters, the murky lines distinguishing refugees and migrants in the context of Burma-Thailand border will be revisited.

There are four key opinions that prevail in policy discussions about migration. The first common point made in policy discussions about migration is that development aid to developing countries deters migration, in other words, increased employment opportunities in the home countries will discourage people from migrating. In fact, the opposite has been suggested by some studies. There is growing consensus that one of the more immediate effects of development has been increased capital, improved access to the international economy and foreign contacts thereby increasing capacity to pay for and organize migration (UN Population Fund, The State of the World Population Report 1993). The second policy opinion counters the first by arguing that development increases migration. Some empirical studies suggest that the family members remaining behind do have increased opportunities due to remittances from migrating relatives; some policymakers emphasize, for instance, the contribution of remittances on the national economy. The total amount of remittances by migrants has been more than the amount of development aid and foreign private investment (Sutcliffe, 1998). This leads to the third assertion that migration creates capital flows such as remittances that lead to development. The responses of many countries are to impose strict immigration controls that block entry; others, such as Thailand, have tried to control the inflow of people from Burma, Laos and Cambodia with various versions of worker registration processes but the consequences of efforts to regulate migration has sharply increased punishing policies for those who were unwilling or unable to register as required by the government. The failure to recognize that social and economic inequities of the broader society appear often exacerbated in the context of migration, means willed



ignorance and complicity in the “injustices [that] gather like vultures around frontiers” (Sutcliffe, 1998: 333). In addition, at its core, anti-migration sentiments materialize as discrimination against non-citizens. The common opinion often discussed is that migration hinders development of developing countries due to the “brain drain” phenomenon, yet the fact that many skilled people in these countries who do not immigrate continue to be underemployed or unemployed gives pause to this assertion (Sutcliffe, 1998).

Bhagwati (2004) cites the research done by historians Timothy Hutton, Jeffrey Williamson and Martin Wolf who wrote about the migration from Europe to United States in the 40 years prior to World War I; this movement increased the “new world” labor force by one-third and lowered the European’s by one-eighth, “figures that have not been exceeded even for California and Mexico in the past 40 years” (209).

Patnaik and Chandrasekhar (1998) write about the impact of immigration for lesser skilled workers. They make the case that the sending country, often a developing economy, receives valuable benefits: the migrants earn increased wages relative to salaries in their home countries and the lesser skilled workers who had not migrated find improved job employment opportunities. On the other hand, Patnaik and Chandrasekhar argue that skilled migration is tantamount to a “unilateral transfer of resources” (363) akin to the drain under colonialism from developing to developed economies. They argue, however, that this drain is different from the brain drain phenomenon in that unless highly repressive and therefore unacceptable policies completely restricting movement are implemented, certain aspects of brain drain are to be anticipated. Bhagwati (2004), who writes in favor of economic globalization,

makes categorical distinction between two different types of developing countries. Countries such as India, South Korea, the Philippines and China, with their substantial population size and capacity to create skilled professionals at home or by receiving education abroad, gain through outward migration. Countries with small populations and failing or inadequate educational systems suffer from outward migration because of the loss of the few skilled professionals. This latter group grapples with considerable consequences of such a “brain drain.” Patnaik and Chandrasekhar’s (1998) so-called unilateral transfer is fueled by the fact that,

The entire program of education and training is often tailored not toward domestic needs but towards the needs of the advanced countries, with a view to creating skills that can operate with, or even innovate in, frontier technologies that are outside the reach of the local economy, much of the emigrant skilled personnel may not even be locally absorbable. No doubt this orientation of education, research, and training programs in underdeveloped countries needs rectification

(Patnaik and Chandrasekhar, 1998: 363).

### Schooling and Reproduction

The orientation that Patnaik and Chandrasekhar speak of is a discussion of the social and economic meanings and implications of stratified and stratifying educational systems between nations. The implications of this hold true within a nation and community. There are concrete and ideological threads that tie schools to the “dominant industrial order” (Giroux, 2001: 43). The discourse on the reproductive function of schools claims that “unstated norms, values, and beliefs

embedded and transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in school and classroom life” (Giroux, 2001: 43). Schools have a “hidden curriculum” and replicate the existing social and economic order and are as well a mechanism of socialization and social control (Apple, 1977; Vallance, 1973).

Functionalist theorists argue that this purpose of schooling is both positive and desirable for a stable society; Parsons (1959), for example, describes how schooling processes, such as homogenous classroom activities, provide children with the characteristics necessary for hierarchical work roles and the values required of preserving the existing society. Dreeben (1968) claimed that formal schooling was the means by which particular sets of skills and social norms are conveyed that cannot be learned from within the family structure. Ideology, power and conflict are ignored or treated as benign in this theoretical perspective.

Other reflections about the hidden curriculum include liberal critiques on the construction of knowledge, social practices, and cultural images (Vallance, 1973; Arnot, 1981). Whereas the functionalist perspective focuses on the perpetuation of societal stability and sidesteps the presence of inequality and conflict, the liberal critiques emphasized the production, negotiation and construction of meaning but often ignored structural analyses (Giroux, 2001). The literature on the hidden curriculum of schools creates a necessary rupture from the impulse to view schooling as simply an input-output mechanism, a black box if you will. Despite sheltering diverse perspectives, the literature on the hidden curriculum is predominantly rooted in analyses of the social meanings of schooling. The discussion should be expanded

to the ways in which differential forms of schooling are provided to different classes of students. This expansion necessarily shifts what has been an important but largely descriptive endeavor to an engaged critique of and response to social control (Giroux, 1987).

Education reproduces the values, socio-economic inequities and the perspectives of the dominant group in society (Apple, 2004; Freire, 1998; Giroux, 1987). Education can also function as a mechanism for deepening division and hatred. Schools “carry out a particular gender, class, race ideology as expressed through school structures and educational processes” (Carnoy, 1992: 144). Such critical theories introduce the interfacing of political, economic and social contexts against which power, knowledge and ways of knowing are constructed, as well as take account of the historical and institutional forms of social struggle and transformation (Apple, 1982). The critical theory literature to which I am referring stems from the Frankfurt school which, while not a homogenous or uncomplicated body of writings, is important for articulating responses to the emergence of the new manifestations of capitalism and its accompanying types of oppression that diverged from orthodox Marxism. In addition, the Frankfurt school was committed to ongoing critique, a process rather than a static body of thought to “penetrate the world of objective appearances and to expose the underlying social relationships they often conceal” (Giroux, 2001: 8). All things, be they consumption, capital, even production, are treated as “historically contingent contexts mediated by relationships of domination and subordination” (Giroux, 2001: 8).

The consequences of a stratified and stratifying educational system are evident in the global educational policy environment, as in cases in which the impulse of the governmental and international financial institutions is to unceasingly recommend that developing nations leapfrog into the knowledge economy. The allure of the “knowledge economy” appears disengaged from the reality of many schools in developing countries with no clean drinking or potable water, where attending school is financially or logistically infeasible, teacher salaries are regrettably low and do not constitute a living wage. In many emergency settings, teachers do not receive a wage, only a meager stipend. This vast disparity in resources occurs not only between First and Third World nations but within them, and sometimes within or between neighboring districts. Some Washington D.C. public schools are unable to properly heat their classrooms in winter, but within 15 minutes drive is the presence of elite private schools. A policy in vogue with the so-called knowledge economy is to address educational gaps with technology. Without discounting the potential of technology to cost effectively deliver lessons to rural or inaccessible communities, technology requires upkeep and upgrades; most important, technology is not equivalent to pedagogy. It is perplexing to ask where distance learning and high tech delivery of educational services may be located on landscapes dotted with resource-scarce schools.

Education is being operationalized in a global framework which assumes that industrialized, Western countries produce and disseminate knowledge while other, less developed countries consume and “buy into” the knowledge economy. This faintly echoes the early modernization school’s supposition that a unidirectional

transfer of knowledge and aid from the industrialized West to the so-called undeveloped Third World was requisite for development, a scenario that precluded the active, empowered participation of the Third World. Even if such a knowledge economy welcomes the participation of all people, given the pace at which technology changes policy discussions must necessarily include funding and support for on-the-job training and continuing, life-long education.

Steiner-Khamsi (2002) writes that the current discussion of globalization is such that policymakers and practitioners are said to embrace the idea of transcending the nation-state in order to survive. The emphases on regional and global economic relationships have significantly undermined the capability or responsibility of the nation-state, in particular the poorer and resource-strapped ones, to provide education and other critical social services (Tomasevski, 2003). The impulse to transcend the nation-state leads to the increasing conformity of policy alternatives to address learning gaps. Policy conformity is often perpetuated by international civil society that designs and advocates certain deliberations about educational policies thereby creating a convergence of ideas and models (Edwards and Hulme, 1996). Civil society, as it is comprised of non-governmental and grassroots organizations, have increasingly partnered with bilateral and multilateral organizations using the rhetoric of good governance and efficiency, but in fact may prove to negatively affect accountability, performance and legitimacy (Edwards and Hulme, 1996). Such partnerships with NGOs reflect the broader political climate in which the public sector is largely discounted and neo-liberal policies gain ascendancy; a fact seen in many policies operationalized in institutions like the World Bank (Klees, 2002).

According to Astiz, Wiseman and Baker (2002), the globalizing (and therefore winnowing) of policy alternatives creates increasingly uniform national education systems around the world. I would add as caveat that this uniformity may as well translate into equally stratified educational systems in both developing and developed countries between the wealthy and poor. The appeal of the rhetorical use of globalization is that it is another avenue through which to direct and push for local education reform. Thomas Popkewitz (2000) writes that “in most nations, educational ‘reform’ is considered to be a strategic site for intervention that can promote the modernization of nations, enhance the viability of economic systems within world markets, and link macro issues of regulation with micro patterns of socialization and childrearing” (3). Reforms made locally and in response to globalization vary in important ways across countries, regions and localities (Carnoy and Rhoten, 2002).

### *Dependency Theory and World Systems Analysis*

Today there are “major transformations in the processes of producing and distributing goods and services [and] is integrally related to changes in the international division of labor” (Arnove, 1999: 2). Yet, globalization and the global world economy is not a thing apart but a part of various eras that has come before. Labor and resource extraction under colonialism in its various guises is a significant exemplar of Euro-American capitalist development that continues to have resounding implications for a vast majority of people in the former colonies. The dependency school rejects the linearity of socio-economic development and offers instead an alternative reading of capitalist development (Fagerlind and Saha, 1989). According

to dependency theorists, resources have been and continue to be siphoned from the Third World either through colonial and neo-colonial relationships or by the actions of multinational corporations (Fagerlind and Saha, 1989). The world is thus divided into core and peripheral countries and is evidence of imperialism's lingering impact on Third World development (Baran, 1957; Amin, 1976; Dos Santos, 1971; So, 1990). Even in this post-Fordist era in which knowledge is touted as the lynchpin of the world economy, there is the ongoing although differently garbed reliance of natural resources from and cheap labor in third world countries, often to fuel the consumptive practices of more affluent geo-political locations.

Criticism from the modernization and Marxist perspectives has emerged in response to these explanations (Laclau, 1977; Petras, 1982; Fagerlind and Saha, 1989; Portes, 1976 et al). Researchers from the modernization school claim the dependency school provides an "all purpose explanation for everything that is wrong with Third World countries" (So, 1990: 131). Furthermore, they argue that scientific rigor has been replaced with political sloganeering. The dependency school was also accused of being equally abstract and ahistorical as the modernization school; by arguing that dependency was a global phenomenon, there is little space left for analytical differences between countries. Still others argue that the dependency explanation precludes the ways people in the peripheral countries have resisted Western domination. They are characterized as only victims of capitalism and Western industrialized countries (Trimberger, 1979). There is also commentary about the dependency school's disregard for the fairly significant ways in which governments of peripheral governments may initiate and embark on processes of change both



domestically and internationally (Portes, 1976). Moreover, to depict all ideas and technologies that come from Western core countries as inherently oppressive is to ignore the potential of some ideas and innovations to positively assist the peripheral nations. Last, the notion that development simply does not occur where dependency exists has been directly challenged; for example, East Asia's economic rise became increasingly difficult to explain within the dependency frame. Disappointment from the failures of some socialist revolutions and states—for example, China's Cultural Revolution--provoked re-evaluation among the more radical researchers. Finally, the geo-political realignment in the 1970s set a different policy environment than that of the previous era of 1950s Cold War alliances and demanded new explanations in the context of the capitalist world system.

One such emergent perspective, world systems analysis, has powerful if not complete explanatory power for this research project. Thailand has economic and political regional clout and, though still a developing country diverges greatly from its neighbors Burma, Lao and Cambodia, a point made evident by the latter three countries being the origination point for the majority of migrants crossing into Thailand. The dependency perspective as such does not provide a theoretical vocabulary by which to discuss the socioeconomic and geopolitical space occupied by countries such as Thailand. World systems perspective introduces one possible way forward.

World systems analysis takes as its unit of analysis the historical system and asserts that in the history of humankind there have only been three historical systems: the mini-systems, world-empires and world-economies. The mini-systems existed in

the pre-agricultural era, homogenous and largely organized by reciprocal exchange whereas the world-empires existed between 8000 BC and 1500 AD and were essentially an organization of political structures with multiple cultures and involving a system of paying tribute. The capitalist world-economies developed in discrepant fashion from the start of 16th century and functioned with the amassing and uneven distribution of surplus thereby creating monopolies that continued to expand and assimilate remaining mini-systems and world-empires (Wallerstein, 1983). This approach takes its start from much of the neo-Marxist ideology and dependency theory. Both dependency and world systems rejects the assumption that progress is inevitable and does not presume that the course of history is linear, improving or deteriorating. The world system perspective argues that the world has had several kinds of historical systems over time and that they have proven to be impermanent which means the key is to not predict outcomes as other perspectives have done but to study the process by which these systems rise and collapse over time and space.

The world system perspective moves beyond the binary of core and peripheral countries to include semi-peripheral ones (Wallerstein, 1983). The semi-peripheral countries, Thailand for example, function as “buffer” and helps avert the economic and political crises of the cyclical expansion and contraction of the capitalist world system. They consider themselves doing better than the peripheral countries and are driven by the allure of eventually becoming a core country. The peripheral countries are similarly driven toward semi-peripheral status. Peripheral countries are the ones who in the distribution of surplus received a relatively insignificant amount while core countries took the majority. At various junctures in the past, countries like the

United States or Germany moved from semi-peripheral to core country status by expanding their markets in various ways, such as conquering neighboring countries, raising the cost of imported goods by providing subsidies for domestic products, and protecting the national market (Wallerstein, 1979). The irony should not be lost on us, however, that developing countries are impeded or blocked from implementing these sorts of trade and economic policies that Western nations relied on in their jump toward industrialization and core country status.

Whereas dependency theory had advocated the self-reliant model and socialist revolution as ways of resisting the uneven economic global relationship between countries, So (1990: 186) explains that world system theory understood socialist countries to be “merely a collective capitalist firm” so long as it is still involved in the capitalist world economy. Furthermore, there is still substantial social inequality in the socialist states. In fact, anti-systemic movements once they “assume political power in state structures...have done less well because the pressures on them to mute their anti-systemic thrusts, from both without and within the movements have increased geometrically. The movements in power have been to some extent the political prisoners of their ideology and hence subject to organized pressure from the direct producers within the revolutionary state” (Wallerstein, 1983:109). Wallerstein (1979) describes the disparity between socialist states and socialism by explaining that the socialist states are merely “socialist movements in power in states that are still part of a single capitalist world-economy” (280). These socialist states are then pressured by the “structural exigencies of the world economy” to curb their domestic “social transformation” (Wallerstein, 1979: 280). Arguably, implicit in a situation

without political accountability or transparency, there is also the drive to maintain control, a force that inevitably conflicts with the responsibility of creating equitable access and social justice. This point holds true since the end of World War II when the world economy could no longer expand as it did in the past which means that for every one country that moves up the economic ladder another one moves down.

This perspective has come under criticism, however, for failing to notice the smaller but significant details of national-level development (Trimberger, 1979; Zeitlin, 1984). Another criticism argues that the world system perspective uses historical occurrences to explain how the capitalist world economy came to be but the inverse is in fact true: these historical occurrences happened because the world economy necessitated their occurrence. This approach only reifies the capitalist world system. In addition, it is more an analysis of stratification than class relations or class conflict; in other words, Wallerstein is talking about strata (a position in the hierarchy of work tasks in the capitalist world economy) rather than connections between exploitation and production, producers and owners, ruling and oppressed classes (Zeitlin, 1984).

Given that the world system perspective is a radical approach with the explicit aim of an egalitarian, equitable world, what are the policy implications of this dilemma in the era of globalization in which, according to Wallerstein, working for greater social and economic equity in a country does not eradicate but displaces injustice? Wallerstein (1988) recommended that resistance to the capitalist world economy shift from national movements to a “new world-level strategy that requires implementation by a world-level movement” (So, 1990: 193). There needs to be a

global movement that assails the surplus stream at the point of production. In other words, to keep the surplus remaining at the source; one way to accomplish this is to raise labor costs but this is different than resistance at the level of the workplace (i.e. trade unions) or country (i.e. socialist parties). Wallerstein (1988) adds that simply advocating change at these levels is moot; capitalists simply find cheaper labor elsewhere or use the state to suppress dissent. Rather, the resistance struggle must be fought at the global level. In other words, workers may organize to improve conditions in one location but for systemic change there needs to be a global articulation of resistance. In the broader conversation in which profit-maximizing transnational companies and international financial institutions are synonymous with globalization, world systems analysis offers a conceptualization of resistance as necessarily a global action. What is the role then of education in this global context of increasing inequality that demands collective transnational resistance? What might education look like from and for people whose statelessness has a multiplicative effect on their vulnerabilities? More broadly, what are the reproductive and liberatory processes and outcomes of migrant community schooling in this border town?

One significant result of globalization is that “national economies are increasingly integrating into regional ones” (Arnové, 1999: 2). This point is powerfully exemplified by the increasing social and economic linkages between Thailand, Burma, Laos and Cambodia. While Burma steeped in economic malaise as a least developed country, Thailand was touted a development success, although the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990’s somewhat tempered these enthusiastic

declarations. Thailand designated the Mae Sot border economic zone project as one part of the East-West Development Corridor Program which sets out to create economic links between Thailand and her neighbors: Vietnam, Lao and Burma (Kasem, 2003). This economic zone project seeks to make Mae Sot district and Mukdaharn province gateways to other countries in the region. Special economic zones are demarcated areas with “privileged trading terms for manufacturing-based exports. [Special economic zones] can attract investment and foreign exchange, spur employment and boost development of improved technologies and infrastructure.”<sup>10</sup>

Mittelman (2000) writes about the emergence of two particular types of economic partnerships: triangles and polygons. Growth triangles are “a patchwork of smaller sub-regional groupings” (153) and growth polygons are “transnational economic zones spaced over defined geographical areas and involving three or more countries” (Sato, 1996 quoted in Mittelman, 2000: 153). They broaden the manufacturing base by adding incentives for transnational companies to treat the sub-region as a “whole package” for investment.<sup>11</sup> The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has supported the building of infrastructure in new growth polygons for six countries in the Greater Mekong area: Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and China’s Yunnan Province. The focus has moved from economies of scale to economies of network whereby “deploying various stages of value-chain activities, usually in the production process, not by centralizing them within countries but spreading across regions or countries” (Mittelman, 2000: 155). Polygons are designed to link

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<sup>10</sup> James Crittle and Gokhan Akinci, moderators for the World Bank’s online discussion, writing for “Do the Benefits of Special Economic Zones Outweigh the Costs?” (July, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> For an extended discussion of the conjunction between globalization and sub-regionalism, see Mittelman (2000) in which he discusses the Southern China Growth Triangle.

resource-rich countries with ones that have better infrastructure and are more economically developed. According to the World Bank, three decades ago there were 80 special economic zones in 30 countries. These economic zones employed approximately one million people and produced six billion U.S. dollars in exports. There are now 3,000 economic zones in 120 countries and they generated over 600 billion U.S. dollars in exports and over 50 million jobs.

On the global level, economic growth has not translated into resource redistribution. In Latin America, for example, economic growth and increased employment have not necessarily led to substantial reduction in poverty or inequity (Korzeniewicz and Smith, 2000). Global and local disparities in educational and economic opportunities remain stark. At the global level, empirical data reveal startling disparities not only between nations, but also between the rich and poor within countries (MacEwan, 1999). Burmese migrants work in labor intensive and varied industries, such as agriculture, construction, domestic work, the sex industry and in the service sector, for far below a living wage. In Mae Sot, there are about 150 factories which are Thai and foreign owned; 95% of the factory workforce is comprised of Burmese migrant workers. The larger factories hire between 3,000 to 4,000 people and the smaller ones operate as sub-contractors. Most workers earn a daily wage of approximately baht 50 which is below that of the Thai worker whose minimum wage is baht 135.<sup>12</sup> In comparison, Burma's minimum wage is baht 16 a day" (Arunmart, 1997). One Thai baht at the Burmese black market is equivalent on average to kyats 25. The following is a table of wage scales by sector:

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<sup>12</sup> In Thailand, minimum wage can fluctuate by province and, even when clearly stipulated in the law, the challenge is enforcing employers to pay that rate.

**Table 2: Wage Scales by Sectors**

<b>Types of Employment</b>	<b>Wages/Salary</b>
Agriculture/ Plantation	Baht 150 to 200 a day (\$3.75) for 10 hours work a day
Construction	Baht 80 a day (\$2.00)
Domestic Work	Baht 1,000 a month (\$28.57) including a place to stay
Industry (i.e. textiles, shoes)	Variable: can be baht 42 (around \$1.00) to baht 60 (\$1.50) a day.

**Reconceptualizing Education**

With increasing inequality in the world, McGinn’s (1996) advice to comparative educators in the era of globalization proves relevant for this research proposal. He urges comparative educators to pay heed to “the decline of democratic practice and participation in the industrialized world; our own confusion as to why education does not help resolve the problem; the impact of economic globalization on education and on democratization; and the urgency for comparative research to focus on cultural diversity rather than individual differentiation, on social integration rather than political and economic homogenization” (342). Given the social dislocation and economic marginalization experienced by migrant workers in Mae Sot, the community schools prove to be a unique geographic and socio-economic location to study the meanings and practices of education.

Education, bearing both reproductive and liberatory functions, must be unmasked; the unmasking not to reveal a singular positivistic truth about schooling but to understand it in specific historical conditions as serving some and not other interests. Any attempt I shall make to theoretically address what liberatory education may look like is framed by the Frankfurt School’s treatment of theory as less about



assembling and arraying facts but as a “transformative activity that views itself as explicitly political and commits itself to the projection of a future that is as yet unfulfilled” (Giroux, 2001: 19). The dialectical conversation about the reproductive function of school proves to be a fruitful way of deepening our understanding first of the meanings and practices of education in migrant community schools and second to consider where these meanings and practices are located in the broader social and economic order.

All discussions about education must breach the silence surrounding issues of ideology, knowledge and power as schools are cultural sites with contested and competing interests across different socio-economic groups and often represent the larger political and economic apparatus of the broader society. Schools, family and religious institutions can be even more powerful than the army and police in reproducing ideological hegemony which is a kind of consciousness attuned to the dominant interests of society and (re)create workers thereby positioning schools as the most critical site for production of ideological disposition and subjectivities (Gramsci, 1971; Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972). Louis Althusser (1986) writes that ideology is without history, that in essence the existence of ideology and the interpellation of subjects are, in fact, one and the same. He theorizes about social reproduction, arguing that school transmits certain work skills and attitudes reflective of existing capitalist relations, that in essence schools create and enforce specific subjectivities for students to inhabit class-specific locations along different types of work. For Althusser (1986), schools, the family, the media and legal structures

comprise the ideological state apparatus which rules by creating an ideology of consent.

Bowles and Gintis (1976) do not diverge from Althusser in articulating that schools reproduce values and consciousness that maintains existing social relations within capitalism; the process of classed, raced and gendered selection and training processes place students in the hierarchical division of occupations. They diverge from Althusser, however, by displacing emphasis on the ideological state apparatus. Rather, Bowles and Gintis (1976) theorized about the correspondence principle by which they argue that the values and skills transmission of a hierarchical, classed society are reflected in the normative, daily classroom interactions and encounters. Althusser's ideological state apparatus unfortunately leaves little theoretical room for resistance and ultimately reifies the system of domination it seeks to explain. Bowles and Gintis (1976) work deepened understanding of the ways the hidden curriculum functioned through the relations within the classroom as well as exposed the class and gender-based links between schools and occupation. As in Althusser's theory-building, however, resistance similarly disappears in Bowles and Gintis' correspondence principle. There is a "homogenous working class life fashioned solely by the logic of domination" (Giroux, 2001). They also fail to provide analyses of how knowledge is both consumed and shaped at the level of the school, by teachers and students.

In describing the potential liberatory aspects of schooling, especially at the level of the community schools in Mae Sot, it seems crucial to not consign resistance to futility by ignoring the contradictions that characterize all social sites and by

describing domination as impenetrable theoretical space for teachers and students. The emphasis should be to consider from what theoretical base do we explain the contradictions and existence of resistance from within the classroom and across schools? One tack into this last query arises from treating schools as a mediating influence in both reproducing and resisting existing capitalist relations?

Schools do not simply reflect society's economic superstructure; one must move away from a narrow focus on economic inequality and instead broaden analyses to include cultural reproduction. In other words, it is not only economic but also symbolic power exacted by ruling class interests (Bourdieu, 1979). According to Bourdieu (1979), culture is the mediating filter between ruling class interests and daily interaction. Schools are potent mechanisms of cultural reproduction because they are treated as value-free and unbiased. According to Giroux (2001:88), "schools are able to promote inequality in the name of fairness and objectivity." This helps us sidestep the absolutist depictions of schools either as ideology-free or schools as uncomplicated echoes of the capitalist social order. The interests of the dominant classes are exposed as cultural capital, a set of

linguistic and cultural competencies that individuals inherit by way of the class-located boundaries of their families. In more specific terms, a child inherits from his or her family sets of meanings, qualities of style, modes of thinking, and types of dispositions that are accorded a certain social value and status as a result of what the dominant class or classes label as the most valued cultural capital" (Giroux, 2001:88).

Schools both legitimize and reproduce the dominant culture: in other words, the ruling classes get to define that which is of value and to disguise this process as free of ideology; additionally, it is not only the school curriculum but the active and subtle participation of the dispossessed in their own oppression (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu (1979) writes about this as a kind of symbolic violence that is not simply imposed on people; rather, institutions such as schools convey cultural capital which then informs social experiences and interactions which in turn reify the institutions. Where Bourdieu's work falls short is his silence on the complex intersections of class, gender and race to determine the ways oppression and resistance manifest.

Diverging from Bourdieu's static depiction of class, Gramsci (1971) describes class as a conceptual frame to explicate the interaction between capital and institutions and the ways this interaction requires the continual mobilization and establishment of a rationale for the existing, oppressive social order. As well, while dominant class ideologies are transmitted in schools, they are also forced on students, teachers or parents who defy them or are actively compelled to abide by them. Ideology, like education, both advances human agency and wields social control. Culture is, in effect, an organizing and transformative process. While internalizing ruling class ideology is but one aspect of schooling, actions, achievements and failures are also concretely grounded in material circumstances.

To return to the point about education as a means to social and economic justice requires re-casting education outside the frames of export-driven, economic growth model of development. Literacy must also be cast in a broader definition. That economic growth and high literacy rates do not bring about greater economic

and social justice is evident in both western, industrialized and developing countries. The United States, a significant geo-political and economic power, has over 60 million functionally illiterate people (Freire and Macedo, 1987). As well consider the example of Thailand which is often touted as an exemplar of Third world country development. Prior to the Asian financial crisis, per capita gross domestic product (GDP) grew fourfold in the 30 years of economic growth; primary school enrollment jumped from 70 to 90 percent, and secondary school enrollment swelled from 40 to 70 percent. According to UNICEF, the male literacy rate is 95 percent and the female is 90 percent. Setting aside questions of quality that enrollment indicators simply do not address and despite the positive outcomes these figures suggest, the fact remains that one in every four children between the ages of six and 17 were still not in school in Thailand prior to the Asian financial crisis (Pennington, 1999). Profound changes were occurring in employment towards non-agricultural jobs before the crisis and there were increased standards of living according to the 1990 census, and yet 71 percent of Thais still resided in rural areas and one-third of this rural population was living in absolute poverty according to a 1994 UNDP report (Knodel, 1997). According to an Asian Development Bank working paper (Motonishi, 2003: 6), income inequality has “significantly increased” between 1975 and 1998. Thus even during times of economic growth there are critical educational issues remain unresolved and poverty continues to linger.

We have to ask what education means, therefore, when treated outside the frames of economic growth and literacy. Giroux (1987:2) describes Gramsci’s definition of literacy as both a “concept and a social practice that must be linked

historically to configurations of knowledge and power on the one hand, and the political and cultural struggle over language and experience on the other.” Illiteracy is then not about whether one can read or write but a cultural marker “for naming forms of difference,” in which difference is synonymous with deficiency. Literacy can translate into “self and social empowerment” or as “perpetuation...of repression and domination” (Giroux, 1987: 2). Literacy is as much ideology and is complicit in shaping the way one perceives and describes past history and future. A critical literacy, therefore, is fundamentally tethered to critique and essential to the broader struggle over knowledge, values and practices that lead to democratic society.

This is a far cry from depicting literacy as part of human capital building or as a process by which people are initiated into “the logic of a unitary, dominant cultural tradition” (Giroux, 1987: 3). Within the dominant discourse, the teacher is a “narrator” and students are “receptacles” and the content of narration/instruction is “emptied of their concreteness and become[s] a hollow, alienated and alienating verbosity” (Freire, 1998: 67). In this construct of education, knowledge is “banked” from those who are regarded as knowledgeable to those who are considered ignorant. The banking version of education requires that people are managed, expected to be passive and accept the “fragmented view of reality deposited in them” (Freire, 1998: 68). Only by rupturing this dichotomized relationship between teacher and student and begin to treat people as simultaneously teacher and student can education be liberating rather than oppressive.

Given the more traditional understanding of education, it is necessary to revisit our notions of educational success; people who attend school and come out

“illiterate” may be, in fact, “resist[ing] and refus[ing] to read the dominant word” (Freire and Macedo, 1987: 123). Such a statement, however, can only be politically salient for people who are not only literate but most likely scaling the upper echelons of educational access and success. To escape such problematic solipsistic impulses, one need only review Freire’s (1998) discussion of critical consciousness as integrative of reality and is evidenced by correspondence between understanding and action. Critical consciousness requires a method that is dialogical, instigates further critical engagement, and is fundamentally based on a horizontal relationship between people (Freire, 1998).

Constructing critical consciousness as such, what of community schools for children of migrants, often stateless and poor? Life in a refugee camp, an IDP area or, as in this case study, community schools for economically and socially displaced children scream the need for genuine “horizontal relationships” in which people are treated as subjects capable of “perceive[ing] the data of reality” and as they “apprehend the phenomenon or problem they also apprehend its causal links” (Freire, 1998: 82). Instead, emergency situations are definitionally limited and as education is often conceived now promote inequality of power between institutions and individuals, as well as between individuals themselves. The education in emergency discourse could, for instance, do more to build upon the conflict-affected peoples’ specific wisdoms, references, and understanding of the legacy of war, the material conditions and needs of their circumstances. Worse, refugees in camps and migrants in the communities are implicitly treated as objects of these circumstances—as people who have had things happen to them--and not subjects who can name the histories—

of colonialism, of war, of displacement—and seek transformation. Even where their knowledge may be invited into the discussion, it is expected to be funneled through “participatory processes” that are managed and regulated by NGOs. If the relationship were truly “horizontal” there would be transformation and engagement on both ends of the relationship. Freire would argue that in these circumstances, there is a need for “authentic help” (Freire, 1998: 113). Freire (1998: 113) writes,

Fundamentally, we knew that the help for which they asked would be true help only to the degree to which, in the process of offering it, we never pretended to be the exclusive Subjects of it, thus reducing the national leaders and people to being simply objects. Authentic help means that all who are involved help each other mutually, growing together in the common effort to understand the reality which they seek to transform. Only through such praxis—in which those who help and those who are being helped help each other simultaneously—can the act of helping become free from the distortion in which the helper dominates the helped.

Giroux (2001) reiterates Gramsci’s (1971) articulation that people behave according to a web “of structured needs, common sense and critical consciousness” and that ideology plays a role in all these aspects of “behavior and thought so as to produce multiple subjectivities and perceptions of the world and everyday life” (146). Marcuse (1955) argued that ideology is entrenched in needs that are both oppressive and liberatory; it is precisely in these contradictions that we can tether Freirean notions of “authentic help” with radical pedagogy that directly addresses the multiple



locations of ideology. To construct emancipatory education, it is first necessary to embrace horizontal, mutual relationships so as to rupture the status of “helper” and “helped” as well as to avoid the pitfall of “helper dominat[ing] the helped” (Freire 1998: 113). Second, recognize the ideological imperatives of the daily interactions and routines in the classroom and school. Third, recognize the various mediations occurring between the students’ material, lived realities and school as an institution. Giroux (2001) cites as an example that radical pedagogy would be consciousness transforming and foster the sorts of social relations that sustain a transformed consciousness. Radical pedagogy would as well have to involve students and teachers to critically engage with their own histories and knowledge. “A radical pedagogy must address the task of providing the conditions for changing subjectivity as it is constituted in the individual’s needs, drives, passions, and intelligence, and for changing the political, economic and social foundation of the wider society as well” (Giroux, 2001: 150).

## **Chapter Three: Root Causes of Migration from Burma**

This chapter sketches the broader context of migration from Burma to Thailand by reviewing historical precedents set by British colonial administration, the economic morass brought on by military rule, and the displacement caused by years of conflict.

### *Military Rule (1962 to the present)*

Burma borders Bangladesh and India in the west, Laos and Thailand in the east and China in the north and northeast. Burma is an ethnically heterogeneous country of 49 million people with eight primary ethnic groups: Kachin, Karenni, Karen, Chin, Burman, Mon, Yakhine and Shan. Burman people comprise the largest population group. For administrative purposes, the country is divided into seven states. Burma's heterogeneity and ethno-nationalistic politics can not be simplified along state lines however given that diverse ethnic communities exist within each state. Religion has also proven to be a fault line in Burma politics: 90 percent are Buddhist, four percent Muslim, five percent Christian and the remaining one percent adheres to other religious practices, such as animism (Fink, 2001; Smith, 1999). 80 percent of the total population lives in rural areas.

Early 19th century British piecemeal forays into Burma rendered it completely colonized by 1886. It gained independence on January 4, 1948, and, for 14 years, had parliamentary democratic rule but it was not without challenge from Burma's communist parties and ethnic armies (Fink, 2001; Silverstein, 1998; Smith, 1999). In 1962 the military staged a coup d'état and the military rules to this day; and in 1974,

the military establishment drafted a new constitution that purported Burma to be a socialist state run by a single party, the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP). The BSPP concocted policies that were an “odd mix of Buddhism, Marxism and nationalism” (Economist Country Profile, 2000: 4). The BSPP also largely withdrew Burma from the international community. Approximately 50 percent of Burma’s economic output, such as the large industrial enterprises, insurance, banking system, foreign and retail trades, was nationalized by the military government. BSPP policies ushered in decades of economic malaise and stagnation (Economist Country Profile, 2000).

By October 1987, Burma had a dwindling economy and was facing public anxiety and anger over a disastrous government scheme to demonetize certain bank notes effectively wiping out peoples’ savings. Student demonstrations erupted throughout the country and soon spread to general nationwide strikes demanding democratic elections. By August 1988, the military leaders, unable to withstand the unrelenting and growing protests, responded with violent suppression. Several thousand civilians were reported to be killed (Economist Country Profile, 2000; Fink, 2001).

In September 1988, the military officially set aside the 1974 constitution and instead “ruled by decree and martial law, enacting new rules and laws” (Silverstein, 1998: 25). Despite repressive and violent measures by the government, people continued to demand political change. The international community condemned the repression. Given such national and worldwide pressure, the military allowed for elections to be held in May 1990. The National League for Democracy (NLD), led

by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, won with an overwhelming majority despite the military having placed her under house arrest prior to the election. In response to the electoral loss the military announced the creation of an “interim” governing body, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), which would rule by martial law and oversee the process of rewriting a new constitution (Silverstein, 1998). 15 years after the election, most of which time Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has spent under arrest, little democratic or constitutional change has been established.<sup>13</sup>

In the 1990s, the junta relaxed visa restrictions and initiated significant infrastructure projects after decades of neglect. The junta declared 1996 a “Visit Myanmar Year” and built hotels in anticipation of the tourists. Steinberg (1999) writes that the junta’s agenda of proposed changes was, however, only “cosmetic” (10). They used forced labor on many of these projects, and, according to investigative journalist and writer John Pilger (1996) many “slums and similar eyesores have been cleared to make way for hotels, parks, boulevards and golf courses and to keep their inhabitants out of sight.” He cites the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) statistic that a staggering one million people were forced from the capital city of Rangoon. The Rangoon Golf course, designed for Japanese businessmen and western tourists, is built, for instance, on the site of a community that had existed for 40 years. People from the community “who resisted were either arrested or forcibly removed in trucks to a settlement 15 miles away” (Pilger, 1996). The junta also moved to consolidate support from within the ranks of the military.

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<sup>13</sup> Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s calls for a negotiated transfer of power and national reconciliation has been recognized by the international community with the awarding of numerous international human rights awards including the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.

Parallel to these steps, the junta responded to the pro-democracy movement in the ensuing years in four concrete ways (Fink, 2001). It expanded the armed forces in the country from 180,000 men in 1988 to 400,000 by 1999. It also acted relentlessly to disintegrate the organizational structure of the pro-democracy groups through the arrest and imprisonment of many of the top NLD leaders. Its third objective was to negotiate ceasefires with the armed ethnic minority groups, some of whom, as part of their ceasefire agreements, operate a thriving drug trade with the tacit approval of the junta. Its fourth strategy was to improve the economic conditions in Burma by allowing greater trade and foreign investment but, despite an initial boom, the economy remains stagnant today. In 1997, after consultation with a Washington D.C.-based public relations firm, SLORC changed its name to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

### *Civil War*

For purposes of this research, the discussion on the causes and pathways of migration will largely focus on the history and experiences of the Karen people; Karen state is located directly across from Mae Sot in Thailand's Tak province where this research was conducted. The refugee camps located in Tak are largely populated with Karen people; numerous Karen students are enrolled in the migrant community schools.

The civil war has largely been drawn along Buddhist and Christian lines and part of a broader discourse about Karen cultural preservation against the Burmese military junta. There is a history to these stratified definitions. In the days when Burma was under monarchical rule, having access to resources and living within the

king's protection was largely established by whether a person was Buddhist and whether the person was "located" in the tributary chain. This could include being a member of the king's court as officials, artisans or soldiers, or it could be as a provider or collector of money by way of duties and tariffs. A majority of the population was indentured laborers, and they often came from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Identity and status were indistinguishable within the tributary system (Gravers, 1999: 19).

The question of membership to a national community becomes immediately problematic and intriguing. The intriguing scenario here involves how the Karens and the Burmese's articulations of belonging to or estrangement from Burma, as it develops from monarchy to colony to independence, are determined through religious self-identification. This engenders socio-political mechanisms that forever determine what belonging and being protected by the Burmese nation-state means. During British rule, "being Burman" was constructed as being Buddhist and, therefore, not "foreign" or British. Religious difference became conflated with ethnic identity and the pin point on which political posturing for and against colonial rule pivots in overly-simplistic but politically compelling ways. There has been a failure to methodically examine the relationship between ethnicity and the state in Southeast Asia. In other words, state institutions have greatly influenced the construction of ethnic identity and the politics of culture (Brown, 1994).

It is apparent that the civil administration system in Burma--both under the British colonial system and the era of partial self-governance in the 1930s--shaped the ways ethnic groups defined and mobilized themselves. The notion of ethnic

“fixedness” either as a socio-biological entity or as a linguistic, religious or community socialization falls short of addressing how the state influences the categorization of groups and how the state is thusly changed and informed by the establishment and naming of these ethnic groups. Prior to colonization, Burma was distinguished not by

stable linguistic cleavages but [was] instead characterized by fluctuating patron-client linkages...between who adopted Buddhist culture and those who did not. Politics indeed, frequently focused on tensions between majorities and minorities, but those terms referred not to ethnic categories, but to disparities of power amongst the competing power centres of the various Buddhist kingdoms (Burman, Mon, Shan and others), and between these power centres and those lacking power—primarily non-Buddhists in the uplands and in the lower Irrawaddy delta (Brown, 1994: 34).

The British colonial bureaucracy introduced modern state structures, such as creating a separate state administration for Christian Karens in 1886. This decision had a fundamental impact on the definitional boundaries of these groups. The colonial administration institutionalized what had previously been fluid, however imperfect, power relationships (Brown, 1994). Goodwin and Skocpol (1994) critique the discussion of Third World revolution as peasant wars and with little attention paid to other actors. They cite the web of alliances and coalitions that “cut across divides between urban and rural areas and among different social classes and ethnic groupings (262).” They also point out that these alliances end or reconfigure in other

ways. This is a crucial concept to keep in mind because ethno-religious groups affiliate not for some pre-existing, ahistorical “natural” order, but in response to administrative and institutional structures, in this case, created under British rule. Furthermore, the direct result of colonial rule was the establishment of an indigenous elite group that were westernized and educated, and capable of contesting British power partially because they conceived themselves as viable political actors who could assume ruling responsibilities. Both Christian Karens and Burmese elites were formed in the process, but they were differently formed and their political strategies and articulations reflected that difference. This formation should not be forgotten in analyses involving civil war for the past three decades. Joel Midgal (1997) writes that the state does not stand in isolation from interactions with social forces. In the case of Burma, the state, as determined by British rule, was less about enmeshing itself within culture to gain recompense and compliance. They created compliance through their administrative structures, by determining what constituted a separate culture within Burma proper, and who deserved “protecting” and who needed to be “held back” by rules and procedures.

The British instituted centralized infrastructural development in Burma, and integrated India with Burma’s economic and political organization. For all practical purposes, Burma was governed from Calcutta. This included a bureaucracy to manage railroads, teak production, port administration, rice production and exportation. British rule also perpetuated exclusion of the Burmese from the higher levels of bureaucracy (Steinberg, 1982). Employment was split along Indian-Burmese lines, but it was also split within the Burmese national community. The



Burma army in 1940, for instance, was staffed by a core group of ethnic minority groups; 88 percent were Karen, Kachin, and Chin while Burmans only formed 12 percent (Steinberg, 1982). (The British argued that the former made better soldiers than the Burmans.) The Karens also held prominent positions in the colonial bureaucracy. These designations had the impact of reinforcing a sense of pride or financial and social privilege for being Karen, and inspired a reaction from the Burmese that they were being disloyal by benefiting from colonial rule. Henceforth the Karen's material and social privilege in this regime became dressed in the rhetoric of religious difference which then institutionalized their outsider status.

Prior to colonization, there were alliances and relationships, such as that between the Burman and Shan monarchs by way of marriages and established tribute paying system. It was routine to see intermarriage between Burmans and other groups, such as with the Arakans or Mons. According to Silverstein (1977), there were no campaigns to "Burmanize" the more outlying groups, like the Shans. Some ethnic minority groups were treated with enmity, however, as "wild" unequals, especially the Karens. He further argues that the deepest suspicion was reserved for those who made no effort to intermarry or assimilate. While I would argue that Silverstein (1977) underestimates the tacit ways assimilation functions in the politics of culture and ethnic identity, he is correct to tease out the interactions between the ethnic groups over time. The British, because it consumed Burma in parts and over time, created bureaucratic structures and administrative regions that permanently uncoupled these inter-ethnic interactions. The hill areas were dubbed the Kachin, Shan, Chin, Kayah states and the Salween district was attached to the Karen state.

This region, roughly about 45 percent of the country, was placed under the direct rule of the British governor, and administered separately from the rest of Burma (Steinberg, 1982). This administrative separation had the unfortunate effect of reifying a sense of historical legacy and long term presence and exclusive claim to an area.

This ascriptive conceptual mode for intellectually mapping the structure of Burma has been so widely accepted by Burma's political elite that they, like the Europeans who created it, have tended to accept the broad ethnic categories as embodying living formations with political imperatives...It is now impossible to avoid the use of broad ethnic labels even while attempting to demystify them (Taylor, 1982: 8).

This administrative "concern" and separation continued even in the early attempts at limited self-government. When the Britain did allow self-government, they reserved certain number of seats in the legislature to "protect [the Karens'] interests" (Silverstein, 1977: 16). From the end of monarchical rule to independence in 1948, there were few other formal structures or institutions through which the Karens and Burmans had to legally interact or cooperate. These tensions grew when the Karens sided with the British against the Japanese and, in the initial phase of World War II, against the Burmans who were in fact aligned with the Japanese in anticipation of independence from British rule. The lack of institutional platform on which both the Burmese and the Karens had to formally and legally cooperate and interact during the colonial period embedded a significant obstacle to their capacity to

formulate a constitution for independent, federalist Burma in 1947 (Steinberg, 1982). It also legitimized the opinion that their interests were at odds with each other and underscored the belief that there was little common political ground.

The British institutionalized the divide perpetuated under monarchical rule, that of “maintaining political and social separation between the hill and plains people” (Silverstein, 1977: 21). The Karens, for example, only provided tribute to Burman monarchs once in a while, and their contribution consisted of giving natural resources to them or providing supplies and rations to the king’s army. This is not to suggest there was equivalency of these two systems. The British bureaucratization of this split entrenched the inequities as experienced by both groups, and explicitly confirmed both spiraling nationalistic narratives. Worse, the colonial administration system institutionally situated each group with irreconcilably polar opposite strategies for accomplishing their own objects. Thus it becomes clear that institutions can and do pattern the kinds of organizations and even manners of interacting and negotiating between groups.

In 1931 there were approximately 1,340,000 Karens in Burma. Large numbers of them had converted to Christianity, spoke English and had extensive visibility due to the work of missionaries who performed as religious and language instructors. Literacy and the written version of the Karen language was driven in large part by the “need to translate the Bible into local languages led to the institution of writing systems for the two main Karen dialects” (Christie, 1996: 55). Furthermore, literacy was a vital function of creating an administrative and symbolic product with which to build national or ethnic consciousness (Brown, 1994). In the

1920's about 22 percent of Rangoon University students were Christian Karens (Christie, 1996). The wider context of conversion is that the missionaries insisted on behavioral and appearance changes to accompany the Christian faith. This included an insistence on hand-shaking as an indicator of Western, Christian civility, but more significantly, they "reorganized everyday life and work" (Gravers, 1999: 20). Thus it became a simultaneous threat to the existing cultural and political orders. The converts were even regarded as "kalas," a term signifying foreigner, and had become "bonafide strangers, having lost their nationality" (Bigandet, 1996: 4). In other words, the converts became outsiders to Burman society because they rejected the way of life in Burma and the Buddhist cosmology (Gravers, 1999).

There was a crucial link between the pre-colonial state (monarchy) and the religious order of monks as it relates to schooling, a link that soon fed into the political rhetoric of both the Karens and Burmans. In addition to the king appointing the head of the order of monks, the monks themselves provided services to the community such as running schools. They organized teachers or taught themselves. Burma's relative social stability prior to British rule was based on "the fact that nearly all Burmans and most of the minorities under their direct rule shared a common faith—Buddhism [even though] it was not rigidly institutionalized" (Silverstein, 1977: 8). When the king was dethroned, however, the sangha (order of monks) lost state-support. The British also founded schools to facilitate training in preparation for work in the colonial administration, and many of them were run by missionaries. This deprived the monks of their traditional roles as educators, and reinforced the belief that there was deterioration of traditional Burman Buddhist values. Many

monks organized themselves to become substantial political actors. Monks became vocal and morally persuasive voices for a newly emerging nationalism. Although this was outside the scope of Buddhist teachings, most Burmans turned to them since most of the leadership roles for home-grown leaders had been usurped by colonial administration.

As more Burmans completed their schooling and training in the schools, many of them “returned” to Buddhism as a marker of their identity, cultural tradition, and it became a compelling strategy of opposition to the so-called foreign, the Christian, the colonial. These western-educated Burmans even founded the YMBA (Young Men’s Buddhist Association.) The name of the organization in Burmese, though, can be translated as the Association to the Care and Well being of Buddhism (Yi, 1988). This organization was committed to making “themselves and the people aware of their heritage and to preserve their shrines from violations by non-Buddhists” (Silverstein, 1977: 24). This soon grew into the formation of the General Council of Burmese Associations, and political action that we now readily recognize as anti-colonial, pro-independence struggle had fully begun. This transition can not be overemphasized. What started as an energetic protection of Buddhism as the pulse of Burman culture very quickly became a clarion call for protection of Buddhist Burma, where Buddhism was the sign post at the boundary between home and “away.” Only after this major change was achieved could the peoples of Burma accept the secular ideas of Western political thought propagated by the new elite (Silverstein, 1977).

The Karens, unlike the Burmans, had organized their first association by 1880, the National Karen Association (Silverstein, 1980). Its strategic goals were to

promote leadership and educational opportunities for young Karens, and to encourage and preserve their culture. According to Silverstein (1980), NKA was a largely pro-British association, including efforts to recruit for the British during World War I and muster support for the British “campaign of pacification” following the Third Anglo-Burmese War. Compared with the YMBA, it was a far more cohesive organization, and its representatives were western educated and even had the chance to present their case in England. Like the YMBA, it too grew into a directly political organization. The Karens were early on uncertain about the merits of opportunities to begin self-governance in a post-colonial, independent Burma. They preferred their own state under British rule. They argued it would “require many years of strenuous training under British governance before this boon can be conferred on it with security and success” (Silverstein, 1980: 45). They later changed their political position and, as mentioned earlier in this paper, the British allotted them five seats out of 130 in the legislature (Silverstein, 1980).

The increasing divergence of political strategy and rhetoric between Karen and Burmans organizations erupted as violence in rural areas between Christians and Buddhists. In 1887 there were violent clashes between the Karen Christians and the missionaries against the Buddhists who associated the dethroning of King Thibaw as an affront to religion and land. The British response to the Buddhist protests was to pay 25 rupees per Burman/Buddhist head, and many Christian Karens, in retaliation for their burnt villages and killings by the Buddhists, “captured monks or delivered heads for a reward” (Gravers, 1999: 23). They also implemented a scorched-earth policy by destroying food sources and villages (Gravers, 1999). The British

“pacification program” of the 1880s were met with guerilla tactics from Burmans, most notably from monks. Despite the principle of non-violence and their vow to refrain from secular activities, the monastic order was seen as protecting Buddhism and its values which legitimated their political involvement. The nationalist discourse grew in proportional reaction to the violence and the use of religion as a placeholder became overly-simplified to Buddhist Burmans and anti-colonization versus Christian, foreigner, pro-British. Political and class differences within the Buddhist Burmans and Christian Karens were largely ignored.

Revolutionary coalitions tend to form around preexisting nationalist, populist, or religious discourses that legitimize resistance to tyranny and, just as important, are capable of aggregating a broad array of social classes and strata (Goodwin and Skocpol, 1994: 262).

The Karens were not blind loyalists to the British in the negotiations leading up to independence. The primary British mediator between the Karens and Burmans, H.N.C. Stevenson wrote, “I have come to the regrettable conclusion that the present Karen quiescence means simply that they refuse to quarrel with us. But when we go, if go we do, the war for the Karen state will begin” (Christie, 1996: 68). The Karens had received ample training and arms from the British during the war against the Japanese during World War II. As predicted, the federalist system of a newly independent Burma did not last long. The 14 years (1948-1962) of parliamentary democratic rule was plagued by mistrust, problematic notions of national security and the rising challenge of armed communist parties. The ballot box became less appealing and civil war soon erupted.

Without downplaying the importance of cultural preservation and ethnic identity formation, a past categorization of any ethnic group outside and before history and politics should be revisited. The 1931 census taken by the British underscores this point. The census undercounted the number of Karens living in Burma proper; it registered one million Karens and nine and a half million Burmans. The Karens argued, however, that they were nearly four million strong, but the British counted the Buddhist Karens as Burman (Christie, 1996). The British administration relied upon the census numbers to formulate Burma policies; such as, for example, which region of the country could be constituted as an administrative state. Karen and Burman claims about who they are and what area constitutes their “community” or “communal homeland” is informed and shaped by the census and other state-building activities. The census is more than a demographic failure; it speaks to British penetration of society. The British census and other records were used “for purposes of surveillance, administration, and regulation” by a colonial administration (Torpey, 2000: 11).

The Karen people began fighting for an independent state within a year of Burma’s independence from the British. Other minority groups, the Mon, the Karenni, the Pa-O and the Kachin among others, also instigated armed rebellion against the central Rangoon government. One of the lingering consequences of civil war has been that there are now 154,000 refugees warehoused in nine border camps for decades.<sup>14</sup> According to the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), there are more than seven million refugees being “warehoused” for ten years or more around the world. “Warehousing” refers to the practice of “keeping

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<sup>14</sup> Thailand-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), December 2006 statistic.



refugees in camps or segregated settlements, deprived for years of the basic rights guaranteed in the UN Refugee Convention and without hope of a normal life” (World Refugee Survey, 2004).

In recent years the Burmese junta has responded to the prolonged civil war with a harsh counter-insurgency policy which has deeply penetrated civilian life and increased cross-border flight. The SPDC implemented the Four Cuts Policy which effectively cut supplies of food, funds, contact and information in areas where there was perceived resistance to the regime. The strategies of the policy include detention, torture and execution of villagers who are accused of having contact with insurgents; systematic extortion, crop destruction and plunder of villagers’ food supplies, livestock, cash and valuables; forced labor in which villagers are “recruited” to work for the army without pay; and increasingly, forced relocation of villagers to sites directly under the control of the SPDC military troops. “The military uses forced labor to cut costs associated with clearing land for road construction, digging trenches, carrying out construction work, and so on.” The SPDC army also uses villagers as “human minesweepers.”

Terrorizing the local population has had terrible ramifications for agricultural output as farmers and workers were not able to tend their fields. In 1996 as many as 2,500 villages were razed and 370,000 Karen, Karenni, and Shan were forcibly relocated to 180 relocation sites (World Refugee Survey, 2004). This policy has terrorized and impoverished civilian populations and exerted great pressure on the armed ethnic resistance movements. It has largely overwhelmed many of the ethnic armies, many of whom have now signed ceasefire agreements with SPDC. Ceasefire

agreements have not quelled violence. Most ceasefire areas are still swarming with junta soldiers. In addition, militarized areas have particular repercussions for women; there continues to be systematic rape campaigns by the junta, murder and harassment by military personnel in all ethnic states and central Burma in both conflict and “non-conflict” areas.<sup>15</sup> In Burma today political repression continues; forced labor practices and violent relocation of villagers occur without impunity and affect hundreds of thousands of people. Analyzing colonial rule does not make politicians less culpable and war more forgiving. There is inadequate understanding of history’s shadow on the contemporary moment; unless the criteria for national belonging and cultural identity are revisited, the discourses of ethnic identity and political autonomy will continue to be reproduced in textbooks, border politics and political imaginings of the future.

*Life in Thailand: Refugees and Migrants*

Decades of civil war have impoverished Burma, a nation once known as the “rice bowl of Asia.” Repressive rule has caused people to flee across Burma’s borders. This research begins in a border town that is for many the first point of entry in Thailand. This section provides an overview of Thai policies on worker registration, access to education for migrant children and the material conditions of life in Thailand. It also includes a discussion of relevant Thai government policies and international instruments protecting refugees and migrants.

A vast majority of people in Burma have had to negotiate their lives amidst armed conflict between ethnic armies and Burmese military. This challenge is

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<sup>15</sup> See Women’s League of Burma report System of Impunity (2004); Karen Women’s Organization’s Shattering Silences (2004); Shan Women’s Action Network’s License to Rape (2002).

underscored by the presence of the nine refugee camps along the 2,000 kilometer Thai-Burma border. The Karen National Union (KNU), an ethnic nationality resistance army, has been engaged in civil war for 35 years but in the early 1970s, military skirmishes largely occurred during the dry season between the KNU and the military junta often causing people to flee across the border to Thailand. Most people returned to their villages during the rainy season, however, when armies withdrew. 1984 proved a pivotal year because the junta successfully breached the KNU front lines in the area across from Thailand's Tak province. This sent 10,000 refugees across the border and when the junta maintained its position over the rainy season, the refugees had little option but to remain in Thailand. The next ten years, from 1984 to 1994, resulted in further KNU losses further increasing the number of refugees to 80,000. Approximately 1.5 to two million additional Burmese are living in undocumented status in Thailand, of whom USCRI estimates 260,000 have fled human rights abuses but remain unrecognized as refugees (World Refugee Survey, 2004). For the approximately 154,000 camp-based refugees, much of the health and educational services are organized by community-based organizations and staffed by the refugees themselves with resources and support from several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide supplies, teacher training and local language classes in Burmese, Thai, Karen and English. The Coordinating Committee for Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT) functions as an umbrella organization for all non-governmental organizations providing services to camp-based refugees.

The assignment of refugee or other statuses is complicated by Thailand's refusal to ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention, the international treaty that defines refugees as persons who have a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. The Thai government instead characterizes refugee camps as "temporary shelters" and refugees as "displaced people fleeing active fighting," a definition that does not comply with international law and excludes large numbers of Burmese refugees from protection (Human Rights Watch, 2004). Under Thai law, forced labor practices and forced relocation of entire villages in Burma would not be considered valid reasons for refugee status. The vast majority of Burmese who have not been designated as refugees under that narrow interpretation are deemed "illegal migrants" by the Thai government, regardless of the person's reason for entering Thailand.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) clearly makes a distinction between migrants and refugees. "The UNHCR does not consider itself to be a migration organization, nor does it consider its activities to fall within the function that is commonly described as 'migration management.' The Office also has no interest in seeing migration situations turned into or managed as if they were refugee situations." Despite disputes about including migrants as unrecognized refugees, one important link undergirds the migrants and refugees in Thailand. In crossing a border without permission they are stateless people; they "no longer enjoy the privileges and responsibilities associated with the state" (Waters and Leblanc, 2005: 130).

Burmese migrants residing in Thailand have extremely limited means to support themselves and their families. Most of them work as day laborers on farms, in factories or on construction sites. They eke out a subsistence living, marginalized in the Thai economy and exploited as a cheap source of labor. They often support not only themselves, but also family members who live with them in Thailand or who remain behind in Burma. They live in fear of detection by the Thai authorities, not only because they are vulnerable to deportation back to Burma but also because such authorities will often exploit their lack of status to extort bribes from them.

At the family and personal level, most of the migrants are pushed to migrate by inadequate or no income and/or employment opportunities in the village, financial crisis due to illness or gambling, the heavy demands or boredom associated with the agrarian lifestyle and women's multiple burdens. Additional factors for Burmese are forced relocation, forced labor practices, heavy taxes, high inflation, severe economic problems, and violence against women by the military, including rape (Asian Migrant Centre, 2002: 6).

The situation in Thailand has similarity to approximately 250,000 undocumented Central American migrants living in Mexico. Most come from El Salvador and Guatemala with the Salvadoreans numbering the most living outside official camps. They have been forced to flee due to war, terror and repression as well as the fallout effects of war on their economies. The Mexican government has dubbed them as "economic migrants" thereby denying them the already scant opportunities available for refugee access health services or education (Graham-

Brown, 1991). In other words, the status accorded to people, be they refugees or migrants, exists as tidy categorical markers of difference from host population only in policy language; in practice migrants and refugees suffer from similar lack in services and have often left their homes due to the direct and indirect consequences of war. One result of such situations has been to argue for a “broader definition based on the overall internal situation in the country of origin where war, repression and economic crisis may combine to make living conditions impossible, even when individuals are not directly threatened with death persecution or imprisonment” (Graham-Brown, 1991: 223).

The Burmese migrants often cross the border without documentation, although documentation that permits short-term entrance into Thailand is available. Such passes are valid for one to two days for a small fee, and are designed to facilitate trade and commerce along the border. Some migrants obtain a day pass for purposes of entering Thailand and then overstay the period for which the pass was valid. Sometimes they cross the border undetected. At other times, they bribe Thai border officials in order to cross. At other times, people pay “carriers,” who may or may not be people they know, to help them cross the border undetected; carriers may also help with locating employment. Such carriers operate through informal networks and charge a significant fee (Young and Pyne, 2006). Once in Thailand some people are trafficked into coercive, abusive work situations including non-payment for work performed or debt-bondage. According to Feingold (2005) research suggests as many as ten percent of the Burmese and Cambodian boys who are trafficked into work on

commercial fishing boats do not return to shore; preliminary evidence suggests some boys “that become ill are frequently thrown overboard” (Feingold, 2005: 27).

The conditions of work can be brutal. In September, 2006 Thai authorities raided a seafood processing factory where there were 500 Burmese migrant workers. One of the workers said some of them had been there for close to six or seven years, a majority of them had been tortured and prevented from leaving the factory premises. He added that, “Those who did not work according to [the factory owner’s] demands were put to shame in front of others by cutting their hair and shaving their head in patches. If they spoke up or were caught running away they were beaten behind closed doors. If the offenders were girls or women they would be taken in front of others where their clothes were taken off and beaten in the nude.” The factory compound was fenced with barbed wire with an electric current and guards were posted. The workers worked over 16 hours a day and were only paid from baht 1,200 (30 USD) to baht 1,500 (40 USD) a month. For comparison, most other factories pay approximately baht 3,000 (75 USD) every 15 days. Three Burmese migrants have died on the factory premises in the past. Interviews with the young migrant women revealed that some had not received one day of rest in a year. The employer considered workers asking to return home, running away from the factory, and requesting changes in the working conditions to be serious infractions. For punishment, workers were made to stand in the hot sun in the nude; the employer beat them with bamboo sticks until bones broke and stepped on their breasts; the employer also placed sharp iron rods into workers’ noses, and arranged for some of the women

to be raped.<sup>16</sup> As horrific as this situation seems, these circumstances are repeated in many factories throughout Thailand for Burmese migrants.

The U.N. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children was adopted by the UN General Assembly on November 2000 but entered into force on December 2003 defines trafficking as “...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purposes of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.” Trafficking may occur at various points during the migration experience, including before the individual has crossed the border, during the border crossing or once present in Thailand itself.

The surreptitious existence of people without legal status and life on the socio-economic margins means migrants are at a strong risk of being trafficked. Even registered migrants are powerless when confronted with threats and bribes by police and many are left just as vulnerable when employers refused to allow them to keep their registration card, despite Thai law requiring migrants to carry the card at all times (Young and Pyne, 2006). The migrants are stranded in between policy gaps; their concerns include fear of persecution by the Burmese military; concerns about

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<sup>16</sup> Federation Trade Unions of Burma (2006). Report of Burmese Migrant Workers Tortured and Exploited in Seafood Processing Factory.



marooning their families without economic support if they are arrested and placed in a detention center or shelter; losing their employment, as abusive as their employment situation might be. According to the immigration control and prosecution-based approach to counter human trafficking, apprehended trafficked persons are typically deported. Burmese who are apprehended by the Thai authorities are often detained in shelters before being deported. Some are deported with prior notification to the Burmese government. Others who admit to being designated as refugees by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Regional Office for Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam are rounded up, detained and informally deported to border areas without prior notification to the Burmese government.<sup>17</sup> It is important to note, however, that the term “person of concern” is used by the Royal Thai government (RTG) to describe a refugee and “temporary shelter” is used instead of refugee camp.

Repatriation is an important and viable option for many trafficked victims but it should not be an automatic response to a trafficking situation. Furthermore, return is simply not much more feasible sometimes for people who do not have legal status in their country of origin, such as those from ethnic minority or indigenous groups who are denied citizen rights (Feingold, 2005). Repatriation is not challenged or reconsidered often enough by international agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working with trafficked persons. Repatriation is often viewed as necessary to deter and prevent future trafficking. It is also often characterized as harmless, despite most deported Burmese returning to Thailand at the earliest possible opportunity (Young and Pyne, 2006). For refugees who have been trafficked, for

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<sup>17</sup> See Human Rights Watch (2004), Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Thai policy toward Burmese Refugees.

instance, return to the country of origin is not possible without tremendous risk and acknowledging that they left camp without permission—and if they had been living in the camp without official registration, a common occurrence since camp registration have been halted by the Thai authorities for an extended period of time now—has its own punitive repercussions (Young and Pyne, 2006). By returning to Thailand a second or sometimes multiple times, the trafficked migrant is at risk of either being identified and targeted by the Burmese military upon return or, en route to Thailand, being ensnared in the same cycle of violence and exploitation they experienced when trafficked the first time. Often the person returns to Thailand burdened with greater debt, either from having to bribe officials on the way or as part of the costs of resettling in Thailand. The cycle of repatriation and return leaves people even more vulnerable to traffickers and bolsters corrupt practices at the local level” (Young and Pyne, 2006).

Some counter-trafficking responses, by failing or refusing to see the economics and causes of migration, have resulted in conflating poverty with trafficking. As one senior UN official reported, “You have to consider trafficking from the point of view of why the Burmese are crossing into Thailand to begin with. They are fleeing to escape forced labor, forced relocation, rape, and economic deprivation. They first have to flee for safety, and then sort out their situation. They need to eat and have to find work, and that’s where the vulnerability comes in, because there is no safe place for them.” For example, the UN official noted that the Thai immigration officials are actively trafficking women in Mae Sot because it is lucrative and supports what is otherwise a paltry salary. He observed, “Because of

this, immigration police consider a post in Mae Sot as the most desirable” (Young and Pyne, 2006). Despite these hardships and risks, migrant workers, when questioned about their motivation to come to Thailand, cite the political repression, armed conflict, and economic devastation in Burma that has directly resulted from years of despotic rule (Young and Pyne, 2006).

The World Vision Foundation of Thailand and the Asian Research Center for Migration (ARCM) conducted a study in 2003 involving 400 migrants from Burma living in three Thai provinces of Tak, Chiang Mai and Ranong. The study determined and ranked the reasons for migration from Burma as: low wages; unemployment; family poverty; distressing experiences such as forced labor practices; and a lack of qualifications for employment. Approximately 19% of the participants cited forced labor practices and 7% of the participants in Mae Sot (Tak province) described forced relocations by the Burmese junta. Many of them stay for three or more years with approximately 30% of them residing in Thailand for over five years. Three out of four study participants responded that they had in fact crossed into Thailand via an immigration checkpoint and simply overstayed; others arrived through bribery and negotiation between the immigration and the carriers—agents paid by migrants to facilitate their cross-border journey (Huguet and Punpuing, 2005). In another, more recent study of 528 Burmese migrant domestic workers, 38% detailed experiences with forced labor, including many who were forced to work as porters for the junta. Nearly 60% of the women spoke of the imposition of arbitrary taxes on their families by the junta and a large majority of them, 85% of the total participants, were Shan, an

ethnic minority group long engaged in civil warfare with the military junta (Panam et al, 2004; Huguet and Punpuing, 2005).

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) organized a survey of 501 migrants in Tak province in January 2006 that investigates the living conditions of Burmese migrants, their migration pathways and examines the community's access to health and educational services for migrant populations.<sup>18</sup> The 501 participants were of varying ethnicities: 60% were Burman; 17% were Karen; 5% were Pa-O; the rest were Mon, Rakhine, Karenni, and Shan. 51% of the participants were women. In addition to the quantitative survey data, the IRC also conducted focus groups with migrants.

The survey stems from an interest in more fully ascertaining the legal basis on which migrants from Burma may in fact qualify for refugee status under the international refugee convention. The preliminary findings speak to the complex root causes of migration; the findings directly challenges the narrowly defined Thai policy language on refugees and migrants and stretches the international convention and protocols that, although designed under World War II conditions to establish the rights of refugees, may be usefully applied to an increasingly globalized labor force that responds to the blurred aggregate effects of war, conflict and economic deprivation in some developing countries. Only seven percent of the participants had completed high school with almost 34 percent of them having received no or only some primary school education. 46 percent of them had children with them in

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<sup>18</sup> The IRC Migrant Survey Project by January 2007 will have been conducted in two additional provinces: Mae Hong Son and Chiang Mai. I managed the survey project for IRC Thailand but the survey instrument was designed by Dr. Karen Jacobsen, professor at Tufts University and Director of the Forced Migration program.

Thailand. Only 16 percent of the children were enrolled in school, 64 percent are attending migrant-run community schools and 22 percent are in Thai public schools. Three-quarters of the parents responded that they prefer their children to study in Burmese schools whether government-run in Burma or community-run in Burma or Thailand. 85 percent of the participants cited economic reasons for migrating to Thailand, but compellingly, 30 percent also cited conflict and 22 percent had themselves directly experienced violence. An astonishing 68 percent of the migrants had survived torture, 40 percent had been forced to porter for the Burmese military troops, nine percent had been conscripted against their will and seven percent admitted to experiencing sexual abuse. The Burmese junta was named as perpetrator in 70 percent of the responses. 52 percent of them have not returned to Burma since coming to Thailand. Five percent of the participants admitted to having lived at one time in a refugee camp but left camp in pursuit of better income-generation opportunities.

There are numerous categories of statuses assigned to people from Burma living in Thailand, as shown in Table 3. The Royal Thai Government (RTG) refusal to officially recognize “refugee” status means everyone is regarded to a certain degree as a migrant with varying levels of permission for temporary stay. This situation is further complicated by the longstanding history of hill tribe peoples and highland people in Thailand who, despite being born there or having long-term residency, are denied citizenship and are therefore without access to state protection or provision of social services.

***Table 3: Status of Refugees/Migrants from Burma in Thailand<sup>19</sup>***

<b>POPULATION GROUP</b>	<b>THAI GOVERNMENT POLICY</b>	<b>STATUS UNDER THAI LAW</b>	<b>RIGHT TO STAY</b>
Refugees registered with UNHCR and Ministry of Interior (MoI) since 1999	Agree in principle to grant exit clearance for third country resettlement: for example, residents of Tham Hin Refugee Camp	Illegal migrant with permission to temporarily stay in restricted area (refugee camp) pending repatriation or third country settlement and if found outside camp without permission refugee will be arrested and deported back to Burma	Thai National Security Board granted permission for this group to stay temporarily in Thailand on humanitarian grounds
Asylum seekers residing in camp without permission	The Provincial Authority Board (PAB), acting as the status determination mechanism, will assess applications for camp admission. Criteria of admission include fleeing fighting and fleeing persecution. Admitted person will be officially allowed to temporarily stay in camp	Until allowed access to camp, all asylum seekers are regarded as illegal migrants with no permission to stay in camp or in Thailand	Subject to arrest and deportation
Person of Concern (such as those in Nupo, Ban Don Yang, and Tham Hin refugee camps)	Agree to grant exit clearance for third country resettlement	Illegal migrant with permission to stay in Thailand, Cabinet Resolution February 10, 2005	Temporary resident status pending resettlement process
Hill Tribe Person holding	Grant Thai nationality if they can prove that they	Illegal migrant with permission	Temporary resident status pending status

<sup>19</sup> Karn Sermchaiwong, former Senior Protection Coordinator with IRC, organized the information and shared with me his vast experiences negotiating with the intricacies of Thai laws for migrants and refugees.

<b>POPULATION GROUP</b>	<b>THAI GOVERNMENT POLICY</b>	<b>STATUS UNDER THAI LAW</b>	<b>RIGHT TO STAY</b>
light blue card	are Thai Grant permanent resident status if they can prove that they entered Thailand prior to October 3, 1985	to temporarily stay in Thailand	determination
Burmese Displaced Person (Pink Card)	Will be granted permanent resident status if they can prove that they entered Thailand prior to October 3, 1985	Illegal Migrant with permission to temporarily stay in Thailand	Temporary resident status pending status determination
Burmese Illegal Immigrants (Orange Card)	No policy to grant permanent resident status	Illegal migrant with permission to stay temporarily in Thailand pending repatriation, Cabinet Resolution March 17, 1992	Temporary resident status pending status determination
Highlanders (Green with Red Edge Card)	Grant permanent resident status if they can prove that they entered Thailand prior to October 3, 1985 Person determined entering Thailand after October 3, 1995 is subject to deportation	Illegal migrant with permission to stay in Thailand, Cabinet Resolution August 23, 2005	Temporary resident status pending status determination
Registered Migrant	Granted permission to work in Thailand on an annual basis but registered migrants who do not have work permit and are not dependents of those possessing work permit will be deported back to the country of origin	Illegal migrant with permission to stay in Thailand until June 30, 2006 Cabinet Resolution May 10 2005	Temporary resident status
A Person of Concern who	Not allowed to move to camps or go for third-	Illegal migrant, subject to arrest	No right to stay

<b>POPULATION GROUP</b>	<b>THAI GOVERNMENT POLICY</b>	<b>STATUS UNDER THAI LAW</b>	<b>RIGHT TO STAY</b>
fails to report to MOI for transferring to refugee camps	country resettlement	and deportation	
Illegal Migrant	Arrest and Deportation	Illegal migrant, subject to arrest and deportation	No right to stay

There are some explanatory caveats to this chart. A significant obstacle for the hill tribe or highland communities is the slow pace at which the status determination process has moved; for some, the status determination process has been indefinitely suspended. Highlanders who are provided with a red-edged green card are granted permission to stay on an annual basis pending the status determination process. They are tasked, however, with the responsibility of proving that they are in fact “Thai” but have in the past missed opportunities to participate in the civil registration process as organized by the Thai government; if successful in their efforts, they will be awarded Thai nationality. This is indeed a daunting task because many hill tribe people are without documents proving date or place of birth (birth registration) and, if they are not born in Thailand, there is little to prove date of entry into Thailand. Some of the hill tribe groups can be found on both sides of the Thailand-Burma border which undergirds much of the RTG anxieties about awarding nationality or recognizing nationality. One of the most immediate and appalling impacts of statelessness is the lack of access to social services, including healthcare and schooling, and the attendant vulnerabilities that arise from poverty and marginalization.



The nearly two million people from Burma who are living in Thailand are designated as migrants. Despite the broad definitional shadow cast by the term “migrant” in Thai policy discourse, this research is focused on non-camp based people from Burma whose children study, sometimes live, at community-run schools in Mae Sot. The profile of unskilled migrant workers from Burma has steadily risen in policy discussions over the years as migration has grown due to Burma’s long-standing civil war and political repression and Thailand’s economic boom of the late 1980s when unskilled labor was in demand. Balancing business interests and the need to regulate migrant laborers from Burma, Cambodia and Laos, the RTG has passed seven cabinet resolutions between 1992 and 2003 that fluctuate widely in their scope and leniency.

In 1992, a cabinet resolution permitted employment of people from Burma; registration was allowed along all nine border provinces and cost TBH 5,000. Fewer than 1,000 migrants registered in this process (Pack and Caouette, 2002). In 1996, another registration process was initiated this time for workers from Burma, Cambodia and Laos; this cabinet resolution lowered the cost to baht 2,500—1,000 fee, baht 1,000 bond and baht 500 health fee--and expanded registration to include 43 provinces but only for employment in eight industries: of the 303,088 migrants who were issued work permits between September 1996 to May 1997, 88 percent were from Burma (Pack and Caouette, 2002; Muntarbhorn, 2005). Almost 80 percent of the migrants were registered in three sectors: construction, agriculture and fisheries (Muntarbhorn, 2005). Work permits were extended for an additional year in 1997. After the Asian Financial crisis occurred, the policy environment shifted from

regulatory to restrictive impulses; the April 1998 cabinet resolution declared that 300,000 Thais would be hired in lieu of migrants and that registration fees would increase to TBH 2,700. This policy shift did little to generate employment for Thais since few of them wanted the jobs previously held by migrants. In response, another cabinet resolution was passed in May which restricted the number of workers to approximately 150,000, but the quota was unmet. The following year, the Thai policy shifted yet again to allow employment for migrants in sectors in which Thai workers were unavailable or uninterested; individual provinces could determine the sectors that required migrant labor. Concurrent to this policy, the RTG increased deportations of people without legal status. As many as 75,315 migrants were deported between November and December 1999 of whom 70,835 were people from Burma (Pack and Caouette, 2002).

The cabinet resolution of 2001 that made possible the registration process from October to November brought into the government's fold most migrants who worked in agriculture, fishing, and domestic services, but precluded those workers in the service industry (i.e. massage or sex work), vendors, people who were less than eighteen years old or those who had been working less than twelve months. One impediment to this registration scheme was that the registration was valid for only six months and extended another six only when the migrant successfully passed a health check up which were organized by the RTG until March 2002. 62,082 migrants from Burma took the health check up. The results of the health check provided reason to deport a little over five thousand workers back to Burma due to having one of eight

categorized diseases.<sup>20</sup> As a result, many migrants were afraid of the repercussions of the health tests and did not return to collect their test results. The seven diseases on the list were: infectious tuberculosis, severe leprosy, severe elephantitis, severe syphilis, drug addiction, alcoholism and mental illness. HIV/AIDS is not included on this list but policy implementers may not always be well-informed of this fact (Muntarbhorn, 2005). This process of re-registration was organized in 2002. The Ministry of Labor (MoL) released statistics at the close of 2002 that documented that as of October 2001 there were 568,249 registered migrants but by March 2002 there were only 430,074. The drop in numbers can be explained by several reasons, including the fact that the regularization of their legal status was not allowed for people with new jobs, only those who continued with the same employment (Muntarbhorn, 2005). The 2003 cabinet resolution determined that migrants who had previously registered could re-register although people without prior legal status up to that point or who didn't have employment were deemed ineligible. There were also some employment sector restrictions imposed and the registration fee cost TBH 4,450. In this registration round, only a total of 290,000 migrant workers registered (Arnold, 2004).

The most expansive registration policy thus far was implemented two years ago. In July 2004, the RTG mandated that all workers, accompanied by their landlords, register their place of residence. Between July and October 2004, the workers must next have their fingerprints and photograph on record at the district office; at this juncture, they will also be issued an identity card and a registration booklet for no cost. A worker with an identity card cannot be arrested for illegal

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<sup>20</sup> Bangkok Post (July 26, 2002). "Thailand Faces Rising Number of Diseases from Foreign Laborers."

entry according to the registration policy. During the same time frame, the worker must consent to a health check up at a cost of baht 600 (approximately \$15) and submit an application for health insurance at the provincial level public hospital. The health insurance costs baht 1,300 and gives a worker the right to seek health intervention at a public hospital for baht 30. Between August and November, the workers who have completed the previous two steps can then apply for work. They are allowed to seek employment in specific sectors such as fisheries and similar industries; agriculture (farming); domestic work; manufacturing and factories; and construction. Thai employers needing migrant labor were also required to register with the Thai government. Work considered unskilled labor was made available to migrants (Arnold, 2004). Once a migrant finds a job, s/he can then apply for a work permit. The fee, including the work permit, costs: for a three month registration baht 2,450; baht 2,900 for six months; and baht 3,800 for a full year. This registration, unlike previous efforts to regulate labor migration, provided an opportunity for dependents to register as well which, so long as the fees were paid, provided the migrant and his/her family with access to health services at provincial and district hospitals. The RTG also permitted workers to change employers under this new registration scheme. As of July 2004, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) registered 1,280,000 migrant workers from countries bordering Thailand. Over 817,000 of the workers participated in the health insurance scheme. Of the 814,000 people who applied for work permits, 45 percent were women and 600,000 were from Burma (Huguet and Punpuing, 2005). Over 93,000 of the total registered were under the age of 15. There was an effort in 2005 to deport pregnant female migrants from Thailand

but an outcry forced the government to change their position (Muntarbhorn, 2005). The Ministry of Labor announced in 2005 “that the demand for workers outstripped the supply available, thus opening the door to more places for migrant workers from neighboring countries—at least in theory” (Muntarbhorn, 2005: 7).

The numerous cabinet resolutions reveal similar policy barriers from the perspective of the migrant community searching for employment, seeking access to healthcare or enrolling their children in schools. Many migrants did not or could not register because there was often inadequate information-sharing about the multiple steps involved in the registration process; insecurity and incapacity stemming from yearly policy shifts in migration management; few translators or translated materials available to facilitate the registration process; fees are prohibitive, especially so for those with dependents; many migrants were unable to travel to the official sites for registration (Huguet and Punpuing, 2005; Pack and Caouette, 2002.) Many migrants also felt fearful about the consequences of registering with the Royal Thai government (Young and Pyne, 2006). Registration also forced the workers to additionally rely upon their employers both to participate in the registration process and to maintain their legal status because, despite registration, many employers took possession of the workers’ registration cards thereby leaving them just as vulnerable to extortion as if they were undocumented (Pack and Caouette, 2002). The RTG also fails to clearly explicate to migrant workers and their dependents their rights and responsibilities under Thai law (Huguet and Punpuing, 2005).

In addition to institutional obstacles and policy implementation flaws, the migrant workers’ choice not to register may not be an illogical calculus given the

limited benefits and high costs. The numbers of migrants registering have dropped significantly each year, with the highest number registered in 2004.

Migrants are registered through a single employer and are not permitted to change employers unless they are re-registered with a new employer, paying another full registration fee. In addition, registration only takes place twice a year, leaving workers 'illegal' through much of the year. Generally employers pay for the permit and deduct workers' wages in monthly installments. In most cases, small businesses and farms cannot afford to pay these permit fees, or simply do not want to pay, so workers are left irregular, meaning both employee and employer are potentially subject to harassment and extortion by the police. Those who pay for the permit in many cases 'control' the workers for fear of losing them before the fee is repaid. As the majority of employers hold the original permit, many workers are often not able to access health care, are subject to deportation as the photocopy given to them is not recognized by police and immigration, and are subsequently subject to extortion and harassment by these officials. In sum, the cost of registration outweighs the benefits as registered workers wages are generally the same as unregistered workers and benefits of a permit are few. Thus, in real terms for the workers, the difference between being registered and unregistered is often narrow, with a slightly greater sense of security with a work permit being a primary difference (Arnold, 2004: 9).

The RTG convened the International Symposium on Migration in 1999 with representation from regional governments including Australia and New Zealand which adopted what has come to be known as the Bangkok Declaration on Irregular Migration. The Bangkok Declaration promotes stronger communication between regional countries and for these countries to implement laws that criminalize smuggling and trafficking of people for exploitative and cheap labor. It also asks for analyses that encompass social, security, economic, and political causes of “irregular” migration and the ensuing impact on home, transit and destination countries. Irregular migration speaks to the disparities that exist between the status of the migrant and the migration laws of the various sending, transit and destination countries. So-called irregular migration includes crossing national borders without official permission, staying past the assigned time frame of a visa, continued residence in a country despite being denied asylum status, working without permission, or to be without documents. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), irregular migration is defined as movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries. There is no clear or universally accepted definition of irregular migration. From the perspective of destination countries, it is illegal entry, stay or work in a country, meaning that the migrant does not have the necessary authorization or documents required under immigration regulations to enter, reside or work in a given country. From the perspective of the sending country, the irregularity is seen in cases in which a person crosses an international

boundary without a valid passport or travel document or does not fulfill the administrative requirements for leaving the country. There is, however, a tendency to restrict the use of the term “illegal migration” to cases of smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons (Huguet and Punpuing, 2005: 51).

These definitional boundaries belie the narrow differences between “regular” or legal and “irregular” migration given that an individual, over the course of a lengthy migration progression or a single passage, a person can often fluctuate between legal to illegal status. “It is believed that the total in these categories [of people living in irregular migration status in Thailand] could equal hundreds of thousands” (Huguet and Punpuing, 2005: xiv).

### *International Conventions*

There are international conventions that have been adopted by the International Labor Organization (ILO) which collectively comprise a binding framework for member states to implement and enforce at the national level: Freedom of Association (1948 ILO Convention No.87); Right to Collective Bargaining (1949 ILO Convention No. 98); Freedom from Discrimination (1958 ILO Convention No.111); Abolition of Forced Labor (1957 ILO convention No. 105); Minimum Age of Employment (1973 ILO Convention No.138); Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (1999 ILO Convention No.182). Most significantly, in 1998 the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-Up “highlights the rights which must enable people to leverage the application of international labour standards and reap a fair



share of the economic growth in a globalizing economy...[this preamble] calls for special attention for migrant workers, because globalization is likely to generate migration flows for employment—and migrant workers are a vulnerable group, often the last to benefit from the economic growth” (Muntarbhorn, 2005: 20). Even if Thailand is not a party to these conventions, freedom to association, collective bargaining and freedom from discrimination have become customary rules that apply to all countries (Muntarbhorn, 2005). Unfortunately, according to Thai law, only Thai nationals can set up trade unions.

These numerous international conventions and standards developed and articulated by International Labor Organization (ILO) extend protection to workers regardless of their legal and registration status in their destination site and country of origin. Many of these standards provide broader protection to legal and registered workers but the fundamental emphasis is on non-discrimination. The 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families is the most comprehensive agreement that details protection for migrant workers and applied to any people who have crossed national borders and who conducts paid activity in a state of which they are not a member. This convention articulates the most comprehensive legal construct for migrant workers and their dependents, although it does not apply to people who are involved in internal migration, an equally considerable global phenomenon. Thailand has not signed some of the international treaties but does in fact have national laws that resonate with International Labor conventions and human rights. The Labor Protection Act of 1998 and the Thai criminal and civil codes extend to all people,

even unregistered migrant workers (Muntarbhorn, 2005). These policies do not materialize, however, as concrete practices in implementation. There are some Thai laws that manifestly distinguish between Thais and non-Thais that have direct implications for migrant workers. The laws on freedom of association and collective bargaining prove to be significant hurdles for workers to argue for the recognition of their rights (Muntarbhorn, 2005). The Immigration Act of 1979 stipulates deportation for people entering Thailand illegally “but it also confers discretion on the relevant ministry to exempt them from the strictures of the law and to stay temporarily in Thailand. This is coupled with the Working of Aliens Act of 1978 which sets out procedures for allowing even those who enter illegally to work in Thailand in various instances” (Muntarbhorn, 2005: v).

The most recent policy development stemming from the Bangkok Declaration has been to establish and implement a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Thailand and each of the three sending countries that would bind each country to assisting with the process of assuring identity and citizenship to better regulate migration flows. Migration in this context is largely discussed in the context of the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) which includes countries along the Mekong River: Thailand, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Southwestern China, in particular the Yunnan province. Although Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Burma have not ratified the ILO convention 9-- the Migration for Employment convention (Arnold, 2004)--the MOU is to function as a bilateral mechanism and intended to organize and regulate the migration of workers from their start to destination point. The MOU will require individual information, such as name and

address, to be sent to their stated home country. The home country must then initiate a process in which the individual's citizenship is confirmed and, if confirmed, a passport or travel document will then be issued.

One concern raised about this process is that it may require several years to implement the MOU. The registration process and fostering of regional cooperation is undeniably a necessary component of mitigating risks and vulnerabilities in the migration process. Nonetheless, unless the MOUs and registration processes are rooted in the promotion and protection of worker rights and well-being, labor migration will be difficult to regulate. Of even more concern is the citizen confirmation process that is core to the MOUs. The success of the MOU requires transparent enforcement and governmental oversight, however, which may prove infeasible or difficult with dictatorial or corrupt governments. This issue can have severe implications for migrant workers whose personal data are recorded on official ledgers; there are scant ways, however, of ensuring that the personal data will not be used against them in the future. Pressing questions include: will the information be used to increase the surveillance of people already living in a politically repressive country like Burma? Used for extorting families remaining in Burma who receive remittances? If some of the migrants have politically active backgrounds, will this process institutionalize a process by which citizenship can be systematically denied? Of the three regional bilateral MOUs, the one between Thailand and Burma would be the most difficult to implement and enforce (Muntarbhorn, 2005). If people's citizenship can not be confirmed for whatever reasons, will people be suddenly rendered stateless? And what about the children of migrant parents who are born in

Thailand for whom birth registration and citizenship issues are not guaranteed? Migrant labor can not simply be treated as a “cheap labor” or regarded as threats to Thai workforce; rather, they must be a core element of the host government’s commitment to include and represent them to the fullest extent of national laws and international mandates protecting and promoting worker rights, especially in a globalized world.

If immigrant workers and their inferior legal status really do worsen the bargaining power of workers in general, then the obvious policy is to attempt to incorporate immigrant workers as fully and rapidly as possible in the trade unions and other institutions that compensate for the market weaknesses of labor, and to fight for full immigrant access to all the rights that national workers possess (Sutcliffe, 1998: 334).

It is the challenge and responsibility of organizations traditionally tasked with national worker rights, such as unions, to bridge the points at which migrant and national workers share similar constraints and objectives. It is also necessary to advocate for worker rights beyond the cartography of national laws when in fact a globalized trek is occurring in which Thai workers seek employment in South Korea and other, richer countries while Burmese, Laotian and Cambodian workers are daily crossing into Thailand. “Since the early 1970s, Thai people have migrated abroad due to the uneven development that has widened the gap between rich and poor” (Asian Migrant Centre, 2002: 3). While the MOU is an important recognition of the necessity to create regional and bilateral coordination on migration and to mitigate the

attendant risks, it fails to see policy from the perspective of the migrant. The MOU is bound to become another clampdown mechanism around which the worker will choose to navigate, sometimes creating additional vulnerabilities in the process. Until Thai authorities fundamentally address the “five C’s--corruption, collusion, cronyism, clientelism and crime”-- regional treaties will be difficult to meaningfully realize (Muntarbhorn, 2005: 30).

### *Education Policies in Thailand*

Migration and its attendant societal shifts force policymakers to seek redress for these vulnerabilities and reconsider the traditional pipelines of social service provision. One of the initial challenges is to stretch policies defined within the frames of national boundaries to include people who often without protection of the state. Schools and educational institutes, for example, often refuse to accept stateless children for enrolment and, even if enrolment is permitted, do not issue certificates or transcripts for documentation purposes. Undocumented children lack state-sanctioned evidence of nationality, date of birth, residency and even proof of relationship with parents. In Thailand, these children are born to parents who are migrants or who belong to hill tribe or ethnic minority groups for whom Thai nationality status has often been unrecognized. There are Thai national laws that stipulate educational rights to all children, however, and can form the policy platform from which the government can begin to address the vulnerabilities of children born to migrants. Article 43 of the 1997 Thai Constitution and article 10 of the National Education Act of 1999 clearly stipulate that all persons have a right to a minimum of twelve years education provided by the government equally and without cost. The

Compulsory Education Act of 2002, article 15, even states that people who cause impediment to children's school enrolment shall be fined baht 10,000. The Royal Thai Government (RTG) has worked to make the policies more explicit for stateless children with the passage of Cabinet Resolution on July 5, 2005:

Undocumented children and children of non-Thai nationals have the right to schooling without restriction on levels of education and in all areas of education. Schools will accept and register all children. After graduation, schools or educational institutes must issue educational documents to all children whether or not they have legal documents or Thai nationality. Moreover, all children are entitled to continue their education at all levels and in all types of education

(Unofficial translation of policy).

The Ministry of Education's regulations in 2006 that outline the documents necessary for student enrolment make clear that undocumented children and children of non-Thai nationals have the right to schooling from kindergarten to university. For enrolment, students may provide birth certificate, house registration, an identity card, any documents issued by the government, or, if none of the abovementioned are available, an interview with the child and/or relatives and the completion of the Personal History form will suffice.

It is unfortunately true that policy does not necessarily dictate good practice. While Thai policies may stipulate that children of registered migrants have the right to attend Thai public schools, "it is thought only a very small percentage of them are actually receiving any formal or informal education. Many of the older children are

believed to be working without permission and often in exploitative situations” (Huguet and Punpuing, 2005: xiii-xiii). There are resource constraints and negative attitudes about migrants or “non-Thais” among teachers and school administrators which cause significant obstacles to school enrolment. Many of the migrant or hill tribe children also speak a different mother tongue and encounter linguistic and culture dislocation at the schools. The schools are often located at great distance from the students’ homes. Hidden costs of schooling need also be addressed, in particular for children from economically marginalized and poor backgrounds; uniforms, lunch fees, transportation, school supplies and opportunity costs in terms of family income or contributing to family needs need to be weighed and taken seriously as well. The policy discussion at the governmental level on quality and continued school attendance of this vulnerable student population is stillborn at this juncture, but require immediate start given that these issues profoundly impact one another. As will be evident from the research findings in Mae Sot, the migrant community schools of Mae Sot provide solutions, even if only partial, that address some of these challenges.

## **Chapter Four: Research Design and Methodology**

This research on migrant community schools in Mae Sot is a case study drawing on ethnographic techniques with an emergent research design drawing on the context and exploration of shifting local circumstances (Creswell, 1998). According to Marshall and Rossman (1999: 61), “studies focusing on society and culture, whether a group, a program, or an organization, typically espouse some form of case study as an overall strategy.” This research grapples with the “complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life” and “takes qualitative researchers into natural settings rather than laboratories” (Marshall and Rossman, 1999: 2); this complexity demanded that the research design accommodates an “eclectic case study” (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994) which is less a methodological label than an active strategy for how I conducted the research. According to Schram, (2003: 66), the eclecticism speaks to treating the “case study as an identifiable method” with multiple approaches and stands in direct opposition to treating the case study as an “end product or format for reporting qualitative work” (Wolcott, 2001; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994).

I utilized several empirical tools: historical narration; interview; published and unpublished texts, observation protocols, participant observation and key participants’ experiences and reflections. There is greater detail about data collection tools in a later section. These tools capture the details of a discrete “social or human problem” (Creswell, 1998: 15), provide rich description (Merriam, 1998) and tease out the complexities of the situation being studied. Field observation was a critical component of building this case study (Stake, 1995). Merriam (1998: 29) describes



qualitative case studies as “particularistic [which] means that case studies focus on a particular situation, program or phenomenon; the case itself becomes important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent. A case study is “heuristic... [because it] illuminates the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study.” This research design enabled balance in the field of investigating “the schools in the community” and “the community” itself to unfold as I conducted interviews and proceeded in an inductive, exploratory fashion.

I have included the interview questions as appendices. The questions were translated into Burmese and guided my conversations rather than structured them. The interview questions were organized separately for each category of participant: the teacher and the school heads; representatives from the community-based organizations; and the parents. Some questions, in particular about personal backgrounds, were asked of all participants. The interviews were conducted in semi-structured format and were fluid in nature. The interviews were often conducted in different places and times with each person. As a result, the depth and tone of the conversation with each person also changed over time which influenced the types of questions or issues I raised. Similarly, some of the questions or thematic issues may not be raised at all if they are not germane to the particular interview setting. I also willingly followed the different tracks of thought and topics as initiated by the participants in the various discussions.

### Site Selection

There were several compelling reasons for selecting Mae Sot as the research site. Mae Sot’s geographical position facilitates both legal and illegal passage from

Burma to Thailand with population estimates ranging from 50,000 to 100,000 Burmese migrants living in Mae Sot (Federation Trade Unions of Burma, 2003). Another compelling factor is that Mae Sot has been targeted as a special economic zone with specific incentives for industries, thereby directly placing the discussion of migration within the frames of globalization.

While the abuse and exploitation of migrants is rampant and unchecked in most places in Thailand, the two aforementioned factors—geographical access, population size—have succeeded in garnering the attention and involvement of local NGOs and Thai politicians. Local NGOs, such as Migrant Assistance Program (MAP) and Federation Trade Union of Burma (FTUB), and community-based organizations such as Social Action for Women (SAW) are rooted in and have long-term experience working with the migrant community in Mae Sot. A significant chasm exists between organizations, however, working on the different aspects of migration: there are those, for example, who have traditionally treated migration from the perspective of labor rights; others regard it as an immigration and border security issue; and still others largely see it as population needing basic social service provision and part of the humanitarian response. More recently, Burmese migrant workers garnered the attention of multilateral and bilateral organizations as evidence of unequal aid distribution in the six Tsunami-affected provinces of southern Thailand thereby raising the profile of migrants in the Royal Thai Government's policy discourse as both a recipient and sending country. Mae Sot, more than any other place in Thailand, is a Petri dish growing the effects of employment in an unequal global economy, of displacement from political and civil strife, of activities

undertaken by local non-governmental and community-based organizations providing essential social services.

Over the past two years I have spent considerable time developing relationships with local leaders and teachers in the migrant schools prior to the start of my doctoral fieldwork. I have variously been involved in fundraising and providing technical assistance to many of the community-based organizations. I have also closely collaborated with many of the social change leaders in the community as part of my counter-trafficking work in the past. For my fieldwork, I returned to two specific schools with the linking thread being that they were each supported by a community-based or local non-governmental organization and, unlike some schools that had not being able to keep themselves open, these three had managed to sustain themselves. The SAW school and the Parami School permitted me to visit and spend time among the teachers, the community leaders, the school administrators and students. In addition, I spent time in at least three other schools to provide the research with comparative insight.

I collected field data in Mae Sot, Thailand during the summer of 2005, although I had visited and spent time in the migrant community schools as early as December 2003 as mentioned above. I also had unencumbered access due to my prior field experiences working with the migrant and political exile communities in Mae Sot and in leading a rapid assessment of the impact of the Tsunami on migrant workers in the six affected provinces in southern Thailand. In 2004, I conducted field research in Thailand for the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children to assess the vulnerability of Burmese refugee women and children to trafficking;

considerable effort was made to collect and analyze data about labor exploitation as well as to integrate this aspect of trafficking into the policy discussion and recommendations (Young and Pyne, 2006). I have also worked as a teacher several years ago for Burmese refugees in Thailand. I am fluent in Burmese and proficient in Thai language. I enumerate these experiences to make clear that I have a strong interest in sustaining my relationships with the community and am committed to meeting the ethnical considerations and confidentiality of the participants.

### Sample Selection

My sampling decisions were guided by several principles. First, I am building on insights and connections from previous field research working with key informants who know “information-rich” participants (Miles and Huberman, 1994:28). I conducted a purposeful sample by first contacting key informants with whom I have worked before. They know very well the current local context in Mae Sot, the Burmese migrant situation in Thailand, and many have themselves crossed the Thai border under similar circumstances. Second, my sample size is relatively small compared to quantitative studies because “depth of information” (Mertens, 1998: 264) was primarily sought.

There are two types of participants with whom I spoke and interviewed. The first group met two criteria: (i) they have migrated from Burma to Thailand and have experienced social dislocation at various phases of the processes of re-settlement or integration in Thailand; (ii) they are involved with the schools, either as community leaders actively engaged with the establishment and maintenance of the schools, parents of children enrolled and attending classes, or teachers working at the school.

All participants have “experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell, 1998:118) of migration and resettlement despite the different roles they play in the community. The second group is comprised of participants who work in local NGOs and who have worked with the migrant community for an extended period of time. This second group of participants is knowledgeable about the broader social and economic circumstances of the migrants. Some of the participants who work for the local NGOs are from Burma and had fled Burma. It was necessary, however, given the shifting conditions of the local situation, to build flexibility into my sampling decisions. This is an opportunistic type of sampling since it permits me to pursue unexpected leads with key informants (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

### Research Tools

I utilized several empirical tools: historical narration; interview; published and unpublished texts, observation protocols, participant observation and key participants’ experiences and reflections. A “study focusing on individual lived experience typically relies on an in-depth interview strategy although this may be supplemented with...other forms of data; the primary strategy is to capture the deep meaning of experience in their own words” (Marshall and Rossman, 1999: 61). I have had opportunity to spend time with many parents, students, community leaders, teachers and staff of community-based organizations involved with the school in the two years prior to and during my field work. These numerous informal but engaged conversations greatly deepened my understanding of the situation in Mae Sot and enabled me to notice changes in practice and opinion over time. I spent the most time during my field work speaking with teachers and community-based organizations’

staff and community leaders. I engaged the children's trust and developed a "normal" pattern of presence at the schools by quietly participating in classroom observation, eating lunch with them, and to simply be with them during play. I wrote extensively in field journals about these discussions or observations either while they were occurring or soon after the conversation concluded. I formally conducted and recorded semi-structured interviews with four categories of participants:

- Two parents with children enrolled in the two community schools of primary research focus;
- Twelve teachers working in four community schools in Mae Sot, of which nine work in the two community schools of primary research focus;
- One teacher working in Burma who has recently crossed the border but is planning to return to Burma;
- Five representatives from community-based organizations who have worked with the Burmese migrant community for an extended period and are variously involved with the two primary community schools.

Individual interviews averaged approximately two hours of recorded discussions. I did spend considerable time simply being present on a daily basis at the schools prior to and after the interviews. I spoke with several parents over the course of my time in Mae Sot but was unable to record them. I heavily relied on field notes. I structured the order of the interviews to begin with the community leaders and teachers prior to the recorded interviews with the parents. Being present at the school and speaking first with community leaders and teachers improved trust and access with the parents to talk to me; it was helpful for parents to become familiar

with and trust my presence at the school and in the community. My work with the community leaders and teachers also afforded them opportunity to watch the research process unfold and provided opportunities for parents to ask questions about my research in specific ways that enabled me to better address their concerns. I interviewed representatives from local NGOs throughout my time in Thailand; interviews were organized around their available time and schedule.

All the semi-structured interviews were audio taped and each interview began with the participants giving oral consent. I reviewed the recorded interviews daily in order to conduct member checks throughout data collection process. The dynamics of a semi-structured interview process in which conversational tangents can be provocative and meaningful data required that I on occasion organized subsequent interviews to clarify issues and deepen understanding of the themes identified as central to the study.

I reviewed and analyzed three different types of textual sources: records, documents and publications. Lincoln and Guba (1985) make a distinction between documents and records. Records are for official use, such as driving licenses or marriage certificates, while documents are prepared for personal use, such as letters and field notes. I reviewed records from the school that outline school budget, student enrollment and attendance as well as cumulative test scores of the students. The records help “trace [the organization’s] history and current status” (Mertens, 1998: 324). Documents that were collected and analyzed include highly descriptive field notes and memos that created context and provided crucial details to the interviews. I had the opportunity to peruse writings and pictures drawn by children at

the school and spend time with them in classrooms and during play at recess. These documents, as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), most uniquely spoke to the school's level of resources, the pedagogical leanings of the teachers and, of course, revealed learning from the perspective of children. Publications from print media and reports from the Thai government, NGOs and INGOs are the third source of secondary data.

My field notes and memos were drawn from my close observation of activities and activities in the homes or school of the participants. My observational role was largely as a "peripheral-member-researcher" (Adler and Adler, 1994), which construes the researcher as someone who observes and interacts closely enough with participants to establish an insider's perspective but without direct participation in the activities of the core group. I kept in mind some of the recommendations made by Patton (1990), which I paraphrase below:

- Describe the physical environment in sufficient detail to permit the reader to visualize the setting;
- Observe the ways people organize themselves into groups or subgroups. Consider patterns, frequency or changes in interaction patterns. Of particular importance to this research topic: notice decision-making patterns, in particular of parents and children regarding schooling choices and the underlying reasons for them;
- Note activities and participant behaviors such as how they experience a phenomenon or activity, paying particular attention to how an activity begins, unfolds and ends;



- Gather descriptive information about informal interactions and unplanned activities. The focus is on what people do or say to each other in these spontaneous moments;
- Pay attention to non-verbal communication, including dress, physical spacing, and expressions of affection;
- Observe physical clues;
- Make note of activities or factors that was intended or expected but did not in fact materialize;

I was cognizant of the need to verify the strength of my observations by being on-site at different times of the day and days of the week (Adler and Adler, 1994).

### Data Analysis

An important analytical goal is to “look for a deep and valid description... [and] attempt to understand the social and cultural context of the situation” (Mertens, 1998: 361). Data was systematically and consequentially gathered and findings generated from the process (Creswell, 1998; Stainback and Stainback, 1988). The analysis occurred throughout the data collection process. There are two levels to this inductive, continually unfolding process (Stainback and Stainback, 1988). The first level involved my reflecting on common themes, impressions and relationships while collecting data in the field. The second level unfolded when I organized the many kinds of data that I had collected and looked for emergent themes and patterns, paying particular attention to differences, gaps and weaknesses. During this second level of analysis, I initially reviewed all data then divided them into “smaller, more

meaningful units” which were then rebuilt to reveal a descriptive narrative (Creswell, 1998; Mertens, 1998: 350).

I approached the data analysis process using what Stake (1995) describes as “categorical aggregation” in which the “researcher seeks a collection of instances from the data, hoping that issue-relevant meanings will emerge” (Creswell, 1998: 154). A significant component of data analysis required reducing information, disassembling and reassembling data and managing the emerging themes in order to write my dissertation (Creswell, 1998; Wolcott, 1994). Much of this process, while in the field and while doing the analysis, was intuitive, interpretive and iterative. Interpretation is the process of making meaning from the data and of recognizing the “lessons learned” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The data analysis stopped when no new revelations or findings materialize from continued analysis (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

### Validity

The research data were reviewed by two procedural concepts, member checking and triangulation. A discussion of the standards or criteria that guided these processes is discussed below. Member checking is understood as requiring the researcher to ask participants to review written drafts of their spoken interviews (Stake, 1995). This is not always appropriate or easily accomplished for a research project such as this one. This consideration in particular applies to all participants but in particular to the parents of the school children due to their varying levels of literacy and familiarity with the research process. As well, the transient nature of migrant communities required extra thought and planning as this had potential implications

for contacting the participants after the interview. I was acutely cognizant of the difficulties in providing participants with a meaningful opportunity to respond or inquire about the transcription after I have left Mae Sot. I decided, therefore, to build in time in the field for member checks; I included time and opportunity to read aloud the transcribed interview to some of the participants. The process of reading and discussing the transcript proved to be another fruitful opportunity to engage with the participants, and itself became a gesture of trust and continued dialogue and presence in the community. It also addressed my concern that the research procedure I was introducing to the participants and their communities not be an alienating or disempowering experience.

The secondary procedure for checking validity was triangulation; triangulation of research findings is a protocol that traditionally requires the researcher to look for a convergence of information (Stake, 1995) but is as well a process of corroboration (Creswell, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994). The information that had been gathered from diverse sources should reveal a “consistency of evidence” (Mertens, 1998: 183). However, as this research is framed by an interpretive/constructivist paradigm which assumes “there are multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge” (Mertens, 1998: 11), inconsistencies proved to be revealing and fruitful. Yin (1994), for instance, encourages the researcher to examine both the convergence and non-convergence of data; in other words, Yin encourages the active investigation of contradictory or different explanations and findings. Moreover, Guba and Lincoln (1989) critique the emphasis on consistency of evidence in triangulation protocols and argue that triangulation may best be used for so called “factual data.” Bearing

these approaches in mind, I triangulated data by gathering information from multiple sources and actively tried to pursue data threads that were both corroborative and seemingly contradictory based on my assumption that the most compelling objective of a research case is not necessarily consistency (Lather, 1986).

Given the interpretive/constructivist paradigm that lends shape to my research endeavor, the process of establishing validity requires further explanation. I replaced in effect the objectivity of research findings with confirmability (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Confirmability in research means the logic of interpreting the data is made explicit (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). I conducted a confirmability audit, a process that essentially makes visible the “chain of evidence” (Yin, 1994) so that the observations, interpretations and decisions that inform my final analysis are clear and available for scrutiny. The process of making my thought processes transparent speaks to a crucial characteristic of qualitative research that refuses the disguise of universal truth. This refusal to provide a singular truth reveals “the complexities of human experience” (Lather, 1986: 63). In recognizing that all research is inherently ideological (Lather, 1986), it is imperative that guidelines are clearly articulated and followed to “protect our research and theory construction from our enthusiasms” (Lather, 1986: 67). I acknowledge that the gaps in my analysis or conclusions are, on a personal level, part of an extended process in which I am learning as a researcher beyond the scope of this research project and, on a broader level, will hopefully encourage other scholars to pursue additional research that could be of service to the migrants.

I committed to full engagement with the lived experiences and daily lives of the participants in the schools and built into the daily rigor of the data collection a

“systematized reflexivity” that revealed how my preconceived notions may or may not be altered by the “logic of the data” (Lather, 1986: 67). In addition to sustained engagement with the community, systematized reflexivity required writing my initial and ongoing impressions, detailed descriptions of observations as well as acknowledging gaps in the data and seeking alternative explanations or readings of the data (Lather, 1986; Mertens, 1998). Finally, I actively shared my findings and ongoing data analysis with school leaders and members of the Burmese community along the Thailand-Burma border familiar with the situation of Burmese migrant workers to create dialogue, discussion and promote feedback.

My positionality as researcher given my background of working in the Mae Sot and other migrant communities need to be clearly articulated. It is erroneous to claim that my presence in the schools did not make some kind of impact although the degree and nature of that impact is open for discussion. Teachers, school heads and community leaders spent time with me, over meals at the school or during chance encounters in town, often discussing at length their plans to improve the schools, peppering me with questions about resettling in the United States, or discussing politics in Burma. I did not abstain from these discussions, nor did I discourage them as I felt being sewn into the daily fabric of community life was a crucial element of my research. My previous work on migrant and refugee issues established easier rapport and access, as did my parents’ long-standing political and pro-democracy involvement foster trust within the community. Although the complicating factor was keeping my family’s Burma politics outside the frames of the school community’s expectations of my research, my own research is unapologetically framed by a

political perspective of global and individual relationships, a commitment to migrant rights and a genuine curiosity about how education serves people with a bare toehold on survival.

### Ethics

Ethics in research range from sensitivity of the topic under study to how the research was conducted. I did my best and put considerable effort into putting participants at ease to show respect for their contribution of knowledge and time to my research project. I anticipated and mitigated for any risks to the participants by arranging safe, quiet places for the interviews when feasible, and prioritized the participants' preference for particular times or days to meet. I also remained fairly mobile in the community or simply met at the school as I knew the participants' mobility and visibility, depending on their legal status, sometimes led to arrest or extortion. I provided participants with the option of not being identified during data collection and presentation of the research unless they agree to be identified. All transcriptions of interviews used a pseudonym and all interview materials are available only to me. Most people were willing to be interviewed but unwilling or unable to sign forms of consent and thus, with the aim of protecting the rights of participants, everyone was provided with an opportunity to give oral consent prior to the start of the interview.

### Significance and Limitations

One cautionary note that I was fully aware of prior and during the fieldwork is the potential problem of studying a research site or people with whom I have vested

interest or with whom I have prior relationships (Creswell, 1998: 114). While this provides unique and valuable access, concerns include participants holding back information or skewing information toward what they believe I, as a researcher, may want to hear. People may also offer information that is risky for an insider (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). Although I considered these concerns seriously, I disagree with the suggestion that this may warrant reconsideration of research site and people (Creswell, 1998). In working with participants from a vulnerable population, trust and familiarity are invaluable currency that takes time to acquire and pivotal for research that, in seeking to deepen understanding of Burmese migrants, will not add additional risk to the participants or their community. Furthermore, the nuances of politics and ethnic identity in armed warfare are not information one gleans from classrooms or books but from being engaged in the Burmese community in multiple ways. Having said that, I have in the past and will continue to exercise great caution and tread gently in my explorations with the Burmese migrant community. While I am Burmese and exiled, I do not presume to suffer similarly, be equally disadvantaged or confront the risks they do.

There are organizations and policy makers talking about Burmese migrants in Thailand, each from the vantage point of their own programmatic or policy objectives. This research hopes instead to capture the daily lives of the Burmese migrants, in particular of their children's experiences with schooling, including the ways they understand their vulnerabilities and, perhaps most importantly, the ways they exercise agency and collective community action in establishing schools despite living on the social and economic margins of a reluctant host country. This research

will underscore the Burmese migrant communities' strategies and multi-leveled negotiations—with Thai authorities, with each other, with employers, with children—and contribute to discussions about the ways people successfully or unsuccessfully forge community despite warfare, poverty and social dislocation. This research tries to create a textured understanding of one migrant community—a single case study, if you will—but it is implicitly tethered to the broader global environment of education rights and migration policies. This study provides rich description of the social, political, and economic setting from which broader discussions about social justice and globalization may take material form.



## Chapter Five: Migrant Community Schools

This fifth chapter describes the material and social conditions under which the migrant community schools function and operate, including the impetuses which underscore community efforts to establish the schools. First, I provide a brief overview of the history of community schools in Burma.

### Community Schools in Burma

Community schools have been one way of delivering educational services to communities without public education in many developing countries. They can often be amorphous entities, and can be supported and run by a non-governmental organization in parallel with the public school curriculum or it can function as an alternative to the government run system. There are varying degrees of linkages between government and community schools in different countries. Community schools have a long, complicated history in Burma. During the colonial era, they were often organized by missionaries in areas without prior access to schooling, in particular in the ethnic states. Community schools in Burma have differently manifested as monastic education. The Christian missionary schools worked closely with British rule to facilitate training in preparation for work in the colonial administrative structure. In contrast, the Buddhist monastic education school reveals historical links between the religious order of monks (the sangha) and the Burmese monarchial administration. The king appointed the head of the sangha and the monks themselves administered the schools by organizing teachers or teaching themselves.

When the British annexed all of Burma in the late 19th century, the king was dethroned and the Sangha lost state support (Silverstein, 1977).

Outside the urban areas in Burma, it is common nowadays for community schools to be organized and often directly supported and managed by the local populace, in particular in the ethnic states where civil war has raged for three decades or where the government has failed to build schooling infrastructure. They often exist in the most poverty-stricken and least accessible areas of Burma. Many migrants from rural backgrounds have experienced either a lack of access to quality education in Burma or have experienced education as a tool of cultural suppression under Burmese military rule; still others, in particular for ethnic minorities living in conflict-affected areas of Burma, community schooling holds the promise of cultural, linguistic, even political, preservation.

Over the past decade, Burma's military rulers have severely neglected the country's public education system. Schools in some areas have been closed due to lack of funding, and in ethnic nationality regions, the SPDC frequently refuses to build enough schools. Where Burma's dilapidated educational system does function there has been concerted effort to use education as a tool for making non-Burmans feel inferior. The teaching of the cultural history of Burma's ethnic nationalities is treated much the same way. State schools, for example, offer instruction in the historical accomplishments of Burmans, but do not provide any classes in other histories or cultures (Earthrights International, 2002).

Many villages have established their own community schools; they manage and raise funds for the school themselves. Villages along Burma's eastern border

also receive educational support from Burmese community-based organizations (CBOs) working in Thai border towns that organize and implement cross-border educational activities, such as teacher training and provision of basic school supplies. Many of these cross-border organizations essentially operate as para-statal entities from across the border since the Burmese junta provides little schooling support.

Given Burma's five decades-long civil war and ethno-nationalistic politics, education is contested terrain. It not only suffers from but may in fact contribute to conflict. Education reproduces the values, socio-economic inequities and the perspectives of the dominant group in society (Apple, 2004; Freire, 1998; Giroux, 1987). Education also functions as a mechanism for deepening division and hatred. Schools "carry out a particular gender, class, race ideology as expressed through school structures and educational processes" (Carnoy, 1992: 144). Recent conflicts underscore this fact. From 1994 to 1996, the government of Eastern Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) blocked primary education for the Rwandan refugees living in their country (Sinclair, 2002). The gap left by this policy decision enabled people responsible for Rwanda's ethnic genocide to establish primary schools in the refugee camps. These schools taught a version of Rwandan history that provided justifications for killing members of other ethnic groups (Sommers, 2002).

#### *Migrant Community Schools in Mae Sot*

At the time of writing, there are a total of 46 migrant community schools in and around Mae Sot; to be more precise, 34 in Mae Sot district, three in Mae Ra Mat district, and nine in Phob Phra district. There are 42 Thai public schools in Mae Sot district for comparative measure. The Ministry of Education recognizes the migrant

community schools only as “learning centers” and not schools. According to the Mae Sot Labor Department, there are 143,012 registered migrant workers in Mae Sot although as many as 2000,000, including their dependents, are thought to be living and working without legal permission. For comparative measure, this overwhelms data from the most recent population survey of June 2005 that estimates 116,733 Thais living in Mae Sot district.

Prior to delving into a discussion of the individual schools, it is important to note that the teachers are themselves migrant workers. Some of the teachers have at various points, worked in factories and in other low wage sectors not only in Thailand but in Burma. A-Ma, who worked as a middle-school teacher in a rural community in Burma, shared important insights stemming from her experiences prior to migration and now in Mae Sot. Her teacher’s salary in Burma was paid by the local community not the government, a common way that communities tried to compensate for the government’s lack of schooling provision in the ethnic or rural areas. Prior to her employment at the school supported by the Social Action for Women (SAW), a Burmese community-based organization, she worked for ten months at a factory. She told me about her teaching aspirations prior to migrating, “I completed my schooling by distant [correspondence course] in history. I never applied for a [teaching] job [in Burma] because to enter the government service requires paying a lot of money [in bribes]. Most people who can not enter government service end up working in mills and factories. It is with this kind of work that I ended up here.” The teachers, parents, and children are in one aspect located in similar socio-economic locations in the Thailand context, but there are also differences. A teacher, having once been a

factory worker (and may yet again) is also a migrant but within the folds of the Burmese migrant community the role of teacher is accorded much respect and social status despite receiving far less pay than factory work. So as broader strokes of the global and national situations of migrant workers are drawn in the ensuing chapters, it is helpful to bear in mind that community life involves shifting negotiations and social roles in the community may have varying levels of significance.

This chapter is divided into two sections, each one a brief vignette describing an individual school and its environment. Each vignette includes a discussion of key findings from my research at the specific school. Chapter six integrates findings from the Parami and SAW schools into a broader analysis of educational provision among community schools in Mae Sot.

### *SAW School*

SAW School, so called because the school is under the official sponsorship by Social Action for Women (SAW), a community-based organization in Mae Sot which has a scope of activities that include disseminating reproductive health information, promoting women's rights, and running an orphanage for HIV positive toddlers and infants. Many of the children have been abandoned or unable to be cared for by the parents who are themselves HIV positive. Some of the other children at the orphanage have special needs. The costs of running this shelter are extensive for SAW because the caregivers have to be on a 24 hour rotation. SAW school had a previous incarnation as a school founded by a member of the Yaung Chi Oo, a worker rights organization. Yaung Chi Oo was established in 1999 by pro-democracy Burmese university students, many of whom were activists and political leaders in the

1988 uprising. Yaung Chi Oo promotes worker rights for Burmese migrant workers and offers legal assistance and information about employment and registration processes.

When I first visited the school in Mae Sot on December 2003, it was located in the back of one of two large empty lots that sat diagonally to one another. A long but narrow asphalted road, across from a Chinese private school on the main road, dead-ends into these lots. The front lot comprised only of temporary housing; I encountered approximately 20 bamboo and raffia huts, some with sheet tin roofs but most with improvised materials for walls and roof. The social disjuncture occurs at the realization that just behind these 20 homes is a large concrete wall on the other side of which is a middle-class Thai neighborhood. These two lots were clearly earmarked for sale and construction and created a palpably resigned feeling of transience to the atmosphere and somewhat concerned attitudes of the Burmese migrants residing on the two lots. They expressed concern about police raids, in particular if the lot managed to be sold for construction. Their fears were not unfounded; the police had appeared several months before and had razed and set fire to their homes in the front lot. There was no running water or electricity available in the homes, but there was a well in the back lot that provided for people's water needs.

The school, a rectangular one room structure, was located on the second lot, behind a narrow row of tin-roofed shacks also inhabited by Burmese migrants and beside three provisional outhouses that served the entire community. These homes were built in sturdier fashion; there were many more men present here than in the front lot which was, at the time of my visit, largely populated by sarong-clad women,

very young infants and children under ten years old, a function of the time of my visit; some of the women informed me that their husbands were at work and would not be back until late. There were approximately 25 children total in both lots. The school had a concrete floor with rudimentary walls made of bamboo on three sides and, because the walls were only about three feet tall, it let in a strong breeze and a great deal of sunlight; the doorway was marked by a simple gap in the bamboo-woven walls. A large chalkboard dominated the front of the room and in the corner was a small stack of rolled up mats and approximately four narrow and low benches which sufficed as tables for the students. The smell of fetid latrines, serving all the residents on the lot, was unavoidable and could, on occasion, be quite overwhelming. Ko Aung, the school head, spoke of plans to build the school's infrastructure, of providing a permanent solution for the children who were absolutely without the means to attend Thai public institutions. Ko Aung had been a political activist who had fled Burma during the 1988 democracy movement and had since lived in Mae Sot. The school had approximately 20 students at the time. The children were from different ethnic backgrounds, but most were Karen and Burman, and had performed traditional dances and songs for their parents the week prior. Ko Aung spoke at length with me about how he believes schooling feeds into the implementation of a future democratic Burma built on the pillars of pride in unique ethno-cultural heritage that coexists with broader national unity. There were not any textbooks or notebooks visible.

When I returned to the same school two years later in 2005 to conduct my fieldwork it was vastly different in structure and organization. Social Action for

Women (SAW), a community-based organization, had agreed to take responsibility for the school from Yaung Chi Oo. The school now offers nursery to sixth standard classes for its 175 enrolled students from Monday through Friday beginning at nine a.m. and ending at three-thirty p.m. The school head I had met two years previously was no longer directly involved with the school. He had in fact moved to one of the refugee camps in Tak province to await third country resettlement as he had been granted “person of concern” status by the Thai authorities several years past.<sup>21</sup> The school still sat at the end of the same narrow road but was now housed in a simple, wooden house. The two lots that had previously housed many migrant homes and the original school were now empty and overrun with tall grass and deep puddles of stagnant water.

The largest proportion of the students is in primary school with 135 total enrolled. Only fourteen teachers teach at the school. When inquiring about classroom management and school subjects, the school head informs me, “Some subjects get more time. Each subject has its own schedule/time. The curriculum committee determines this. The older standards, for instance, have more time set aside for math. History is a little less, perhaps three times a week only while math is taught seven times a week and Burmese language five times. We avoid [homework] as much as we can. They are unable to read or study much at home. We teach all we can at school and prefer to give a little bit on Saturday and Sunday.” On average 150 students show up for class. There are approximately 14 to 17 students who are only

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<sup>21</sup> All “persons of concern” (POCs) who are to be resettled to a third country must reside in the refugee camp prior to exiting Thailand. The resettlement process can take a fair amount of time and often requires extended stay in a refugee camp, a contentious issue for many POCs who wish to continue their political activities, have greater freedom of movement or earn an income.



able to attend school two to three days a week most of them in the younger age group. Reviewing the school attendance log books on a given day, however, I found the highest number of absentees in the nursery with 11 absent and 32 in class.

The school sits more solidly than its previous incarnation and rather unobtrusively behind a corrugated iron fence. The SAW schoolhouse has raised wooden stilts being in a traditional Thai style. In the cool, fairly dank space created beneath the raised stilts, the children find relief from the heat; it is here that SAW organized five classrooms and an outdoor kitchen. The mosquitoes have found respite here as well and endlessly pester anyone who dares to stay still if only for a few minutes. In one or two of the darker corners of this space, the ventilation is poor and the air smells moldy. The SAW schoolhouse had a small yard that was either dusty patches of grass or muddy terrain depending on the season. During my extended work at the school, it was not uncommon for the school to be forced shut from flooding during the rainy season. Even if the schoolyard remained unaffected by rising waters, flooding has serious implications for the students, many of whom live quite far from the school. Just in the past year alone, seven children in Mae Sot had drowned by falling into drains left open to combat the rising waters.

Up a small flight of stairs and through the front door of the house is located several small sleeping rooms, most of which were set aside for a few live-in teachers and approximately 25 students who board at the school; some of the children's parents are unable to live with them due to their employment circumstances. Many of the children have been orphaned and are therefore under the care of the school and SAW. One woman who lives there has been tasked with caring for the children. The

approximate cost of caring for the boarders runs approximately baht 1,500 per student each month (approximately USD 39) for all costs related to schooling and boarding. The rooms are well-organized if simply furnished, bright and with good ventilation. A room each has been set aside for the girls and for the boys. There is a small television, and a DVD/CD player in the corner; close by a handwritten sign reads that the television can only be watched from eight to nine in the morning, 12 noon to three in the afternoon or seven to nine-thirty in the evening. A sketch of Daw Aung Suu Kyi is hangs on the wall. Two additional rooms remain for use by the school administrators.

An awning stretches over the front of the school house to accommodate a classroom of the younger students who sit on linoleum-covered concrete floor at the front of which is a small blackboard propped on a wooden tripod. The pink and blue flowery motif of the linoleum dominates attention in that space. A two by three feet laminated poster of the Burmese alphabet stuck to the outer wall of the house stirs remote competition for garnering similar focus. With the exception of the blue plastic tarp hanging from the opposing, external wall of the house, the two ends of the rectangular classroom remained open and outdoors.

Two concrete bathroom stalls are located at the back of the yard with tap water available. There is a table and four folding chairs ten feet away at which teachers sit in between teaching classes. Above the table are two wooden shelves on which sit a few school supplies: a small stack of notebooks and several boxes of pencils. Across the way is a low-lying table atop of which are scattered several three-tiered tiffin carriers. The school provides some snacks to the children but not lunch

so the children are expected to bring food daily. On most days there are fewer tiffin carriers than children which suggest many of the children are unable to bring lunch from home. Lunch on most days consist of a piece or two of meat, usually bony pieces of chicken, some sour soup with vegetables that has steeped into the rice, but it is largely plain steamed rice that fills the tiffin carriers. On occasion the rice is mixed with a fermented fish paste and little else. At lunchtime the children collect their tiffin carriers and, amidst cacophonous chatter and hollers, they move aside the benches that serve as school desks and organize themselves into social circles of four to six students on the school room floor. Without prompts from the teachers or school heads, the children often share their food with the children who were unable to bring lunch. Some of the older girls in the circle often grouped together the available tiffin carriers and fed the younger set by scooping spoonfuls of food in turn. I noticed a few children who were without lunches behave quite shamefaced and in near tears at the start of recess but the slightly older children mitigate this situation by collecting and feeding them, much as mothers do for their children. It is a common Burmese cultural practice to spoon or hand-feed children as old as ten. Mothers or older siblings often care for the younger ones in the family in this way. Some of the female students similarly fussed after the littler ones, mimicking the behaviors of mothers and aunts in the family. The school prepares lunch for the teachers and the children who board at the school.

Towards the back of the school house is a roofed, rectangular room with concrete floors and, on one side, a concrete wall built only halfway up leaving space available for breeze (and the splatter of rain water during particularly strong

downpours) while the other wall is solid and part of the foundation of the house. The length of the solid wall is sparsely decorated with xeroxed photos of Burmese revolutionary heroes such as of Aung San, who resisted British rule and negotiated Burma's independence and father of Nobel Peace Prize winner Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. There are also color photographs of Daw Aung San Suu and images of students felled by bullets during the 1988 pro-democracy uprising.

Since its inception in 2001 the school has undergone two name changes and a change of location if only a street over. SAW, the community based organization that supports it receives funding from several sources including Burma Borderline Project, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, and International Rescue Committee, among others. Most of the teachers at SAW school have attended the pre-service teacher training provided by World Education. The school was operating with very few funds for awhile; the teachers were only paid a monthly stipend of Thai baht 500 (approximately USD 13) until January 2005 when SAW was able to increase pay to Thai baht 2,000 per month (an estimated USD 52). One teacher, who is awaiting resettlement to a third country and whose husband is living in a refugee camp, informed me that teachers were previously provided with lunch by the school but that this practice was halted. Nowadays, they bring their own food or, as I observed on several occasions, a few of the teachers shared and ate lunches together, often in homes of teachers nearby the school.

The school has school children and teachers who are from many ethnicities and faiths, approximately one third of the students are Muslim.<sup>22</sup> Ko Min, the head of

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<sup>22</sup> The children are Muslims from Burma but not Rohingyas who are natives of Arakan state in Burma. The Burmese government has failed for decades to recognize the Rohingyas as natives of Burma.

SAW school's education committee, informs me that "there is actually an Islamic [faith-based] school near their homes but [the students] do not attend that one. They have also lived closely with many of the teachers at this school, sometimes for three or four years, so they come to this school and are happy here." Revisions have been consciously made to the history and other textbooks that make xenophobic remarks or teach a prejudiced perspective about Burma's ethnic and religious diversity but the curriculum predominantly follows the Burmese national standards with textbooks brought from Burma and photocopied.

The school serves crucial educational and social functions. The school, and by extension, the teachers perform parental roles and intervene with the moral authority accorded to family elders. One school administrator describes how, after his own migration to Thailand and while living among migrant workers, he met many of the children. "In the mornings the parents went to work and the children were left behind. Some children, being left alone, went about as they wished since there were no parents around; this is just children's nature. I saw this everyday and I started to think, if these children continued to live this way—and back then there were no schools in Mae Sot—what are they going to do when they are older? Some children grew up and joined the work their parents did--construction or factory work--they were mingled into this community. I started thinking that if we could build the children a school here, it would be good. We could bring them together, and when parents leave for work, could pick them up, teach them discipline. Also, when their

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They suffer discrimination because of their religion and ethnicity and are consistently denied access to basic social services. In 1991, as many as 250,000 Rohingyas fled to neighboring Bangladesh during a massive crackdown by the Burmese junta. Many of them have since been involuntarily repatriated, a move that has been condemned by many human rights organizations. See Human Rights Watch (1996) [The Rohingya Muslims: Ending a Cycle of Exodus?](#)

parents are not around or go to work, we could guide them, teach them a word or two, to provide basic education, so they can write and read Burmese, and that's how we began this school.”

The school and the teachers assume a protective presence in the children's lives beyond the scope of a Monday through Friday schedule and outside the boundaries of the school yard. According to school head Ko Min, “the school is only closed two months during the summer [months of April and May] but after final exams [and before the start of summer holidays], for those students who didn't do so well, we continue teaching them at school. For the students who can not come to school during the holidays, we go to their homes and teach them. The teachers have no free time during the summer holidays. We also teach additional English and Math at the school [during the summer holidays]. For those students who are going to the other school, to the seventh standard, we review sixth standard math.<sup>23</sup> We also have drawing classes. Even though the school is closed, there is a continued relationship between the students and the school. The children come to play at the school for an hour or so. They come on their own.”

Ko Min's remarks underscore that through the mechanism of educational delivery, the children are also kept safer as a result. Given that the Burmese migrants, many of whom would qualify as refugees under the refugee convention, are outside the scope of state and UNHCR protection, simply to have a safe, supervised area for play is crucial. There are a few other ways that schools provide direct protection interventions. Teaching Thai language has important implications for negotiating with authorities and navigating through Thai society. The school head of SAW

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<sup>23</sup> During the time of my fieldwork, a new secondary school had just been established.

school explained that Thai language instruction was already being adopted at many migrant community schools. He discussed at length that “Many people very much like our Thai language classes. We have three to four classes. The parents don’t speak the language but they hear the students at home reciting/writing the Thai alphabet. The children read the signboards to them while walking along the street; the parents feel very encouraged about this. They can rely on their children for their Thai language, such as reading signs.” Ma Aye, a teacher at SAW school, explains how Thai language is “critical for helping them move around [Thai society.] To understand their language means we know what they are saying and what they are doing. That’s why it is important to teach Thai language in all the schools here. To not understand what they are saying means they can do to us whatever they wish.”

Another way the schools provide protection is in arranging for the students to wear the blue and white uniforms of the Thai school system. The SAW school asked the parents who can afford them to go make or purchase the uniforms. Thai public school uniforms are, however, expensive; they cost baht 120 to 150 each. Uniforms for older children can cost up to baht 300. For the children who do not have the financial means, the school had thus far collected about 70 uniforms in donations, but many more were still needed. The school head at SAW school informed me, “Most people can not afford them. We now have about 70 uniforms, but we need about 100 more. We buy the uniforms; sometimes we get them donated from Thai acquaintances. Most children own only one set of uniform; usually they take the uniform off once they arrive at school, put it back in their bags then put it on again before leaving the school [compound].” For the previous school year, the school was

able to provide each child with one. In discussions with school administrators and teachers, the uniforms proved to be important signals to the Thai community that the migrant community schools are equally legitimate institutions comparable to the Thai schools and must therefore be accorded the same respect. They described the students as blending in with Thai students, of being integrated into the Thai social fabric in such a way that the children were no longer “migrant” or “Burmese” but simply children en route to school. In a border town where harassment and extortion is rife, being literally and figuratively seen as “just a child,” not unlike other Thai children, has extraordinary repercussions. Once perceived as children and not just “illegals,” some of the neighborhood police and local immigration authorities adopted a more sympathetic outlook. They still expected regular bribes from the school but harassed the individual children less. One school head explained that the local police officers are now familiar with the teachers and the students and even regard the bribe as payment for fulfilling their role in maintaining the security of the school in the neighborhood. The Thai cultural orientation to respect teachers and schools contributes to this perspective shift.

The schools also provide another protective function. Ko Min and others shared that the children are often at home without adult supervision due to the parents’ work schedules. This fact also makes it difficult to meet regularly with the parents. In response to these concerns, the teachers visit the students at their homes during the school holidays. They provide additional tutorial help and the visits provide opportunities to check on the children’s well-being. One teacher remarked that “police [sometimes] arrest the parents and the children are left alone. If they are



among people who know the children, they sometimes bring the children here [to the school] when this happens. When they bring the children here, we do check thoroughly and we take responsibility when we can. Also, some of the children here have been abandoned at hospitals and so we've taken responsibility for them. Some were living on the streets, without relatives or parents and quite destitute. Some parents are ill with diseases so we've taken the children for fear they'll get sick too."

In fact, basic literacy and numeracy are fundamentally tethered to protection if we regard them as enabling people to better defend and access human rights. In this regard, the migrant community schools function as resource centers for the entire community. According to Ko Min, SAW school "provides for the children who have to work during the day but who want to study we have a night class. There are about 32 people in the class. The ages of people in the night class range from five to 40 years old. We have one teacher; we use a book from Burma—it is quite good-- that was introduced in 1997 for adult education called The Three Rs. Of the 32 students, five progressed from the Three Rs to the first standard. There were about three adults in that class; ten students were around 17 or 18 years old. The adults had never attended school before. When people asked them to read, they weren't able to read. They didn't even know how to sign their names; they signed with an 'X' for the signature and were increasingly ashamed. So they wanted to learn...they know that without education or literacy, the workers get the lowest paying jobs and the most labor-intensive, 'rough' kinds of work."

Caouette (2001) identified drug production and addiction as serious issues confronting the migrant community, sometimes effecting children only nine or ten

years old. There was evidence of young migrants being given amphetamines by employers in order for them to work longer and harder. Many migrants were also recruited for drug trafficking. A senior staff person at SAW described how “in the past, the children were using amphetamines. Some were told to sell them. Once the school opened these things stopped. The nearby neighborhood understands this. Without schools, all the children would be on the streets. Very many awful things can happen to them. Their character could be very much ruined. It is not a question about whether this could happen if the schools are here or not, these are things that did happen when schools weren’t here. That’s why we opened this school [but] we only have one in three children [in Mae Sot] schools.” When the conversation evolved to a discussion about whether there was much difference in danger between girls or boys, the senior staff person at SAW elaborated that “when it comes to amphetamines, it is mostly boys. Picking up trash also tends to use boys. There’s also the danger of picking up trash with no gloves, no protective gear. This is mostly affecting boys. For girls, the danger is different. They are still underage, only 13 or 14 and the employers take advantage of them.” There are many concerns about sexual violence and exploitation of girls and young women.

During a lengthy conversation with the deputy director of SAW as to what education could meaningfully offer a community gripped by so many pressing needs and vulnerable to so much violence, Ko Thant gently but firmly informs me that, “there are three points to the issue of schooling. First, the children must be educated, literate, so they can contribute back to the welfare of people; second, as we said before, to prevent children being sold, trafficked, have to enter the workforce or to

live as beggars; third, to be undamaged by the current Thai environment or society. It is as we were saying before, children out of school—begging, stealing or selling amphetamines—affects Thais and that has an impact on what Thais think of Burmese. They think lowly of us. Thais are always complaining or debating about us in the newspapers. For us, schooling provides many benefits, some to the future development of our country. And even if only one out of 100 becomes literate there are benefits; if even one student out of a thousand becomes a doctor, there are benefits to that as well.”

### *Parami School*

From the highway look for a Shell Gas Station then, when you see a sloping small road, turn left. This is how one is told to find Parami School, down a slightly sloping road and rather unobtrusively behind a sliding metal gate. Parami School from the front gate looks like a medium sized stand alone house with a brick and cement first floor and a wooden second floor. Parami School was established in 2000 by the Federation Trade Union of Burma (FTUB) who recognized the few schooling options available for children of migrant workers in Mae Sot. The school’s enrolment has recently grown from 60 students to 171. The school now provides nursery to sixth standard classes that relies on the Burmese curriculum. Most of the teachers and students are Karen.

The school is enclosed by a solid concrete fence. The children gather at nine a.m. every morning on the front stoop of the house. They sing a few songs, some in English others in Karen. I visited this school in 2003 and 2004. When I returned to conduct my fieldwork in 2005, I noticed little had changed except the songs were

accompanied now by an acoustic guitar and the school children sang first the Thai King's national anthem. The first floor of the house is largely designated for classrooms while the second floor of the house has been set aside as sleeping quarters for some teachers. The upstairs is a large space free of clutter; along one wall there are tidy individual piles of sleeping blankets, pillows, and mosquito nets. The two individual bedrooms have been set aside for some of the older teachers; most of the teachers sleep on bedding in the large space. The first floor of the house has been separated into individual classrooms and a kitchen. Each classroom has been equipped with a simple whiteboard and a chair for the teacher. The children sit at low bench-like tables with thin straw or plastic mats between themselves and the unvarnished concrete floor. On one wall are several pictures drawn by children with themes of friendship and play; on the wall beside the entrance to the kitchen is attached a large sheet of paper with the names of children organized into teams and tasked with a specific set of duties to be accomplished on different school days. The remaining walls are sparsely decorated.

To the right of the front gate is a raised, circular gazebo with only railing for walls. The fourth standard class, which is a tiny class of five children on most days, is taught in that gazebo. They are unprotected from the spray of rain. There is another, smaller and more rectangular building in the same compound. This building is separated from the school house by a partially covered driveway. This smaller building houses the Mae Sot office of the Federation Trade Union of Burma. The ground floor of this building is sunken in and serves as a kitchen at one end and an office at the other. The office comprises of a few folding tables, three computers, one

printer, and some plastic deck chairs stacked in a column. The office is largely open space. A door leads to the yard and another leads to the kitchen. This kitchen is for FTUB staff who live upstairs; the kitchen is rudimentary and comprised of a small storage unit, some pots and pans on a shelf and a gas tank attached to a freestanding stovetop. Even a slightly tempestuous rainstorm immediately floods the kitchen and the FTUB office.

The school had just completed a separate structure to house the nursery. The nursery, a rectangular concrete structure with half-high walls and a simple sloping roof, is set back a bit behind the FTUB office and on a raised slope of the compound. Two cantankerous dogs, if not barking noisily at street dogs outside the compound, constantly saunter around the compound, often in and out of the FTUB office, the kitchen and back to the school, often settling for naps in front of the fifth standard classroom.

In most ways the children at Parami are not unlike those at SAW school. The parents are migrants from Burma, often working in garment and other manufacturing industries. The school day is organized remarkably similarly; equally similar are the challenges and educational aspirations of the parents. The curriculum, as was the case at SAW school, is a modified Burmese curriculum with the addition of Thai language instruction. Like SAW school, Parami sidesteps problematic references to minority ethnic groups in the textbooks; the modifications reflect the notion of a multi-ethnic Burma without dominance of the Burman culture and language. I was surprised to learn that despite many of the students and teachers being Karen, there was muted interest for Karen language classes; most parents claimed that at the least

it can be taught at home. They quietly expressed some reservation about whether Burman children may want to learn Karen language. Research shows, however, that mother tongue-based curriculum can contribute positively to learning outcomes and even facilitate the learning of additional languages (Malone, 2004). The school does provide, however, cultural activities such as teaching classical Karen dance and songs. As the school principal and teacher explained to me, “Some parts of the Burmese textbooks include remarks about not being able to count on ethnic peoples. We take these out. We teach the appropriate messages and leave out the rest. I think the other schools do this too.”

Parami School was established seven years ago by Federation Trade Unions of Burma (FTUB) who saw a vital need to address basic educational needs for the children of migrant workers in Mae Sot. FTUB was founded with two primary objectives, one being to promote democratic transition in Burma and two to increase awareness of trade unionism and worker rights. In the beginning there were only 20 to 30 students being taught by two or three teachers. One mother of two children at Parami School explained to me as to how she selected the school and what she believed the school best provided, “I heard about the school, they came to tell us there was a school for migrant children. Of course we had to then enroll the children in the school otherwise they will become uneducated. They can not just stay home; the parents are at work and there’s no one to watch them. The teachers can help open their minds and teach them. I pay tuition baht 50 per month, nothing for transportation and baht 20 for supplies at school. In the past years, the school provided lunch but now...they provide lunch two times a week, sometimes it is rice,

other times noodles. On other days, I pack a tiffin lunch for my two children. I want them to reach their potential in life. If they are smart, let them be smart. If they become educated, [then] they don't have to do the rough, tiring work. They don't have to work in the sun, such as on construction sites, like their father has to. They can work in the shade. I would of course permit my children to attend university if someone will help. It is hard to guess what the children's lives will really be like in the future." This sentiment is echoed by many other parents. A teacher at SAW school who worked in a garment factory when she first arrived in Thailand describes the work. "It is incredibly exhausting work. We stand all day. We have to work as much as the employers command. We work all night, all day, it is like this. It disrupts sleep, disrupts eating meals, it is a lot of trouble. With some education, even if they have to work in factories, they don't have to do the rough work. To know a little Thai, to know Burmese well, to be able to read and write means they can do accounting, it is better than coarse, rough work. It is certainly a little easier."<sup>24</sup>

While discussing the cross-linkages between trade unionist community organization and education, U Maung, secretary general of FTUB, expounds, "We have to start educating people. Democracy is not only just changing from the military rulers. We have to change the system. And within the system there has to be free press. People understand a lot about that. Freedom of expression: people understand quite a lot about that. Freedom of activities for political parties: people understand that. But they will not go to other civic institutes, like women's organizations, or youth organizations, or trade unions. They don't see that to be a part of the

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<sup>24</sup> Accounting is used broadly in this context. It includes work such as taking inventory or keeping accounts but it is also a placeholder that suggests work other than menial labor.

democratic system or society. So we try to do as much as we can; we start with having discussions about trade unionism and where it fits into the democratic sphere and how we approach basic democratic rights. We've learned in doing this process that basic education is essential for the people. We built up Hsa Thoo Lei and Parami schools because we saw that children of people who are working on the fringes of the border on both sides were not being educated." Education in this instance is regarded as a means of promoting civic participation with participation being unequivocally assumed to be an essential component of a democratic society. FTUB's explicit pro-democratic stance does not deviate far from this supposition. Participation proves to be a quagmire for organizations that, while aspiring to democratic ends, are unable to move beyond mere representation. U Maung is earnest in speaking about the urgent necessity of addressing the basic educational needs of this "border" generation, but questions remain as to the types of transformative practices, perhaps beyond what these community schools can provide, that may alter the structural inequalities that perpetuate poverty.

There were several children in the school, mostly spread through the first four standards, who had older siblings already working. One student has an older brother, aged 13, who is working in a mechanic shop as an apprentice. He had been a student at Parami School but had left when his father simply did not earn enough for their family. As an apprentice he only earned baht 120 a month (approximately USD three). He hopes to earn more money one day with the skills acquired at this garage. The teachers visit him on occasion and have developed a cordial relationship with the Thai employer in order to secure the student's well-being. One of the mothers, a



migrant worker long involved with labor and political rights and whose husband is imprisoned in Burma for democratic activities, explained, “Some children just have to work. The families always tell us they work because of financial instability or need. Some who work are as young as seven or eight, others 12 or 13. It is very difficult for them to attend school [under these circumstances.] Many of the younger ones accompanied their families across the border but the 13 or 14 or 15 year olds sometimes just come by themselves with carriers. They come here to look for work, often because their families need the money back home and don’t have a means to find income.”

FTUB’s commitment to supporting Parami School is apparent but what is less apparent within the community is their early involvement in establishing schools in Mae Sot for children of migrant parents. At the time of research, there were already discussions about various ways in which the school can sustain itself independently or from other donor bases. Hsa Thoo Lei School, which FTUB also helped found along with other prominent community leaders about five years ago at the same time that Parami was established, is now running independently with a strong funding stream and had developed close working relationships with several donors. The schoolmaster of Hsa Thoo Lei School, Sayama Paw Ray, also heads the Burmese Migrant Workers Education Committee (BMWEC), the most recognized migrant-run education association representing 36 migrant community schools in Mae Sot. FTUB is less inclined to claim leadership in the actual schools; rather, it leaves pedagogical direction and leadership to the teachers with the participation of parents. According to U Maung, “We don’t have the expertise so we leave it with the teachers to

determine what good schooling is; we don't have a say in the education system, in how things are taught.”

This reflects the tendency within FTUB to operate in a fairly decentralized fashion; FTUB fosters independent but close partnerships with other community-based organizations such as the Migrant Karen Labor Union (MKLU). It prefers to support community-driven efforts such as in one of the tsunami-affected areas in which Burmese migrants worked to establish a school for the children where none existed. Its strength is in maintaining staff who have political commitments, some of whom have worked as migrant laborers themselves. Ko Tin is one such person. He had been active in the 1988 democratic uprising and had left when he realized arrest was imminent. He is one of the FTUB officers based in Bangkok. He arrived here in October 1990 by way of Malaysia where he worked as a migrant worker. His first job in Thailand was not atypical of many migrants in Thailand; his day began at six in the morning and ended at one or two in the morning. He was expected to prepare a cup of coffee for his employer and a glass of orange juice for the employer's wife every morning; his day concluded only after he washed his employer's car so he often had to stay up until the employer returned. In between the coffee and the car, he cleaned bathrooms and tidied the house and worked nightly in the employer's restaurant in the evenings from six thirty p.m. to midnight. For his labor he received approximately baht 2,500 to 3,000, the equivalent of 65 to 70 U.S. dollars a month. He returned to the political fold when he became reacquainted with Burmese organizations in Bangkok. Ko Tin has since married a Thai woman, has a four year old son and speaks fluent Thai. He is often FTUB's point person for dealing with

local authorities as well as documenting cases of migrant worker abuse and exploitation of migrant workers.

Ko Tin's experiences are interesting because to a significant degree he has quite fully integrated into Thai society. Do the community schools provide that opportunity for the border generation? In many ways, Ko Tin had advantages. He left Burma with a passport unlike many of the 1988 democracy activists who had to flee on foot across jungle terrain. He had completed tenth standard and was preparing to attend university. His life story underscores the opinion that social integration and political involvement is greatly enhanced, if not greatly determined, by educational attainment. Schooling prominently appears then at the beginning of a broader policy discussion that significantly contributes to other socially significant outcomes.

More than at SAW, Parami School visibly raised the question of whether migrant community schools were in fact the beginning of a broader policy discussion rather than the end goal. U Maung mentioned that FTUB's longer-term strategy is to integrate the children into the Thai education system. "Over the years we've learned that in the Thai constitution, under which we are all living, any child born in Thailand can enter a Thai school. We've talked with quite a lot of NGOs, [Thai] parliamentarians and bureaucrats. They've told us that the children can join the Thai schools. If we do the basic Thai language education, then they will be entitled to join the Thai schools. This is the best protection we can have because we are not from this country, we are guests, and we are also migrants. We have to face that we believe our children should be integrated into the Thai system so they at least know

the judicial or legal system. They will be able to trust themselves if there is a need. This is a way of getting protection for the children and also for the teachers.”

Broadening educational access for migrant children in Thailand may require supporting migrant community schools in places like Mae Sot but this is not always feasible in other locations where there are few if any Burmese community-based organizations to support schooling endeavors. An estimated two million Burmese migrants are now settled in many provinces in Thailand, not just along the border. To provide schooling or any other social service provision for them will require challenging the royal Thai government’s constricted definition of national social cohesion as well as supporting its efforts to more fully implement existing policies which stipulate schooling for all children regardless of legal status or ethnicity. For example, the Thai government suppresses rather than engages the Muslims in southern Thailand; their religion and ethno-linguistic affinity with Malaysia fundamentally sets them apart and profoundly challenges the implicit national construct of Thailand as Buddhist and Thai. The Thai government also continues to deny citizenship rights and legal protection to many of the hill tribe groups, including refusal of right of movement outside designated areas without prior government approval.

Most migrants have a cautious, distrustful relationship with authorities stemming from their experiences in Burma and the local authorities exercise their power over vulnerable people with impunity. It will require efforts from both the migrant communities and Thai authorities to find ways to collaborate if even in only localized ways. In the five years since Parami School has been established, FTUB

has actively forged inroads with the local authorities toward this end. According to U Maung, “It is essential that whatever is done needs to be acknowledged by the local authorities. We’ve found a place where the local authorities got together, sat down, and put one class of Burmese children into a Thai school itself. The children are Burmese; the teachers are Burmese but they are teaching in a building of a Thai school at the same period. This is very good. It has to be appreciated; we do appreciate it. So we are trying slowly; there are preparatory rounds for our children that, if they want to, they can join the Thai system. This is the best possible way available right now. This is also a way of getting protection for the children and also for the teachers.” The situation is complicated by the fact that parents consistently informed me of desiring both integration and cultural preservation, a common but critical dilemma encountering immigrant education the world over. As one parent said to me, “I would like to send my son to the Thai public school, but I would also want him to know Burmese language.”

The Ministry of Education (MoE), both at the provincial and central levels, is now pursuing a process by which these migrant community schools will be tucked into the broader Thai system. MoE has begun collecting information about the migrant schools in Mae Sot including number of teachers, enrolment figures and the like. Concurrently, it has announced that after the initial registration process no other migrant school can be included in the MoE system; MoE is concerned about the proliferation of migrant schools partially due to legitimate reasons such as quality of education and for other less persuasive purposes, such as anxieties about creating additional pull factors from Burma to Thailand. The most significant hurdle in this

process may be for the MoE to officially recognize teachers at the migrant schools. As it stands, the migrant work permit process does not include a category for teachers. Including teachers as a valid and legitimate employment option in Thailand directly challenges the implicit assumptions that migrants are just seasonal or temporary workers and that they are only capable of unskilled labor. It would require integration and consideration of Burmese children and their families in policymaking decisions affecting education in Thailand. Arguably, this integration into the Thai system is not a panacea; the country's ongoing struggle with an appropriate development model, a multi-ethnic, multi-faith based society and the dilemma of statelessness is apparent in the contested terrain of schooling policies that allow access to all regardless of nationality but are not fully implemented due to hostile school cultures and resource constraints, to name just two reasons.<sup>25</sup> Integration into the Thai education system, therefore, is not an uncomplicated process given the economic and social reproductive function that all schools have but it is a first step towards providing migrants who currently fall in the fissures between two states to be counted and accounted for by one of them. In the immediate sense and on the most practical level migrants will have recourse to regulations and policies that apply to working conditions, minimum wage and the like, even while recognizing that migrants, not unlike other marginalized peoples, have a conflicted and terse relationship with the state and state regulatory functions.

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<sup>25</sup> As was made evident in the People's Social Forum of October, 2006, it is not only people from Burma born in Thailand that pose a challenge to the Thai government. There are ethnic Thais born in Tavoy (in Southern Burma), various hill tribe groups, sea gypsies and many others who demand their right to be recognized as Thai citizens and to be accorded full inclusion into state and society.

## **Chapter Six: Education, Social Life and Emergent Themes**

In this chapter, I discuss some common threads about the migrant community schools and discuss the educational and social functions of the schools. It is difficult to speak about a singular migrant community along the Thailand-Burma border. Some Burmese migrants live in integrated villages with Thai people, as is often the case in Mae Hong Son province, others live in temporary housing provided by the employers, and still others reside in makeshift homes in urban neighborhoods. Mae Sot is unlike most other border towns in that it has an extensive Burmese community structure, with Burmese run community-based organizations, a well-known health clinic and community schools. Even one hour's drive out of Mae Sot to another district, such as Phob Phra district, in Tak province suggests an entirely different set of social networks and community structure. Whereas Phob Phra district is dotted with rose farms and other agricultural sites, Mae Sot is a burgeoning town in which pharmacies hang signs in Thai and Burmese languages, where longyi-clad Burmese young men ride past in bicycles, where the main outdoor market promises fresh vegetables and deliciously pungent fermented fish paste alongside Burmese language books and posters.

### *Social Reproduction*

As discussed above, these community schools provide essential if basic educational opportunities for the Burmese migrant community but there are other, double-edged repercussions of schooling. The teachers and the schools may provide relatively safer spaces for the students but aspirations largely remain unchanged and

social roles are reproduced. In informal conversations with some of the standard five and six students at Parami School a young boy described that when he is older he is looking forward to working as a mechanic; a young girl talked at length about how she will one day be able to help her family by working in construction, like her older brother. Both young people spoke of these jobs with pride in being able to find employment and provide for themselves or their families. While white collar jobs are not the only ones meriting pride and success, the crux of my argument does rest to a significant degree on the issue of living wage and equitable social spaces. The base reality is that construction work earns approximately baht 80 or two U.S. dollars a day. Truncated and poor quality education creates a situation in which children of migrants are socialized into particular roles and continue to fill a specific low wage, largely unskilled employment slot. Many of the students also repeat grades when enrolling in the migrant community schools because of erratic attendance throughout their schooling years and poor quality of schooling in Burma, two issues especially relevant for Burmese migrant children. “The frequent movements of families and individuals seeking work and greater prosperity also have its impact on children’s schooling. The idea of education as an escape route from poverty has often been associated with physical mobility: for example, for poverty-stricken sugar-cane cutters in north-eastern Brazil, education is regarded as the way one’s children can get out to the city” (Graham-Brown, 1991: 53). Burmese migrant parents often cited the difficulties in Burma in terms of finding sustainable work or continuing with their farming and described how crossing the border provided better prospects for the family’s survival and increased schooling opportunities for their children. According



to Graham-Brown (1991), education exalts aspirations for white-color and regular waged employment while other kinds of labor are under-valued; this neglect or disdain for the rural sector has produced a situation in which “improvement has been associated with finding urban employment” (Graham-Brown, 1991: 55). Thailand is in many ways the metaphoric “city” for rural Burmese families displaced by or directly coping with the onslaught of the juntas’ economic and military policies.

### *Migrant and Refugee Schooling*

Some of the impediments to schooling success in the migrant community schools are echoed in the experiences of students in the refugee camps, in particular about income generation and language of instruction. Migration is complex and labels are affixed for people at specific junctures along the way; yesterday’s internally displaced person may cross the border today and become a refugee in one of nine camps then leave the camp to earn an income as a migrant worker in one of the cities. While it is erroneous to conflate the vulnerabilities and circumstances of internally displaced persons, refugees and migrant workers, there are similar constraints and urgent issues that require comparative analysis and consideration. For instance, the refugee camp-based schools have an interesting relationship to migrant community schools. First, the camp schools face similar challenges of making education relevant to young people who exist on the social and economic margins. They are without meaningful opportunities either to continue with their education or to use their knowledge to change their life circumstances. They are unable, however bright or talented they may be, to pursue employment that sustains themselves and their families. Second, many of the youth who do complete secondary school in refugee

camps near Mae Sot participate in the English Immersion Program (EIP) or complete a teacher preparatory course organized by an international NGO. Some of these teachers leave camp to become teachers in the Mae Sot migrant community schools. Third, refugee and migrant students face the challenge of being denied official certification for the education they do receive. Last, many migrants are in fact unrecognized refugees due to Thai policies that restrict camp access only to Karen and Karenni people. The Shans, despite years of repression by the Burmese military junta and crossing international borders seeking safety, are by default migrant workers according to Thai government policies. Only a fine definitional line exists between refugee and migrants from Burma.

An education survey was conducted by the Netherlands-based international non-governmental organization ZOA Refugee Care between July and November 2005 in seven of nine refugee camps along the Thailand-Burma border.<sup>26</sup> There are three refugee camps in Tak province, the nearest one being about one hour drive from Mae Sot. The survey assessed educational needs of camp residents and collected information on ongoing educational activities with particular focus on topics such as student dropout, parental, teacher and community support to students, language instruction and schooling obstacles. ZOA's data was collected at the same time as this research in the migrant community schools was conducted in Mae Sot; some of the educational data are included here to provide context and add comparative value to this case study. Learning activities in refugee camps include primary, middle and secondary schooling; post-secondary education; literacy and language classes;

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<sup>26</sup> The seven refugee camps are Mae La, Umpiem Mai, and Nu Po (in Tak province); Mae La Oon and Mae Ra Ma Luang (in Mae Hong Son province); Don Yang (in Kanchanaburi province); Tham Hin (in Ratchaburi province).

vocational programs; issue-specific awareness raising courses; and, in some camps, night school.

The ZOA survey (2005) reveals that despite preliminary enrolment figures being around 99 percent enrolment in all camps, the need for income to support one's family compels many students to withdraw from schools, a fact which parallels the students in migrant schools; 58 percent of the young men and 42 percent of the women cited this reason. It should be clear that income generation is a significant concern for migrants and refugee families, and should not be treated outside the scope of educational goals. Of the 4,508 camp-based refugees who were interviewed for the ZOA survey, on a monthly basis 44 percent earns zero baht; around 25 percent earns baht one to 100; one-fifth earns baht 101 to 500 baht; approximately eight percent between baht 501 to 1,000; and a little more than one percent earns in excess of baht 1,001.<sup>27</sup> Most migrant workers in Mae Sot earn a daily wage that ranges from baht 50 to 120, depending on the type of work, which is still below that of the Thai worker whose minimum wage is baht 135 (Federation Trade Union of Burma, 2003).

Students tend to leave the schools by the end of the primary and middle school. Other reasons cited for leaving school include learning difficulties and early marriage—77 percent of the young women stop attending school upon marriage. Girls may also discontinue schooling and marry young because “the issues relating to girls and sexual control are most acute when they reach the age of puberty” (Graham-Brown, 1991: 60). Religious beliefs in the Karen and Karenni camps about adolescent sexual activity also result in the young girls who marry early to leave school due to cultural beliefs that wives need to focus on the home not learning. An

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<sup>27</sup> At the time of writing, one USD is equivalent to baht 38.5.

additional constraint to continued school attendance is that the curriculum bears the brunt of tensions between displaced people who seek to preserve and teach their linguistic and cultural traditions through language of instruction at school and policymakers from the Thai Ministry of Education (MoE) who regard curricular design as part of their mandate and therefore insist on Thai language acquisition.

The number of languages in the curriculum has to be examined carefully, especially in light of the recent policy set out by the Thai Ministry of Education. Thai language courses are to be introduced into the curriculum at all levels. Students are already overloaded with three languages from the time they begin school. It may be possible to lessen the load by reducing formal teaching in Burmese and English, and introducing after-school language clubs which use games, puzzles and different forms of media to immerse students in these languages (ZOA Refugee Survey, 2005: 25).

This same report concludes that students leaving school are not able to understand the textbooks used. This red flag necessitates a thorough reconsideration of the language of instruction being used in the camp schools and migrant community schools. There also needs to be a frank discussion with border communities—be they refugees or migrants-- in particular among parents and other community leaders for whom curricular issues are not only a schooling issue. For Karen and other ethnic minorities from Burma who have faced military and cultural violence enacted on them, language of instruction is not just about learning but about identity, national and cultural affiliation. Education is both a repressive tool for regimes and the source for

resistance. Although outside the scope of this case study, it may be useful to track impact of implementing Thai Ministry of Education's new language policies on learning outcomes and student withdrawal from school. Language of instruction should not be treated as polarizing options but as part of a broader pedagogical strategy given the importance of Thai language acquisition and possibility for social integration.

In one of the conversations I had with Sayama Paw Ray, a principal of Hsa Thoo Lei School and head of the Burmese Migrant Workers Educational Committee (BMWEC), articulated concerns to me about the involvement of Ministry of Education with migrant schools. BMWEC is a recognized community-based organization that acts as an umbrella organization for numerous migrant schools in Mae Sot. It also organizes classroom supplies and equipment for the 36 member schools by collectively pooling funding resources together. Sayama Paw Ray is a strong-willed, middle-aged Karen woman and an indomitable force and well-known social change leader in Mae Sot. Sayama Paw Ray discussed with me that the Ministry of Education must understand the interests of migrant and refugee communities that wish to represent themselves and not just blindly follow the dictates of the Thai Ministry. She was enthusiastic about being able to provide certification for students completing their schooling but also articulated that the administrators and teachers of the migrant schools must be included in the decision-making processes that the Ministry of Education undertakes. She mentioned that the community has their own needs and priorities when it comes to curriculum and language of

instruction and that those priorities may not resemble those of the Thai Ministry of Education.

In a significant way, the migrant schools are confronting the same dilemma that refugee education has had to grapple with: is there intention or opportunity to integrate into the host country or return to home country?<sup>28</sup> Are they staying short or long term? How willing is the host country to meeting their right to education and other social services? Even if the host country issued certification, will the certification—be it for teacher training or student diploma—be accepted by host and/or home country? These are questions for which solutions are influenced by several “pseudo-state” entities and not just the schools. The pseudo-state entities would include the “international humanitarian relief regime” as described by Waters and Leblanc (2005: 131) but in the case of Burma there are other significant actors. The ethno-nationalist armies that for decades have waged war against the junta have also created para-statal infrastructure to provide vital services to their own peoples and communities. The Karen Education Department and the Karenni Health Department, to name just two, work in and out of the camps; they provide services to people who are internally displaced inside Burma. Being forced to withstand the onslaught of state-sponsored violence and having claimed their own autonomous states within the cartography of Burma these ethnic-national based organizations operate along the Thailand-Burma border and have undeniable influence on the shaping of education delivery.

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<sup>28</sup> Third country resettlement is an option for relatively few refugees and as such I have not included them in this point.

Education is, according to Waters and Leblanc (2005), a kind of communion: “this communion is possible only when vast numbers of people are exposed—and indoctrinated—to the same ideas through the system of mass public schooling that every modern nation-state seeks to establish” (129). By virtue of creating a shared identity of belonging, there is an implicit definition of who does not. Refugees have been expelled by the state due to ethnicity, religion or for harboring certain political ideas. Waters and Leblanc (2005: 131) write about refugee education in the context of the pseudo-state of international humanitarian non-governmental organizations, but their argument can be stretched to include the aforementioned ethnic-national border organizations as they have moved in to fill the gaping social service space vacated by the Burmese government. As para-statal organizations, they are not without their own messages about membership in a historical and cultural community ranging from the benign—preserving and teaching Karen language—to the more problematic practices which may deepen division between Karen Christians and Karen Buddhists.

#### *Schooling for Integration and Repatriation*

The Federation Trade Union of Burma (FTUB) and the Social Action for Women (SAW) are organizations that support the two migrant schools discussed in this research. Their decision to use a modified version of Burma’s national curriculum is a compass pointing towards a shared hope for return and national reintegration. The SAW school’s large classroom is decorated with a visual history of Burma’s multi-ethnic democracy movement and the FTUB’s political vision for democratic transition in Burma is based on a multi-ethnic federalist system. The teachers, school head and the community-based organization leaders mentioned

considerable concerns about the fate of the migrant children were these schools not available to them. It was not uncommon to hear concerns rhetorically iterated as “who else will tell these children they come from Burma?” Another frequent iteration was that these children should know they are indeed part of a country and culture despite being outside the folds of Thai society. One of the schools at which I have spent much time but do not discuss in this research project was founded by exiled members of the political party National League for Democracy (NLD). During one lengthy conversation I had with the headmistress of the school, Ma Sanda, herself a member of the NLD, informed me that her role as school head is to share history with the children. The children board at the school because their parents live and work in distant areas, usually on farms. Ma Sanda talks to the children about the NLD activities and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. She me during one conversation, “The parents [of these children] are not only farm workers and migrants, they were members of an important movement; they worked for democracy.” This transmission of historical knowledge, while moving and well-intentioned, still fails to provide the children with the capacity to critique and participate in democratic or critical movements of their own making. One can argue that education does not provide this anywhere given its reproductive function, but this belies the resistance that students, teachers and others engage in, although some of the resistance is on an individual rather than institutional level.<sup>29</sup>

Waters and Leblanc (2005) write about three paradoxes that influence schooling for refugee children; two of these three points have bearing on the

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<sup>29</sup> Work by John Ogbu and Signithia Fordham about the oppositional culture to institutionalized racism is one example. It begs mention that despite certain behaviors or actions being regarded as resistance it does not necessarily produce positive, social results or change.



circumstances of schooling for migrant community schools. Education is a vehicle by which “interested groups seek to exploit or extend power as well as to promote a particular form of economic and social development” (Waters and Leblanc, 2005: 145). Simply accepting the Thai curriculum may not be acceptable to the school heads and politically-minded community based organizations since they have a well-intentioned interest in creating citizens for a future democratic Burma. Their hope is embodied in the use of Burma’s national curriculum, albeit modified to reflect a pluralistic as opposed to ethnocentric Burma. One can argue the Thai curriculum teaches the “same” math but the difference is that certification from one system is the same as all others. Certification is more than a piece of paper, however, as it symbolically signals competency of the same core knowledge as all other students in Burma. Despite the community schools not being able to provide state-issued certification, the use of the national curriculum is perhaps the most clear if not the only tether to Burma for children living in the fissure between two states. For stateless Burmese children—born and living in Thailand--and those from ethnic minority groups grappling with state-sponsored violence, the curriculum may be the only sinewy connection to a country that thus far denies them membership. This may directly be at odds with international non-governmental organizations who for reasons of programming sustainability and social cohesion promote standardized curriculum along the Thailand-Burma border and closer integration with the Thai Ministry of Education. Over the course of one year, however, Parami and SAW now provide regular Thai language classes which signals commitment to addressing current needs of the students. Two constraints were that it was difficult for the

schools to find a Thai teacher willing to teach in the migrant community schools and Thai teachers had salary expectations challenging to meet. Thai language instruction helps with the daily negotiations that accompany life at the border, such as with the Thai authorities or employers, as well as facilitate continued access to schooling since Thai policy stipulates that all children living in Thailand have a right to enroll in Thai public schooling from primary to tertiary education. While Thai language requirements are not stipulated in the policy, in practice many Thai schools heads and teachers will discourage migrant children enrolment in Thai public schools claiming lack of training and resources to adequately teach children who do not have a basic grasp of Thai.

The second issue that Waters and Leblanc (2005) raise is that schooling is “embedded in the broader project of individual and economic development; refugees, by definition are therefore outside both the modern economy and modern society” (145). Waters and Leblanc (2005) are describing the challenges of creating an education system for refugees, but their point clearly relies on certain narrowly-defined assumptions that do not hold true for communities along the Thailand-Burma border. They assume refugees, once “expelled” from the country of origin are outside the scope of any other imagined communities. On the contrary, for the Karen people, their ethnic nationality is defined by two crucial elements: first, their rejection from the traditional nation-state of Burma is in fact a starting point of their imagined community; theirs is a border-based “nation” built over four decades with its own para-statal bureaucracies--such as the Karen Health and Education Departments—political structure and even their own military. Second, refugees are not only a part

of the modern economy they are in fact emblematic of the way the modern economy thrives on low wage, unskilled laborers, people who in fact have little negotiation power or opportunities for employment that provides safe working conditions and a living wage. In Thailand, refugees seek daily permission to leave camp to work in neighboring farms as day laborers, often only earning baht 60 to 70 a day; many more find ways, however, to surreptitiously leave camp without detection but, if caught, the penalty is severe. Currently, it is mostly stipend-based work as health workers or teachers for international non-governmental organizations that serve as employment and income generation opportunities for refugees (Buscher, 2006).

Waters and Leblanc's (2005) aforementioned points hold true if in fact refugee camps are hermetically sealed environments rather than permeable communities but this is simply not the case for refugee camps in numerous country settings.<sup>30</sup> Some refugee camps in Thailand are located right next to highways, simply fenced and fairly easy to leave and return. Others are more remote. Thai government policies are generally restrictive, not only for camp-based refugees but for NGO workers and others who need to access the camps. Ultimately, the geographical location of the camp makes a significant difference on issues of mobility. A male teacher of a migrant community school, who previously lived in a refugee camp for five years, mentioned that he "didn't like it much [in the camp], compared to Burma it was alright. In the camps, food was provided even when one didn't have work. Of course, people really should have and need to work."

Camp residents do in fact regularly leave the camp without

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<sup>30</sup> See Marc Sommer's (2001) book [Fear in Bongoland: Burundi Refugees in Urban Tanzania](#) which discusses the rural to urban movement of refugees seeking employment and integration.

permission in order to find work. As one camp committee leader put it, “There is no work here, and even if you are educated, it does not take you anywhere.” As refugees languish for years in camps, younger people in camps look to life outside the camps...Because of the clandestine nature of the movement in and out of the camps, it is difficult to ascertain exact figures tracking such movement (Young and Pyne, 2006: 25).

People who are categorized as migrant workers, for instance, describe political repression, forced labor practices and physical violence in Burma and would qualify as refugees (Young and Pyne, 2006). It is imperative, therefore, that categories such as “refugees” and “migrants” and definitions that constitute “economic” as opposed to “political” causes for migration be viewed through more complicated lens. Moreover, there needs further study of the complexities of repatriation on returnees and communities when migrant workers return and of the consequences and opportunities for migrants to integrate into new national communities. For too long now research about refugees has sidestepped or failed to grapple with a forthright discussion about the economic contribution and income needs of refugees. This is changing, however, as evidenced by the recent report produced by the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children which studied income generation and livelihood options for refugees at the Thailand-Burma border. This point coupled with the earlier discussion about the Thai Ministry of Education’s growing insistence on Thai language instruction and the schools providing such coursework, underscore

Waters and Leblanc's (2005) point about the "de facto integration" of some refugees into the "Thai countryside, whether legally or not" (146).

### Schooling for Safety

Prominent against the backdrop of desiring educational opportunities for their young children is also the recurring theme of migrant parents seeking safety and protection for them as well. There is a general cognizance among parents and teachers that play and learning are essential elements in the children's lives. Other recurring aspirations are for the children to be socialized properly, that they understand and appreciate their culture and that they are not swayed into unethical or inappropriate behaviors. According to one parent, "Without these schools, these children can not receive an education. Without an education, they will be unknowledgeable, uneducated. It is also the case that the police tend not to harass the school children. They tend to be more careful and don't arrest the school children as much." This prompted lengthy discussions and reflections on what signifies "school children" to the authorities and what that means in terms of added protection.

The subject of school uniforms and the students being perceived as children by local authorities appeared in numerous discussions with administrators, teachers and parents. Ma Nwe, who has lived in Thailand for seven years, has by most measures in the community, more financial and legal security than most other migrants shared her insights with me on keeping children safe from harassment and arrest. She insists that her children "wear Thai school uniform because it looks proper, it is important that other people know these are school children. The police tend not to harass or speak to them this way." Ma Nwe worked as domestic worker

for four years in Bangkok for which she received baht 1,500 a month. In the past three years, she has also worked as construction worker, as a room maid in hotel, and in a factory. She is married; her husband works as a construction worker earning a daily wage of baht 40. She and her husband have officially registered with the government and have work permits; additionally, her current employer has recorded and reported her dependents, four children, to the authorities which mean they are less likely to be harassed at home. Only on one occasion has she had to pay the police baht 500, as she says it, “to gain their understanding.” She used to send money back to her parents in Burma for taking care of the two elder sons but has since brought them all to Thailand. She explained to me that even being able to set aside baht 400 (ten U.S. dollars) provided an income in Burma of kyats 2,000, a significant figure given that her husband, while employed in a government-run industry in Burma, only earned kyats 600 a month. As part of his job, he was also provided with a ration of rice but it was an insufficient amount to feed the family. Nowadays for baht 200, she is able to exchange money at the “black market” for kyats 5,000.

Another way the schools keep the children safe is by organizing morning and afternoon transportation for the students who live further away. According to Ma Nwe, “Some parents work on their employer’s farms or plantations and do agricultural work; in between the road and their homes are only farmland and muddy plots so [the children] have to cross fields to come. It is quite difficult to cross and quite far. They get up early and sometimes even go without lunch because their parents want them to be educated.” At both schools, one of the teachers always accompanies the driver in the morning and afternoon; children as many as 20 crowd

into a modified pick up truck that has two long benches at the back. As one teacher explains, “A teacher always goes along to take care of them and make sure nothing happens.” Such transportation provides both physical and social protection. As evident in cases of children who have fallen through open drains during floods in the rainy season, it is important to provide safe means of reaching the schools. Despite all these efforts the issue of police arrests is ever present.

At SAW school, the school head recounted a recent incident that underscores the ongoing vulnerability of children, perhaps even more so for the older children who are more mobile. “There are real troubles for children. Last year, there were two children who boarded at the school; one was 13 and the other was 15; they are brothers. They often left in the morning on their bikes to buy breakfast of steamed lentils and rice. The police arrested them one morning; when we went to get them back, the police asked an exorbitant price of baht 3,000 for each child and we couldn’t afford the fee. So the children had to sleep overnight in detention. We did manage to deliver dinner to them. The next day [the authorities] dumped them on the other side of the border. These children no longer had parents and had been staying at the school. They didn’t have a home in Burma, they had nowhere to go. We were incredibly worried; what if something happened to them, what if they didn’t know how to get around or get back. And I couldn’t go over there. So I sought the help of a friend who waited on the Thai side and found another person who could cross over to find the children. We bribed the soldiers at the border and brought the children back.” In other instances, neighbors have brought the children to the school at which they are enrolled when the parents have been arrested because few other options exist

for the children's care and protection. The school proves to be a significant and often effective mitigating factor in this highly charged local context, an especially crucial fact given that other traditional institutions, such as the family unit, are compromised due to the structure and nature of employment for adults. One teacher explained with both determination and resignation about the situation "we must take responsibility when we can."

### *The Cultural Construct of Teachers and Teaching*

Some vulnerabilities of the school children can be buffered through planning and strategy, such as when the use of Thai school uniforms signify legitimacy of the migrant community schools and underscore the presence of a child rather than ethnic difference or legal status. Other circumstances can not be planned in advance such as sudden arrests and detention or when illnesses or loss of employment strike parents force children to work. Yet the common tether that mitigates the seriousness of these circumstances is found in the active participation of teachers and school heads. The teachers provide a parenting function for the children who board at the school and watch all the children on weekends during which the schools stay open for the children thereby providing safe if rudimentary area for play. The popular educational discourse on parental participation often rests on the implicit assumption that the parents come to the school in which the school serves as the focal point. In Mae Sot, even while the school serves as a focal point for the students during after school hours and on weekends, the teachers visit the students' homes recognizing the rigidity of the parents work schedules.



The schools have committees comprised of parents, school administrators and parents that on average meet monthly. Many parents are unable to participate at the meetings. Ma Gyi, the math and geography teacher for the fifth and sixth standard at SAW school provided greater detail about the teachers' role outside school. "The parents from this neighborhood do come [to the school]; they come to discuss things often. When the teachers have time, we divide up and pay visits to the parents' homes. For example, when a student is not at school to ask why they weren't there, and to make some sort of arrangement. For us, it is mostly related to the education or school-related issues. They can tell us about their difficulties—be it about the children's poor health or reasons for irregular attendance. The teachers, after all, have the responsibility of watching the children, but at home the parents are responsible for guiding them." To understand the multifaceted roles of the teacher, it bears mention that many of the teachers at the migrant community schools are sought after for information or consultation by members of the community. Some teachers have even received training from a local Burmese run health clinic to act as first line health workers in the schools.

The teachers' community involvement may be easily heralded as proof of tremendous commitment but there is significant sacrifice and material hardship that accompanies these activities. SAW school at the time of this research project was able to begin paying the teachers in January 2005 a monthly salary of baht 2,000 although efforts were being made to generate enough school revenue to increase it to baht 2,500. When the school was first established, the school could only pay baht 500. As Ko Thant, deputy director of SAW, mentions, "In truth, teachers here teach

not for financial reasons. When we couldn't pay them much, yet they worked. One time, we couldn't pay at all, but still they worked." Ko Min, head of SAW school's education committee shared that "People donate but it is not enough for the year. If we need a little something here and there, we buy it ourselves."

Education and teacher are powerful constructs in the Burmese cultural imagination. The teachers' basic material needs are largely subsidized by the schools in terms of food and housing but by and large most of the teachers share housing and barely sustain themselves on a stipend from the supporting community-based organization. The money is often distributed itinerantly or not paid altogether in situations in which the schools financial pool dips low. All of my conversations with teachers, parents and administrators described teachers as parental figures and schools are explicitly permitted to act in loco parentis. These roles are common expectations in Burma but are exacerbated in migrant communities where few other social institutions can consistently provide pillars of stability.

There is tension between teacher as caregiver and teacher as professional. When a teacher is regarded as a caregiver, someone who is implicitly expected to sacrifice and provide despite personal hardship, it poses a significant challenge. All members of the community, including teachers, described the characteristics of a good teacher in largely Buddhist spiritual terms, even people of different faiths in the migrant community used similar Buddhist rhetoric. A good teacher has "sedana" and "karuna," words that can be defined as having empathy, compassion or loving-kindness for others, in particular for those experiencing hardship or suffering. "A good teacher has sedana, a desire to teach, understanding for the children's and

parents' situations and their surrounding environment. A teacher must also meet the parents and inquire about their situation." While it is entirely commendable to see the teachers' level of commitment and the degree to which teachers are accorded respect by the community, the question of professionalizing teaching and sustaining teachers with experience remains to be answered. As well, the cultural referent that exalts a teacher for being self-sacrificing, in particular about his or her own material needs, needs to be critically examined. It is a precedent that relegates the teacher, a position that is largely staffed by women in these primary schools, to the task of caregiving as opposed to professional capacities.

There are teacher trainings and other activities being implemented by various non-governmental organizations. Much of the training involves improving teaching quality but raises the specter of certification and professionalization of the work; the training centers on a pedagogical shift from rote memorization to student-centered learning. A teacher who has completed some of these trainings explains, "When we start teaching a subject, as teachers, we try to understand how much they already know. As teachers, we try to guide them. Second thing a teacher does, we try to encourage them to ask questions. If they don't know how to ask questions, we ask on their behalf so they will understand how to do it later on. As teachers, we meet and discuss what else we can do to improve the school." My observations revealed however, that for substantial change to occur in pedagogy, the logistical and material set up of the schools will require change. The number of students learning in relatively small classroom spaces, in particular for the younger standards, poses substantial challenge to implementing different teaching methodologies, if nothing

else because it is difficult to focus on the individual child. The teacher recited and the students repeated; the din of recitation and repeat from different classrooms situated next to one another was cacophonous; even while standing beside the teacher I found it difficult to follow even one trail of several concurrent lessons.

In informal conversations and observations of the children, it was apparent that the children learned units of information but lacked knowledge on how to apply the information or to use it in unfamiliar ways. I witnessed for example one English teacher point to a picture of a human hand and remark in English, “This is a hand.” He then waited for the group of students to respond, “This is a hand.” He would often move to another object in the same category at this juncture (e.g. “this is a leg”). When written practices were assigned after this initial recitation the teacher wrote the sentences on the board and the children had to copy the sentence down. (“

The teachers and administrators did not, however, lack the commitment and interest in the concepts of a student-centered pedagogy. One teacher described it best. “Some children—from the way they were taught in the past—appear before us shaking, quivering in fear of teachers. But actually children have innate intelligence, knowledge. As teachers, we simply have to fill in the gap, to supplement. We can not force children to be what we want them to be; they must be able to speak freely, to ask freely, to act freely, to teach them not to be afraid, to open their minds, to be free. As teachers, it is to observe, to comment only when they are about to do something wrong, and we must be able to explain why it is wrong. That’s it. That’s the best kind of education. To only do when someone commands it, this is not good. As a teacher, my role is to encourage them to ask anything, so long as they have

respect for the role of teacher. They can associate with me as friend, as younger sister, as parent. My students are like my children; this is why they are not afraid of me. I am not someone to be afraid of, don't be afraid. I'll do everything I can to be prepared for the questions. But sometimes it is the children who know the answers and I don't know the answers so it is from them that I learn." The teacher trainings serve the purpose of introducing perspective shifts, but until the classrooms are materially constructed as learning spaces, there is little hope of student-centered practices rising about the din of multi-grade classrooms sharing a single space.

## **Chapter Seven: Implications for Migration and Work Policies**

In this chapter, I begin with an overarching discussion of the global policy environment on migration and its policy implications for Burmese migrants in Thailand followed by a review of some global policies in the Thai national context. The next sub-section narrows the discussion to the conditions of work for Burmese migrants and the implications for children in the migrant schools, including the ways schools are grappling with child labor. This chapter closes with a few recommendations specific to improving the organization and quality of the community schools, including a shift to more non-formal compressed educational options for migrants.

### *Policy Implications: Migration*

Much of the national-level policy advocacy strategy is reflected in a conversation I had with one of the prominent community leaders actively working on migrant issues. He stated that the Burmese migrants “have to break in and show that we don’t mean any harm. By doing this, we are helping [the Thais]. We are getting people systematically organized. This is a help to your environment, help to your society. The main thing is getting the local people to understand why these schools are coming up.” This is part of a broader challenge facing Thai society as it confronts the social consequences of being an economically strong nation in the region. Advocacy involving campaigning, lobbying, research and building alliances will be required with policymakers, local police officers, Thai teachers and employers.

There are many policy recommendations that can help mitigate for the vulnerability and address the basic needs of the Burmese migrant communities in Thailand. As is evident in the comment above, the challenges of addressing the needs of Burmese migrant and other stateless people in Thailand necessarily involve a profound evaluation of Thailand's state apparatus but an evaluative process will have profoundly important repercussions for Thais as well, such as those in the poorer, more rural provinces and in the mountainous hill tribe areas.

Much of the meta-level policy recommendations I make here are shaped by the imperative "to define utopias as a necessary part of designing policies for today" (Sutcliffe, 1998: 333). In other words, even while recognizing the need to re-tool approaches and reconfigure policy recommendations for continually fluctuating global circumstances, the policies themselves should fundamentally be rooted to core fundamental principles such as people's right to move freely and establish residency; people's right to be able to earn a living wage that sustains themselves and their dependents; they should be able to continue learning whether in or out of schools; and they must have access to an impartial justice system that will arbitrate without discrimination of ethnicity, gender or nationality. To create broader progressive policies which alleviate hardships that accompany cross-border migration, I paraphrase Sutcliffe's four key principles of migration policies (1998):

- Resist policies that hamper movement, in particular in or to the more developed countries.

- Create discussions that go beyond migration as a sum demographic total or as an issue about regulation; there are innumerable accounts of human rights violations that accompany immigration policies in their formulation and implementation.
- Confront discrimination and social injustice as they are encountered and even exacerbated in the migration process—involving a person’s gender, sexual orientation, or socio-economic background.
- Advocate that all countries contribute to the care and well being of forced migrants, such as internally displaced persons or refugees. The policy rhetoric, in fact, has often spoken about this material contribution as “burden-sharing.” While it is true that a disproportionate number of poor countries are left responsible for this influx of forced migrant population, refugees and migrants are not “burdens.” There are benefits gained by host and other countries for enabling forced and unforced migrants to reestablish themselves and/or their families in durable ways.
- Eradicate all policies that discriminate or distinguish between citizens and non-citizens. Even documented migrants in host countries often lack meaningful access to democratic rights.

It is increasingly urgent to humanely treat unregistered, illegal migrants even if an appropriate regularization process was devised and implemented. This will have particularly meaningful ramifications for victims of trafficking who require shelter, care, permission for temporary stay as well as psychosocial and logistical support for repatriation and integration. They must not be treated as “illegals” but as people requiring immediate assistance. In addition, in the cases of exploitation and abuse,



humane immigration procedures would enable them to access the national justice system for appropriate legal proceedings.

On a broader scale, one critical strategy to mitigate risk and vulnerabilities during migration is to seriously discuss the policy construct of immigration controls, a set of bureaucratic procedures in a globalized era born from post-Enlightenment nation-state building impulses (Torpey, 2000; Brubaker, 1992 & 1994). As immigration controls exist now, they in fact fail to protect members of the national community and, more substantially, cause added vulnerability to the migrants who, in order to bypass state control and surveillance of the sending and receiving countries, rely on the negotiation and knowledge of paid “carriers” who may be either benign or extortionary in their dealings (Young and Pyne, 2006). Immigration and passport controls are products of institutions that help define the construct of a nation-state; a nation-state’s borders define geographical territory as well as create a discourse that distinguishes between citizen and non-citizen within the boundaries (Torpey, 2000). Documents, such as passports or birth registration, make the distinctions between citizen and non-citizens enforceable by law and underscore the ways the nation-state, as part of an “international state system” monopolizes the means to legitimize or delegitimize movement of people (Torpey, 2000: 4). Anderson’s (1991) concept of national communities as “imagined” ones functions as such only by state-sanctioned procedures that codify documents that establish the identify of citizens. In fact, the institutionalization and codification of identity is what translates membership in a national community socio-economically crucial. Torpey (2000: 12) writes, “The idea of belonging that is at the root of the concept of citizenship is threatened when people

cross borders, leaving spaces where they ‘belong’ and entering those where they do not.” It is only in a broader historical purview of the development of the nation-state that critics of problematic migration policies can see and dismantle the language of “illegality” or “legality” as maintained through elaborate state machinery. It is equally compelling in advocating for migrant rights to recall that one aspect of the nation-state was the promise of according and guaranteeing legal, political and social rights to those in the national community. The task remains for us to use this promise as scaffolding to stretch the policy language that would shelter people who migrated, live and work, often marry and settle, in a new country. Only then can we meaningfully enable children to participate in schools, be they community-based or part of the host country’s public school system.

A second strategy would be to commit to actively diminishing factors that impel people to leave their home countries. In the case of Burma, this would require a multi-tiered approach. Because a significant cause of migration is the political repression in Burma, including torture and forced labor practices by the military junta, there must be concerted and sustained international pressure to enforce the results of the 1990 democratic elections, allow for a mediated negotiation for a transfer of power and the reintegration of the military into civil society and organize another election.

Another impetus for migration is development-induced displacement; this fact demands serious reconsideration of whether most configurations of development projects include adequate consideration of whether they promote sustainable livelihoods. The projects also need to better assess their impact on communities, in

particular in areas inhabited by ethnic minority groups. In Shan State at least two thousand households located near the site where the Tasang Dam is to be built were involuntarily displaced.<sup>31</sup> Over 365,000 people have been forcibly relocated, a vast majority of them to 176 relocation sites controlled by the Burmese military. The reservoir alone is expected to flood an area of at least 640 square kilometers. There are more dams in the planning stages: Thailand and Burma have partnered together to construct several dams on the Salween River to supply electricity for Thailand's burgeoning power needs.<sup>32</sup> The Wei Gyi dam and Dar Gwin dam are built in Karen state, next to Mae Hong Son province in Thailand. There were 210 villages destroyed in Papun district between 1992 and 2004; of the 85 villages close to the two dam sites, only approximately 21 villages remain. Villagers were either forcibly moved to 31 relocation sites that are controlled by the Burmese military and where forced labor practices and other human rights abuses are widespread.<sup>33</sup> Many have fled to Thailand or live as internally displaced persons hiding in the jungles of eastern Burma. A teacher explains the impact of these dams on a local village school which had been destroyed by the junta in 1994 but was rebuilt by the community the following year when they noticed that parents, because they were desperate for their children to receive some schooling, sent their children to refugee camps in Thailand where education was available. The teacher explains,

We cannot say we are living in a stable situation now. Education

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<sup>31</sup> Earthrights International, April 2005b.

<sup>32</sup> Karen Rivers Watch, 2004. KRW is a coalition of Karen community-based organizations: Karen Office of Relief and Development; Karen Youth Organization; Karen Student Network Group; Karen Environmental and Social Action; Karen Women's Organization; Federation Trade Union of Kawthoolei. These organizations work on a spectrum of issues: environmental, women's rights, youth, trade unions, and political change in Burma.

<sup>33</sup> Earthrights International, April 2005a.

for the children will be very difficult when the dam is built, because we will have to flee from the SPDC and live in the jungle. The dam will also cause problems for our health situation, because living in the jungle, without a real home will cause many diseases. The health condition of the villagers here is very poor.”<sup>34</sup>

Education is highly valued and even those people forced to live as internally displaced persons organize schools for the children despite the constraints, such as schools being continually relocated and classes canceled when the junta runs military operations in the area. There are also few full time teachers available since they often have to farm for survival themselves. Some villages have organized village-wide projects, such as establishing a retail shop, from which all funds go to providing salaries for local teachers.<sup>35</sup>

Reasons cited for hydropower development projects largely focus on economic benefits but as is evident in the teacher’s comments above there are unacceptable costs as well. There is appallingly inadequate discussion about the negative impact of these projects on the eco-system, communities, livelihoods, cultural preservation and human rights of people who have long lived in the areas of the dams. There is no evidence of transparent decision-making by the military junta or input from the local communities. Furthermore, the burden of these projects is borne by local communities and the benefits will be exported to other countries in the region, such as urban areas in Thailand and Vietnam, and not distributed to local communities.

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<sup>34</sup> Karen Rivers Watch, 2004: 72.

<sup>35</sup> Karen Rivers Watch, 2004.

To cite another haunting proposal of development gone awry, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has forecast an interest for several years now in building a highway starting from Mawlamyine, the capital of Mon State, in Burma through Mae Sot in Thailand, Laos and Vietnam thereby creating a “Greater Mekong Sub-region East-West Economic Corridor.” According to the ADB, this highway will increase mobility and reduce rural poverty by producing more economic opportunities, in particular for women; a deep-sea port, industrial estates and special economic zones are being developed in conjunction with the highway. Ironically, the Department of Highways of Thailand is tasked as the main implementing agency for the project inside Burma. ADB has failed to consider the Burmese junta’s ongoing military campaigns against civilians in Mon and Karen States, the two areas through which this highway will bisect. The ADB is deafeningly silent on the possible use of the highway by the junta to deploy troops and military equipment more rapidly thereby increasing the militarization of the border and appears to be mute on research conducted in other countries of the greater Mekong sub-region by the United Nations and public health agencies which point to the ways that new highways also enable greater trafficking in women and the spread of infectious disease, especially HIV/AIDS.<sup>36</sup> ADB’s claims that increased mobility will usher in poverty reduction and facilitate improved lives for young women and children prove dangerously ill-conceived if not outright culpable for increased suffering of impoverished people.

The global epoch promises cross-border linkages while also threatening community disintegration. Globalization is a multi-headed hydra: socio-cultural,

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<sup>36</sup> David Feingold’s presentation at the World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2004. For more information, see Earthrights International’s (2005c) report “East-West Economic Corridor.”

economic and political transformation in the workings of the world has sprouted multiple possibilities, promising great potential for transnational political responses against oppression as well as exacerbating disparities between rich and poor. Technology that sprouts from the body globalization can both liberate information and simultaneously widen the gap between those who produce and consume knowledge to those who are without access to said information technology. Concrete examples of globalization's ills may include trafficking in persons or sweatshop labor; but its potential includes linking a national-level resistance movement to supporters abroad such as in coordinating international pressure on a multinational firm that violates human rights. It is best to comprehend globalization, in other words, as a "political project whose content can be determined (instead of as a law of nature or an economic 'invisible hand' which cannot be halted)" (van den Anker, 2004: 16); this perspective enables us to avoid the cacophonous name-calling that has become routine banter between the so-called anti and pro-globalization camps. In the interstice between these two positions, can we define what social justice might look on the subject of migration? And what might it require at the level of the individual migrant from a lower socio-economic class or oppressed ethnic minority group whose calculus for migration may be profoundly different than that understood by governmental policymakers or non-governmental program implementers? Without a discussion of policies as experienced or perceived by the migrants, safe, pedagogically sound schooling for migrant children or healthy, thriving migrant communities are hard-pressed to exist.

As mentioned previously, there are innumerable accounts of human rights violations that accompany immigration policies in their formulation and implementation. Discrimination and social injustice—involving a person’s gender, sexual orientation, or socio-economic background—are encountered and even exacerbated in the process of migration. Human trafficking provides one lucid example of the deeply troubling ramifications of migration clashing with immigration controls; the trafficking issue has become the cover for policies designed to curb immigration. Trafficking may occur at various points during the migration experience, including before the individual has crossed the border, during the border crossing or once present in Thailand itself. The surreptitious existence of people without legal status and life on the socio-economic margins means migrants are at a strong risk of being trafficked. Recent efforts to whittle down approved number of asylum cases for admissions to developed countries has in fact forced more migrants to depend on smugglers or “carriers” (Feingold, 2005). The U.N. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children was adopted by the UN General Assembly on November 2000 but entered into force on December 2003 defines trafficking as “...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purposes of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, services, slavery or

practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.” The use of terms like slavery evokes specific and powerful reactions. It has been used by evangelical groups to denounce sex work and conflate all sex workers as trafficking victims, but it has also been used frequently in journalism and other media when talking about poor working conditions of migrant workers. Anderson (2004: 108) writes that at the “most obvious level, slavery is often shorthand for long hours, no pay and imprisonment. The power exercised over the migrant worker, and her corresponding lack of control over all aspects of herself including vulnerability to physical, psychological and sexual violence.”

Many policy and programmatic responses to counter trafficking are divorced from discussions about causes of migration and of economic necessity in a globalized climate of exacerbated poverty. Trafficking has largely been dominated by policy and inflammatory language of slavery, a manifestation with much currency right now being counter-trafficking initiatives relegating all sex work as slavery.<sup>37</sup> One oft cited comment in the counter-trafficking literature is that most trafficking victims are coerced into the sex industry. Although trafficking for prostitution is an unacceptable and exploitative act,

statistics on the ‘end use’ of trafficked people are often

unreliable because they tend to over-represent the sex trade.

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<sup>37</sup> See David Feingold (2005). The U.S. Department of State ranks the performance of countries around the world in their efforts to respond to trafficking in their annual Trafficking in Persons (TIPs) report. It is an encouraging move that the 2006 TIPs report includes broader discussion about labor trafficking, but many problems remain with it, such as the U.S. advocating a prosecution model and places an inordinate focus on sex work as opposed to the broader issue of labor exploitation. Another is that the U.S. is not included in the countries being evaluated for its counter-trafficking work despite the U.S. being a major receiving country.



For example, men are excluded from the trafficking statistics gathered in Thailand because, according to its national law, men cannot qualify as trafficking victims. However, a detailed 2005 study by the International Labor Organization (ILO) found that, of the estimated 9.5 million victims of forced labor in Asia, less than 10 percent are trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation (Feingold, 2005: 26). Arguably “trafficking is often migration gone terribly wrong” (Feingold, 2005: 32). Advocating for and designing programs for safe migration is one policy recommendation that builds migration policy from the perspective of the low-wage migrant laborer who has compelling need for income-generation and will often cross borders at great risk and without permission to seek employment. Discussions about safe migration also empower the migrant by directly inputting risk-mitigation strategies into the calculus of the person considering internal or cross-border movement. Interestingly enough, it also challenges the schizophrenic nature of a global economy that champions the transnational flows of capital and goods but demonizes as interlopers people who dare to cross borders.

#### *Global Polices in the Thai National Context*

This discussion will next move away from the broader global context and shifts to the Thailand policy environment. One policy decision that would have fairly direct implications would be to lower trade barriers that work against exports from developing countries. This would, in other words, increase “the demand for labor in the shape of products. This raises the whole issue of ‘unfair competition’ from countries whose comparative advantage is cheap labor” (Radwan, 1998). In addition,

policymakers need to be able to guarantee the protection of migrant workers in their host countries. This means not only the ratification of international instruments, such as the International Labor Organization (ILO) standards, but the rigorous implementation and enforcement of them. One significant obstacle to protection of migrant works, especially in the vein of employment rights, is most evident in Part III of Thailand's 1997 constitution, which is the section that covers specific freedoms and rights. Despite the constitution being explicitly built on the concept of "human dignity" (Article 4), according to Muntarbhorn (2005), Part III distinguishes between Thais and non-Thais and specifically provides essential employment-related provisions, such as freedom of association (Article 45) and the right against forced labor (Article 51) to Thais.

There has been a shift within some Thai trade unions in which membership is open to non-Thai migrant workers but voting in the organization or representation is still not available to them. Other models of representation and membership exist and should be seriously considered for the Thailand country context. Policy often manifests differently in practice than the original language and intention of law, but advocating for change means demanding the implementation of good existing laws, often stretching them to shelter the most vulnerable and most in need of such laws, as well as forging new ones to mitigate the gaps in the legal framework. There are examples of steady incremental shifts in Thailand that need to be encouraged and sustained. The Thai laws, as it concerns children and labor, for example, clearly state that the minimum age for employment is now 15 and, for dangerous work, such as work involving toxic materials, chemicals, certain machinery, the employee must be

at least age eighteen. The young person is also entitled to the same pay as an adult (Muntarbhorn, 2005). In the past, when workers joined together to argue for fair wages or worker rights they were simply dismissed by their employers which mean they were immediately without status and could therefore be deported. Deportation prevents workers from seeking legal redress. A new policy established in 2005 aims to improve this situation; it permits workers to stay for one year after dismissal from employment which implies they would not be subject to deportation within that time frame (Muntarbhorn, 2005). Some non-governmental organizations have stepped in to provide support to migrants who are in the process of seeking legal redress, an especially important intervention that holds the government accountable and makes policy implementation more feasible. This 2005 policy may prove to work well in tandem with the criminal and civil laws which explicitly cover people regardless of nationality and legal status.

Muntarbhorn (2005) cites one case in which a group of Thai nationals are being prosecuted for murdering several Burmese migrants. The Federation Trade Unions of Burma (FTUB) also often acts as an advocate for migrants, one recent case being of two young Burmese women who were raped and nearly killed in early 2006. They were discovered in the trunk of a car barely alive. The son of a provincial governor and his acquaintances are being charged for the crime; at the time of this writing, it is an ongoing prosecution. These cases and the active involvement of local organizations have repercussions beyond the scope of direct assistance for individuals injured; they send a signal to the authorities, employers and the general public that maltreatment of migrants will not necessarily escape scrutiny and accountability.

One recommendation that addresses both existing gaps and immediate dilemmas is to replicate the Labor Law Clinic that has been established in Mae Sot. The American Solidarity Center, FTUB with assistance from the Thai Lawyers Council has created this office at which workers of all nationalities can seek legal redress and assistance. The idea is to create a feeling of solidarity and shared interests between workers regardless of ethnicity or nationality. It also emphasizes the common plight of low wage, largely unskilled laborers in Thailand rather than pinpointing and selecting to assist only the Burmese migrant workers which, while necessary, does not necessarily build social cohesion or forge political alliances.

A final comment to bear in mind at the conclusion of this discussion is to consider the politics of victimhood. In other words, one must resist the urge to collapse all migrant workers into worst case scenarios and recognize the differing means for negotiation, access to resources and working conditions among migrants. Numerous cases of exploitation are documented and analyzed and the hunt and prosecution for wrong-doer begins. Yet by only focusing attention on the worst case scenarios and only talking about the exploitation at the place of work, there is a failure to address the structural inequity. “This focus [on cases] enables a denial of the materialistic context, the structural forms of power that often allow the possibility of abuse in the first place. [Thus] structural adjustment, for example, or the immigration and asylum policy that drive migrants into risking their lives are completely ignored” (Anderson, 2004: 112-113). It is critical to directly grapple with the broader cultural system that regards some types of work as less valuable or beneath respect, and challenge a global structure that produces such inequality.

It is not only the global structure or immigration and asylum policies that exacerbate the situation. There is inadequate recognition of the particular calculus of safety and risk from the perspective of migrants. As in the aforementioned case of the seafood processing factory, local authorities, perhaps even some NGOs, construct the raid on the factory as the *end* of abusive circumstances for migrants. In the weeks following the raid during which time the migrants were living at a shelter, many of them expressed interest in being released. They were grateful for not having to work at the abusive factory, but they expressed concern about length of stay at the shelter. Their mobility was restricted and they were without the possibility of generating income while they were kept at the shelter.<sup>38</sup> They will be returned to Burma after the close of legal proceedings against the factory owner, but most likely they will soon return to Thailand for the same reasons that previously propelled them across the border.

Migration invites renewed analysis of the way community is usually defined in development discourse and by extension rote references to empowerment. Migration is ultimately an interruption or series of interruptions across communities. Barber (2002: 42) writes, “Migration reveals the ways in which development can over-represent the temporal continuity of social and cultural rhythms in the local...empowerment discourses continue a ‘tradition’ of romanticizing notions of community in development writing where uncritical and untheorized reference to ‘community’ as a site for empowerment assumes social cohesion and avoids questions of social power differentials and divisions.” Barber writes about migration

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<sup>38</sup> Personal conversation with a member of the Federation Trade Unions of Burma (FTUB) who was liaising between the authorities, the migrants, and the shelter staff (2006).

from the Philippines, but her critique applies equally well for Burmese migrant communities. Barber (2002: 42) argues that “empowerment for migrants is time and context sensitive—it is contingent.” I would argue that the same holds true for safety and security. As is evident in the recent case of the seafood processing factory and counter-counter trafficking research, migrants are expressing agency that challenges the effectiveness or merit of usual interventions and development models.<sup>39</sup> A government shelter, so long as it restricts their mobility and undermines their need to work and have an income, does not represent security for migrants.

I have written about teachers, parents and school heads as part of the migrant community but they are not without agency as individuals; their decisions and actions are not necessarily enacted collectively nor is it without contradictions and differences. “When thinking about migration and empowerment, it becomes difficult to isolate empowerment as a clear-cut negotiation. Rather, empowerment is not a state or condition that once arrived at is achieved and moved on from. Empowerment is an ever-present possibility” (Barber, 2002: 42). In other words, to understand the parents’, school teachers’ and heads’ expectations of what their schools in Mae Sot can and should provide—security for children, food security, basic Thai language skills for negotiating work--one must purview the streets of Mae Sot and glance across the border to Burma. Their life in Thailand is integrally affected by the material conditions and lack of basic security in Burma. Furthermore, if the discussion only hovered at the realm of collective action and social transformation, people like Ma Nwe, who has managed to bring her children here in recent years and

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<sup>39</sup> Federation Trade Unions of Burma (2006). Report of Burmese Migrant Workers Tortured and Exploited in Seafood Processing Factory. Young and Pyne (2006) Abuse Without End.

enroll them in school, find relatively good work for herself and her husband, and register with the Thai authorities would not appear as any indicator of success. For Ma Nwe as for many others, taking action and showing agency is an iterative, non-linear process and can stretch over expanse of time and place.

One school teacher at SAW school who has been active in politics for close to 30 years shared his opinion that some of the schools in Mae Sot that were teaching only in Karen or Shan languages should switch to Burmese and have the children learn the mother language at home. He insisted this was the general necessity for a future democratic, federalist Burma. His comments seemed dissonant with the opinions of parents who were more concerned about the teaching of Thai language in order to have more safety and opportunities in Thailand. Some did express concern that their children would no longer know their own language or culture but their emphasis was on mitigating the risks of the immediate not long term circumstances.

Barber (2002) urges theorists who tether empowerment to collective political action and social transformation to see the unique configurations of decision-making and action that migration poses. Barber's (2002) caution seems particularly relevant for this situation. She argues that positional politics "push beyond simple binary explanations about individual and collective action" (Barber, 2002, 43). There is of course a role for collective action and better migrant-centered policy-making, but one must not insist it stems from all pockets of the migrant community. In other words, educational planning relevant to the needs of a country in transition—from civil war to reconciliation, from military to democratic civilian rule—while important and should be discussed among international non-governmental organizations, donors and

community-based organizations engaged in educational provision for refugees and migrants, there is another more immediate sphere to tackle. The cycle of poverty that is being perpetuated in part by low wages, horrific working conditions and policies that talk about migration as *it should be*, not how it is, must be severed now.

*Policy Implications: The nature and conditions of work*

The focus must not only be on movement within or across national borders; the nature and conditions of work must also be discussed in more complex terms. The working conditions can vary by sector and type of employment. Many Burmese domestic workers in Thailand suffer from physical abuse, sleep deprivation, work without pay and sexual assault (Panam, Zaw et al., 2004). There is an inherently gendered dimension to domestic work. “Workers do not simply substitute for the work of their female employers. There is no total amount of domestic work that can be divided fairly between equal partners, or hived off to someone who is paid to do it. There is always more domestic work to be done. The divorcing of management from labour has consequences on the practical daily level: standards go up when one does not have to do the work oneself” (Anderson, 2004: 109). Anderson (2004) also states that beyond functions such as distribution and preparation of food, sustaining basic cleanliness and child-rearing, domestic work is as well about reproduction of lifestyle and, most importantly, of status. “Nobody has to have stripped pine floorboards, hand-wash only silk shirts or dust-gathering ornaments. These all create domestic work, yet they affirm the status of the household, its class, its access to resources of finances and personnel (Anderson, 2004: 110). A specific recommendation is to organize organizations in response to specific sectoral priorities. Consider, for



instance, organizations working in close collaboration to support domestic migrant workers, such as Kalayaan and UWA. UWA is an especially significant example of an effective organization responding to migration and globalization. From the start it was a new type of organization for migrants because, rather than prioritizing country of origin or ethnicity of the worker, it emphasizes legal status and type of employment. In other words, workers “share experiences across boundaries (of nationality, country of reception) with a view to identifying common problems” (Anderson, 2004: 107). UWA is an exemplar of how worker rights organizations must globalize their political responses to reflect the pressures of the world economy on the individual worker.

Children and young people’s labor is another complex issue confronting the migrant community. Much advocacy, research and argumentation has been made that child labor has destructive impact on some characteristics of children’s health and be an insurmountable obstacle to educational access (Nizan, 2004). A common well-intentioned assertion is also that children ought to have childhoods, a remark that tacitly presumes childhood and youth, to be of value and happiness, are without work. There has been much critique written about whether the current human rights discourse on children’s rights leans too heavily towards a Western ideal type of childhood. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) explicitly sets qualitative boundaries and chronological definition of childhood. According to the Convention, a child is “every human being below the age of the eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (article 1). The distinction as to what constitutes childhood and adulthood at age 18 is at best an

arbitrary demarcation and at worst belies lived realities of vast numbers of young people. This gap has been acknowledged in recent years, in particular arising from discussions about the needs of youth living in emergency settings. The Convention on the Rights of the Child as it is drafted represents only a sliver of the world populations' experiences and cultures. Cultures the world over differently determine when a child becomes an adult and it is not always decided by chronological age but marital status or a particular rite of passage.

The United Nations agencies that recognize differences between childhood and adulthood make the following distinctions: "young people" range in age from ten to 24; youth range in age from 15 to 20 four; adolescents range in age from 10 to 19 (Bethke, 2004). Some non-governmental organizations have their own age categories for youth; the Lutheran World Foundation, for instance, designates anyone between the ages of seven to 40 as youth (Sommers, 2002). Lowicki (2000) notes the difficulty of drawing categorical markers on the constitution of adolescence, and adds a significant dimension to this discussion when she remarks that the term adolescent is defined in English as a person "in transition from puberty to adulthood" (3) and that this definition is fundamentally rooted in "Western theories of child development that may not apply cross-culturally" (3). The gist of this critique is not to discount the stark realities of child labor, only to recognize the complexities.

Young people work for their own and their families' survival and "child labor sets a pattern for the reproduction of poverty in that it stunts the physical and intellectual development of a whole generation of workers, who as adults will be forced to work in low-paid and low-skilled jobs" (Nizan, 2004: 137). Yet the reality

is children and youth are working both for pay and for non-wage labor to support themselves and their families. The construction of childhood as a tender life phase shielded from the responsibilities of work and family life is a false and problematic supposition. Some of the child labor issues are framed as well by an implicit concern about maintaining the employment pool for adult workers and to counter the practice of private firms that use younger workers to lower wages and make more difficult efforts by workers to collectively organize better wages and working conditions.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, if by polarizing the debate about work and school, we are denying the immediate material needs and educational rights of working children and youth then the next generation of unskilled, low-wage workers is birthed and does little to improve the nature and conditions of labor.

According to International Labor Organization (2002), there were 211 million children between the ages of five and 14 who were engaged in economic activity in the year 2002. Economic activity is defined broadly in this instance and includes work in the informal sector, unpaid work and illegal work. ILO does not equate this term with exploitative child labor which the 1973 ILO Minimum Age Convention determined must be eradicated. The 211 million children engaged in economic activity constitute nearly one-fifth of all children in this age group around the world. If the age bracket were extended to age 17, the total number of economically-active young people increases to 352 million. Young people and children may be marginalized in the economic sphere of community life by working for little to no

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<sup>40</sup> I discussed the issue of child labor and alternative approaches to work/school for migrant children with a former AFL/CIO senior staff member who now works in a different capacity in Thailand. He argued about the dangers of work and its threats to children's social, physical and psychological development. He also discussed the need for jobs of "healthy men and women."

direct compensation, but they are not marginal to the collective well-being of their families, be it girls who provide sibling care and do housework or children who labor alongside parents (Tietjen, 1991; Tomasevski, 2003). In many places around the world, economic needs and family responsibilities are significant hurdles in the way of retention and school completion (Tietjen, 1991; Tomasevski, 2003). This may prove to be especially significant in the case of internally displaced children, in particular those from women-headed households (Mooney and French, 2005); their labor and contribution at home and with income-generation activities are no more pressing than for other poor children but take on a particular hue given their destabilized local or domestic settings. In addition, many children and youth in ongoing or post-emergency settings are heading households, often caring for their siblings and themselves because of displacement or the death of parents. Educational projects designed to eliminate child labor can also have unintended outcomes. A recent evaluation of one such project in an African country funded by the U.S. Agency for Development (USAID) concluded that the children who continued to attend school and stopped working still undertook wage labor during the school holidays, and often for extended hours to compensate for the time in school. In other words, the project did not so much end child labor as displace it. In addition, it found that the woman-headed households of students in that school suffered a greater burden and consequences than other families.<sup>41</sup>

One way out of this quandary is to assert that work per se should not be conflated with exploitative work conditions, nor should it be construed in polarized

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<sup>41</sup> This evaluation has only recently been completed and thus far not made public. These findings are not, however, unique and can be corroborated by other organizations' and peoples' work.

opposition to schooling. Children often contribute in financial and non-financial ways to the family's survival. Work must be regarded as a meaningful activity; it can also be a positive socializing process in which children can develop "a sense of belonging and a sense of responsibility both for him or herself and for the wider family unit" (Nizan, 2004: 142). The problem is that globalization and local economic contexts "shifts the purpose of the child's work away from a socializing and education function to that of earning a wage" (Nizan, 2004: 142). Another important discussion to continue in this discourse is to stop quibbling over whether a child is only and always "a child." In other words, the young are harboring composite or hybrid identities based on complex, interlocking economic and social processes at work in the community. They are simultaneously and interchangeably workers, students, children, sibling, and migrant; they are from Burma but not necessarily part of the imagined national community.

Several educational outreach programs designed to reach vulnerable, working children exist now that integrates work demands and with schooling. Demonizing work per se moves us further away from core protection and educational objectives. Worse, poor parents are also deemed lacking in sound judgment or care for children but poverty is not a character flaw but a structural issue. According to Manokha (2004: 221), exploitation of workers and child labor in sweatshops of multinational corporations (MNCs) in developing countries "must be seen against the background of poverty in these states and the competition between them for foreign investment. The MNCs have been able to find cheap labor in poor Third World countries where rates of unemployment and poverty are so high that even sweatshops with long

working hours, appalling conditions and little pay seem a better option for many laborers than not working at all or than sticking with traditional livelihoods.” This point underscores the necessity of cutting the poverty cycle for adults and the young alike.

Boyden (2005) argues that a child’s work creates much needed income for the household and provides important learning opportunities and greater social integration. She cites recent research from the University of Oxford that assert working children often have better nutrition and have, contrary to popular assumptions, increased chances of attending school. Furthermore, this research--conducted in Ethiopia, Bolivia and India--suggests that in addition to work preventing school attendance and learning, frustration with curricula considered irrelevant and poor quality teaching also push children out of schools. Boyden (2005) argues against generic policy objectives that ban children working. Getting families and children out of poverty may most require improving quality of schools, ensuring safe working conditions, and providing living wages. The challenge is to have work that is not exploitative or dangerous.

A little girl in the third standard quietly handed me a tiny pink beaded keychain shaped like a handbag one afternoon at the close of the school day. I found her later with a small cluster of third and fourth standard students creating various trinkets of pink, blue and green plastic beads as part of a small vocational program that the school organizes. The Mae Sot representative for FTUB, Ko Myaing<sup>42</sup>, who lives in the space above the office with his wife, informed me that he was trying to devise ways of providing the students with some basic skills for simple income-

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<sup>42</sup> This is not his real name.

generation activities but offered, rather reflectively, that it may not be sufficient. It is apparent he is struggling to latch the twin issues of children's contribution to family income and educational opportunities. He sheepishly and rhetorically asked me on another occasion, "When is it child labor and when is it vocational training?" signaling that financial needs are scarcely met by such an activity, that he is contemplating his own responsibility and role in the process of negotiating these two issues.

In one corner of the FTUB office can be found a sewing machine of industrial size and quality, the kind used in garment factories. The Parami School was wrestling with the intractable issue of child labor and education; the sewing machine in the corner of the office attached to the Parami School was a chronic reminder of the ever-present demands of the socio-economic context outside the school yard while its idleness speaks to the lack of successful and sustainable interventions. Ko Myaing had tried to teach the children the use of this machine but clearly it sits dusty and unused for awhile. During my very first visit to Parami two years ago there had been toys made from pressed and discombobulated soda cans. All these income-generating experiments, even if they were sufficiently sustained and justified by the money generated, begs the question whether these skills, under the cloak of education, in fact reproduce social roles. Most of these children's parents in fact work in unskilled, low wage employment such as in garment factories. Are schools preparing children for their parents' lives? Ko Myaing's experiments with income-generation may ultimately prove to be problematic endeavors given that the tasks earn only subsistence income and unintentionally relegate these children to the labor force

of their parents. Nonetheless it is apparent from conversations that he is a man seeking answers for urgent questions with few resources and little expertise about the future of 170 children, each of whom on a daily basis, are being pulled further from education by an undertow of enormous financial need and the failure of political and social institutions. I inquired with U Maung about these income-generating activities in the FTUB-supported schools. Maung was clear:

We don't have the resources or the expertise to run a proper training program. For me, our approach is let the children be children; let them go to school. If they want to study, let them study. The children who are in Mae Sot should have access to schools. If they are told to work in the markets, then it'll be difficult because they won't have any other alternatives [in the long run]. It is not up to any adults to decide these children should only receive vocational training. I think most children are, almost everybody is, intelligent. They have their own ideas; they have to be given a chance just like we were given a chance. They need to be able to read and write themselves, not just reading for reading sake but for the logic. They need to at least finish middle school to have the logic.

I had several discussions with teachers, school administrators and parents who described many of the children working simply to sustain the most basic nutritional needs of the families. Work included picking a particular type of vegetable that grows in fields and along the roadside for daily consumption. Others picked at the local market for a few hours in the early morning hours not to make a significant



wage but enough to buy food for the family. Most of the working children had younger siblings just enrolling in school; many were part of female-headed households and a few of the mothers described being injured at work or recovering from illnesses. This suggests that children's need for income-generation may be chronic or temporary, in cases such as a parent's illness. The schools may do better to simply grow a garden, maintained by the children at the school that can either supplement the families' diets and, if successfully abundant, can be sold at the local market the profits of which can create a fund specifically targeted to assist families in urgent if temporary need. The criteria for these grants can be determined by the school heads, parents, students and teachers and facilitated by the supporting community-based organizations. The management of this community fund can itself be integrated into the school curriculum and organization.

More direct programming involving income-generation and employment can be organized but the capacity of the community-based organizations and the schools is insufficient to undertake this task. Furthermore, the school communities are themselves vulnerable and in compromised position to advocate and negotiate with the larger Mae Sot community of employers and others. The most practical and much needed contribution that the schools can make may be to strengthen their existing non-formal education classes designed for adults and working people. The schedule is flexible and the aim is basic literacy and numeracy. The SAW school already offers this but it should be explicitly expanded to working children who can not attend school during the regular hours. The community schools should not individually offer these classes. They should work through the existing Burmese

Migrant Workers Education Committee (BMWEC) which represents 36 schools to jointly organize a few classes in several neighborhoods and at different days and times for increased access and greater safety of people interested in attending the classes. A coordinated approach translates to more efficient use of resources and improved capacity to organize classes that mesh with the scheduling and educational needs of the most vulnerable migrants, be they under or over 18.

*Schooling Implications: Mae Sot Community Schools*

At the macro policy level the responsibility is solely on policy makers, governmental and non-governmental actors working on migration to stretch the scope of work to see security and well-being from the perspective of the migrant and to broaden their analysis beyond fenced work sites. As most interviews with parents taught me they express interest in being part of a future Burma but always spoken as if the answer should be obvious to me. I could have just as easily asked them if they would like to live in a large house with running water, electricity and abundant food. To a certain degree, this is ambivalence but one born from practicality, a knowledge gained from living in constantly shifting material conditions and a sort of acquired flexibility to better respond to changes in circumstances. Migrants' remittances, responsibilities, challenges and solutions know no borders. They have themselves developed networks of "carriers" who ferry people, money and goods. They even have ways of bringing news from Thailand to Burma and back for families who are off the telephone and electricity grid. Interventions to improve their and their children's lives should also recognize these networks as complicated pathways; they are not all exploitative networks. Furthermore, as long as laws demonize peoples'

search for income-generating work, so long as local authorities make extorting migrants and as long as interventions look only to future returns and not immediate concerns, the most abusive aspects of these social and financial networks, the “traffickers” will thrive.

At the level of the local migrant community school, the educational interventions need to step beyond treating their schools as a replication of the formal school system in Burma. The schools do not yet realize their greatest offering may be in non-formal educational options for children and adults. It is a critical perspective shift to move away from the traditional school set-up to becoming more of a community focal point for educational opportunities, resource mobilization, even advocacy with local authorities. Were the school leaders and supporting community-based organizations to undergo this perspective shift the schools can become learning spaces for children and adults alike. There are also differences between migrants that are important to recognize. Many of the school heads and community-based organizations are run by politically active people who fled Burma after the 1988 democracy uprising, most having some university education and having come from largely urban backgrounds. The parents, on the other hand, have largely had some primary, at most secondary, schooling and come from more rural areas. Furthermore, it is more likely that the school heads and community-based organization representatives, rather than the rural poor, who have access to the third-country resettlement process for their more political activities. The former is easier to identify as refugees and the latter are categorized as migrants. These distinctions are not insignificant.

As it is, the schools are unable to provide certification that is currently recognized by the Thai or Burmese governments and, although certification is a critical issue for reintegration and return in the future, the current situation demands non-traditional, innovative approaches. The basic literacy needs of the children are not being met, but neither are they for adults in the migrant community. Alternative approaches such as accelerated learning programs that compress six years of schooling to three may be beneficial to address the basic education needs for a transient population of all ages. Accelerated learning programs for refugees, as detailed in the education for emergencies literature, have much to offer migrant children in particular those who are older, have irregularly attended schools in the past, and are constrained by other schooling impediments. The migrant community schools in Mae Sot would be improved by grappling more directly with the type of community they serve and of which they are a part. Even where the students do not move away from Mae Sot, the harsh realities of poverty produce irregular attendance and a school environment that suggests survival amidst chronic emergencies. In such a space, basic literacy is safety and providing children and adults with it is an urgent necessity. As U Maung, head of FTUB, explains, “Unless the workers in the developing countries or the third world are helped in their education, are able to stand for their own for their own rights, I don’t think there’s a chance of anyone surviving within the workplace.”

As discussed in the aforementioned sub-section, sewing and making beaded key chains are not solutions, but creating opportunities for the children to find multiple ways to sustain themselves and their families and go to school may be the

way forward. The school can play an important role as negotiator and advocate at the community level. FTUB and Parami School have, for example, developed relationships with local employers in Mae Sot. I recently met a young man, age fourteen, who is working as an apprentice in a garage. FTUB and the teachers from the Parami School check on him regularly. He wants to continue with school but sees his current situation as a choice between work and school. It is difficult and fraught with tentative trust-building but working with employers to negotiate paid apprenticeships, working hours and regular work site visits is the way forward for youth and children who are facing limited choices. While this does not remedy structural inequities, it will ease the burden of poverty on individuals and their families.

Improving material conditions for individuals is not less urgent than demanding for systemic change. The globalized world offers opportunities for new kinds of collaborations in which information and knowledge travel bilaterally rather than unilaterally. U Maung, secretary general of FTUB, describes their strategy:

I've been talking to people and what we've found is that workers and unions in developed places often need our help. All the jobs are coming here. The phone calls in America are being done in Karachi and Bombay. The impact of globalization does not just stop with the top line money earners but gets down to the workers environment. The working environment will be skipping from America to Australia to Hong Kong to Burma to China to Cambodia to Laos. We need to get workers in this part of the world updated, it can be done, not that

easily but I would say, it is not that difficult because the electronic age is here. We have the capacity to link up with each other within the hour. This is what the multinationals are doing; this is what the workers should be doing. It used to be the unions strategized in terms of ‘turf’, but you can not do that. We should keep a watch on multinationals and see what they’re doing in [other places], such as Philippines, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. This can be sent back to America and American workers can send back [information] to us. If we have this kind of information exchange, then we can have education exchange and exchange of current salaries and wages. This becomes public access, and then everybody can talk to the companies at the same time. And that would be something that would help the workers of the world. We hope we can be that for Burma. We have studied some of the methods on how to cope with the multinationals. We are trying to help the Thai trade unions also.

The political engagement and collective action U Maung is describing will require disrupting the cycle of poverty that enmeshes migrant children and their families if enough to achieve basic literacy. Poor families require better options than those which posit schooling and work as binary options, and community-based organizations and NGOs must create interventions that help negotiate the terms of work so it is safe, transmits skills and provides a living wage. People may be labeled “internally displaced persons” on one side of the national border then “refugee” or “migrant worker” when they cross it, but the individual striding across this mythical

threshold—the cartographic dotted line—carries on his or her back the same set of goals: they wish to be safe; they want to take care of themselves and their families; and they want to improve their material circumstances and to have better options. Until we give due acknowledgement to these most basic and crucial of human desires, migration will continue to be dissected in different agency corridors as a humanitarian, counter-trafficking or labor issue, rather than a complex phenomenon rooted in the most basic of human rights. National borders were drawn arbitrarily, but the right to free movement is not.

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