

Acknowledgments

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Abstract

This master thesis is based on a field work conducted in Thailand with migrant and refugee children from Burma belonging to the ethnic minority of the Karen people. One urban school for migrant children and one rural refugee camp school served as research sites. The study explores the daily life experiences of children aged 8 – 13, with main focus on their school life. Various methods such as observation, essay writing, drawing and photography were used in order to search for the children's own perspectives on their life worlds. Through these methods, the children were able to express their ideas about their present and future lives.

Within 'the social studies of childhood', children are viewed as social agents and competent human beings. The thesis highlights the meaning of school from the children's perspectives, as well as issues of social relationship, place identity and national identity. The study found that the children's everyday lives consisted of school, work and play. The migrant children and the refugee children lived different lives, and consequently perceived their lives differently. School was meaningful for both the migrant children and the refugee children in the present. The children living in the refugee camp also emphasized that education was important for the future. The thesis therefore argues that if we are to acknowledge children's perspectives of themselves and their life worlds, both present time and the future is of importance. Children are both human beings *and* adult becomings.

The research also found that the refugee camp children appeared to be more engaged with ideas about the 'Karen nation'. However, their understanding of the Karen nation seemed to be more connected to local place than to their 'homeland', Karen state in Burma. Furthermore, the refugee children showed a great commitment to their 'Karen people', meaning the refugees in the camp. The meaning of school was also connected to the responsibility they felt towards the other camp residents: They wanted education to be able to help 'their people' and to 'give back'.

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List of acronyms

BVP = Burma Volunteer program

CIAWF = CIA, The World Fact book

DKBA = The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army

HRW = Human Rights Watch

ICRC = International Committee of the Red Cross

IDP = Internally Displaced Person

IOM = International Organization for Migration

KED = Karen Education Committee

KNA = The Karen National Association

KNLA = Karen National Liberation Army

KNU = Karen National Union

KRCEE = The Karen Refugee Committee - Education Entity

KWO = Karen Women Organisation

MOE = Thai Ministry of Education

MRGI = Minority Rights Group International

NGO = Non-Governmental Organisation

OHCHR = Office of the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights

SLORC = State Law and Order Restoration Council

SPDC = State Peace and Development Council

SMRU = Shoklo Malaria Research

SNL = Store Norske Leksikon

SSB = Statistisk sentralbyrå (Statistics Norway)

TBBC = The Thailand Burma Border Consortium

TMR = Thailand Migration Report

UN = United Nation

UNCRC = United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child

UNESCO = United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNHCR = United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF = United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

UNTC = United Nations Treaty Collection

USD = US dollar

WET = World Education Thailand

WCRWC = Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children

WHO = World Health Organization

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Choice of topic

I chose Thailand as the field work site for my master thesis, and the topic for my research to be: *Daily life experiences among Karen migrant and refugee children from Burma living in Thailand*. The Karen people are one of Burma's many ethnic minority groups. In this introduction chapter I will present my background and why I chose this particular field site in search for *children's perspectives on their daily lives*. Thereafter the place for my field work will be presented, and my aim for the study as well as the research questions will be elaborated. In the last part of this chapter I present the structure of my master thesis.

Education is of great interest to me, and with my background as a teacher it was natural for me to choose schools as sites for my field work studies. Being a teacher for immigrants in Norway I have worked with adults and young people from many different countries in the *global South*. I have also worked for years as a teacher in Norwegian primary and secondary school. When following a Master Programme in Childhood Studies I have learned about children, childhood and development in the South. Intercultural communication is another main interest for me, and also a relevant topic in my job as a teacher. I chose Asia and the border area between Thailand and Burma as my field site. From my work as a teacher I know Karen adults and teenagers who have lived in this area before they came to Norway. My master thesis gave me an opportunity to learn more about their background.

1.1 The Thailand/Burma border area

During my field work I spent 5 weeks in July and August 2010 in a town in Thailand, near the border to Burma. The town's has approximately 120 000 inhabitants, and an estimate of 60 – 70% of the population are Burmese (BVP, 2012). Legal and illegal migrants work in factories, in domestic work, service and agriculture in the town and surrounding areas (IOM, 2011).

The Burmese migrant workers are the town's low-cast. To illustrate this I will share an experience I had one day I was cycling around town on a rented bike. I was heading for a hotel outside town to go for a swim. As I did not know how to find my way, I asked a young woman on a scooter if she could tell me where to go. She was kind to drive together with me

for a few kilometres, to show me the way. She drove first, and waited for me until I could catch her up with my bike. I had taken some of her time, and therefore I offered her a little money as thanks. She refused to take my money and replied: "*I am a Thai*". I wondered what she meant by that. It took me some time before I understood the meaning of her answer: She thought I had reckoned her to be a Burmese. If she had been a Burmese, she would have needed the money. Being a Thai, she did not need it.

1.2 Migrants and refugees in the border area

The country known as Burma is now also known as Myanmar. The military government in Burma changed the official name to Myanmar in 1989, and the name Myanmar is now commonly used throughout the world. However, many refuse to accept the name Myanmar, and Burma is still much in use. In this thesis I will mostly use Burma as this was the name commonly used by the people I met in Thailand. Sometimes the name Myanmar will occur.

In Burma a civil war has been going on for decades between different ethnic groups and the Burmese government army. The ethnic conflict in Burma is one of the world's forgotten conflicts, and the refugee situation in Thailand is one of the most protracted in the world (Lorch & Will, 2009). The conflict has forced hundreds of thousands of people to cross the border to Thailand during the last four decades. The children I met in Thailand or their parents had fled or migrated from Burma and now they live as migrants or refugees near the border to Burma. Some people have been living in refugee camps in Thailand since the 1980's, others have come lately.

1.3 Aim of research

Children in many places in the global South live their lives far from the carefree, playful childhood lived by many children in the global North (Abebe, 2007). Idealised notions of a universal and 'proper childhood' has neglected the lives of children within many cultures around the world (Montgomery, 2001). I wanted to go to the global South to meet children living in a cultural context very different from my own to learn from children living 'other childhoods'. How is it to live as migrant and refugee children? How do the migrant and refugee children perceive the world they live in? In this research I hoped to learn about the daily experiences of Karen migrant and refugee children who come from Burma and live in Thailand.

The aim with the research was to find out how children in this context experience their life worlds and how they put meaning into it. I searched for the children's own perspectives on their lives, based on a view that children are not passive victims, they are "*active agents in their own environment; they engage with the world around them*" (Boyden & Mann, 2005, p. 5). I wanted the children's *voices* to be heard.

I decided to use schools as locations for my data collection, and got permission to do research in two schools. The first was a school for Karen migrant children in an urban area, and the other in a rural refugee camp. I went to the field with an open approach, wanting to know how the school children perceived their everyday lives, with a main focus on *the meaning of school*. Using an open methodological approach gave me an opportunity to see *what emerged in the field*. I conducted workshops with 51 children, and I used multiple methods to give the children the possibility to voice their opinions in different ways. In search for the meaning of school I also needed to know more about the context the children lived in. Therefore I interviewed school principals, had informal conversations with teachers and other adults, studied school curriculum and interviewed aid-workers in NGO's engaged in the migrant – and refugee schools in the area. This gave me additional knowledge and understanding of the school situation and the lives of the children.

1.4 Research questions

What is the meaning of school for Karen children aged 10 – 13, living as migrants or refugees in Thailand?

This was my original research question and what I try to answer in this thesis. My aim was to get an understanding of the children's everyday lives, with a main focus on schooling. I searched for the children's ideas about their lives here and now and their thoughts about the future, as the meaning of school is often related to the time to come and adult life.

The children in the migrant school and in the refugee camp school constructed their everyday lives both similarly and differently. They told about how they related to people, to the place they lived and to their ethnic belonging. These issues raised by the children turned my focus to explore the notions *national identities* and a *place identity*. Identity and belonging will

therefore also be a focus in my thesis, and in addition to my original research question I raise a second research question:

How do Karen migrants and refugees from Burma living in Thailand construct their social identities in the time being and in the future?

1.5 The structure of the thesis

My thesis consists of eight chapters. After this introduction chapter the background chapter follows, which contains a presentation of the historical and political background that led hundreds of thousands of people to flee and migrate from Burma to Thailand. In the background chapter I will also present the school situation for refugee and migrant children in the border area, and I will present the two schools I visited. The third chapter is the theory chapter, where I will present the background for the modern western conceptualisation of childhood, relate my thesis to the social studies of childhood and present the theoretical concepts most interesting for my research. I focus on childhood in the global South, migrants and refugees, Karen nationalism as well as theories on identity.

In the fourth chapter, the methodology chapter, I present my methodological approach and explain and discuss the research tools I have used in my study. I also discuss ethical concerns and my research role. The last part of the methodology chapter is about data analysis and challenges related to data analysis. The two next chapters, chapter five and six are the analysis chapters. Chapter five will be about the issues I had planned to explore; the children's everyday lives, and the meaning of school, related to my first research question. In chapter six I will analyse some of the issues put forward by the children, and my second research question will be in focus here. Chapter seven is devoted to the discussion on the topics I found most interesting and relevant in my study. In chapter eight, the conclusion chapter, I will sum up and conclude my discussion and give some final remarks on my two main research questions. The thesis ends with a few words about the new situation in Burma after 2010 and how this may influence the situation for the migrant and refugee children.

Chapter 2: Background

2.0 Introduction

The field work for my master thesis was done in Thailand, by the border to Burma. The children I met in a migrant school and in a refugee camp school all belong to the Karen people, the second largest ethnic minority group in Burma. Since the 1980's hundreds of thousands of Burmese people have fled or migrated over the border to Thailand in. Some have fled from forced labour, land confiscation, burned down villages, sexual abuse, torture, mass killings and other atrocities (HRW, 2012). Others have legally or illegally migrated to Thailand in search for jobs and education. Illegal migrants in Thailand risk being fined, jailed or in the worst case, being sent back to Burma (IOM, 2011). Some of the Burmese have found shelter in one of the many refugee camps along the border. The refugee situation for Burmese people in Thailand is one of the most protracted in the world. A generation of people have lived their entire lives in refugee camps, and many of the camp residents belong to the Karen ethnic group.

In this chapter I will present the context where I did my field work. Childhood and children's lives cannot be isolated from the social and cultural context which they live in (Prout & James, 1990). I start with presenting Burma and the background for the ethnic conflict. Thereafter, I turn to the situation for the Burmese migrants and refugees living in the border area in Thailand, focusing mainly on children and education. The last part of this chapter describes the two schools that I visited in Thailand.

2.1 Burma

Burma is a South Asian country which borders to Bangladesh in the west, India in the north and west, China in the north and east, Laos and Thailand in the east and the Indian Ocean in the south. Burma/Myanmar is divided in 7 different states and 7 regions (Divisions). Yangon used to be the capital city, but the government established a new capital in 2005, Naypidaw, which lies in the centre of the country.

Approximately 50 – 55 million people live in Burma (CIAWF, 2012). The country has more than a hundred different ethnic groups, where the Burman (Bamar) group consists of around 60 % of the population (MRGI, 2007). Among the other ethnic groups, the Shan people are the largest, and the Karen people the second largest. 70 % of the population in Burma are

farmers. The country is rich on natural resources like oil, gas, minerals and timber (CIAWF, 2012). The climate is tropical with a very hot and humid season during summer (June to September). In the higher mountain regions, the temperature is lower. During winter time, (December to April) the weather is cooler and dryer. Burma is exposed to natural disasters like earthquakes, floods, cyclones, landslides and sometimes also to drought. The border to Thailand is 2000 kilometres long.

Burma got its independence from Great Britain in 1948, and the federal state of Burma was established. The 1947 Panglong conference stated equal political rights for all the ethnic groups in the country and “*paved the way for the new Union of Burma*” (Pedersen, 2008). However, the ethnic minority leaders throughout the country were gradually excluded from power after independence, and the local leaders soon lost all their former political influence over the local communities. The Burman majority centralised political power and became the dominant group in the army and in all other national political institutions (Pedersen, 2008). The many ethnic minority groups started their militant resistance, and they have been fighting the Burmese army more or less continuously ever since (SNL, 2011).

After independence rivalling Burman communist groups led the country into political unrest, and in 1962 the military made a coup. The revolutionary council, established by the new military junta, wanted to build the country’s politics on a Buddhist version of socialism. Institutions like schools were nationalised, and Burmese became the only legitimate language (Sawade, 2009). The borders were closed for foreign investments and the military power increased.

After a referendum in 1974 a new constitution was founded, and a socialist one party state was established. The economic policies led the country into great problems during the 1970’s and 1980’s. In 1988 the economic problems resulted in mass demonstrations and general strikes initiated by students, monks and workers. Demonstrations broke out throughout the country, and the military answered with killing thousands of peaceful demonstrators (Schock, 1999). The strongest spokesperson for the democratic, anti-government movement was Aung San Suu Kyi. She is the daughter of General Aung San, one of the Burmese independence leaders. The country was almost thrown into anarchy when the military regime managed to reorganise and reconstitute their power under the name of ‘State Law and Order Restoration Council’ (SLORC). SLORC forced the hungry, striking workers back to job (Schock, 1999).

The military regime held its grip over Burma, and when the elections for the National assembly was held in Burma in 1990, SLORC hoped this would lead to more foreign aid in to the country and a stronger international legitimacy for the regime (Schock, 1999). Having arrested opposition leaders in months before the election, SLORC was confident that they would win (Schock, 1999). However, The National League Party with its leader Aung San Suu Kyi got 60 % of the votes. The military regime, did not accept the election results, SLORC refused to give away its power, and Aung San Sui Kyi was placed under house arrest. In 1997 a new military government was established under the name of 'The State Peace and Development Council' (SPDC) (SNL, 2011). They governed the country until the first election in 20 years was held, in November 2010.

2.2 Ethnic conflict and the Karen people

One of the ethnic groups that are most heavily affected by the ethnic conflict in Burma is the Karen people, who today consist of 4 – 7 million people (CIAWF, 2012; KNU, 2012). The Karen people are believed to have migrated to Burma from Tibet and China. When they moved south is uncertain, however by the 18th century they were populating the mountain areas of the central and eastern part of Burma, now known as Karen state (MRGI, 2007). Most of the Karen people belong to either the Skaw Karen language group who are now mostly Christian, or the Pwo Karen group who mostly consists of Buddhists. The vast majority of the Karen people live in Karen state and a minor group lives as a small ethnic minority in Thailand.

To understand the origin of the ethnic conflict between Burma and the Karen people it is necessary to go back to the time of colonisation. Burma used to be a British colony, and on the heels of the colonists the Christian missionaries arrived. The first American Baptist missionaries came to Burma in 1813 (Rajah, 2002). They tried unsuccessfully to convert the Burman population from Buddhism to Christianity. Then the missionaries turned to the Karen people with their mission instead, and here they had much more success (Rajah, 2002). The missionaries tried to link Karen myths to biblical stories, claiming the Karen people to be "*descendants of one of the 'ten lost tribes of Israel'*" (Rajah, 2002, p. 525). The missionaries' interpretation of the Karen myths offered the Karen people "*a distinctive collective identity and migratory 'history' of their own*" (Rajah, 2002, p. 526). This focus on their past and their common origin nurtured a rising national consciousness among the Karen people (Rajah,

2002). The British brought education as well as Christianity to the Karen people, and in 1881 an educated Christian Karen elite formed The Karen National Association (KNA) (Brown, 1988; Rajah, 2002). KNA's purpose was "*to promote Karen identity, leadership, education and writing and to bring about the social and economic advancement of the Karen peoples*" (Smith in Rajah, 2002, p. 527) Through the KNA the idea of the Karen people as a nation was established (Rajah, 2002). In 1886, when the first Burman anti-British rebellion broke out many Karen fought together with the British to suppress the Burman insurgency.

After independence in 1948, the ethnic minorities did not get their political rights as was promised in the Panglong agreement (Pedersen, 2008). The Karen leaders, mostly Christian, reacted in different ways, some converted to Buddhism and assimilated to the dominant culture, thus they were given positions in state institutions. Other Karen leaders formed the political party Karen National Union (KNU) and started the struggle against the Burmese government (Brown, 1988). KNU claimed Karen autonomy over the territory Karen state. (Rajah, 2002). The same right should be given to all the other ethnic groups within a federal democratic union (Rajah, 2002). The fight against the Burmese army started. Karen and other ethnic groups controlled much of the border area east in Burma until the 1970's when the Burmese army pushed KNU closer to the Thai border (TBBC, 2007). The fighting resulted in temporary refugee streams across the border to Thailand during the dry seasons when the Burmese army were attacking. In the rainy seasons the Burmese withdrew and the refugees returned to their villages in Karen state.

In 1984 the Burmese government started a heavy military offensive to try to get control over Karen state. Thousands of Karen people and other ethnic groups (Shan, Mon, Karenni among others) fled their homes and many crossed the border to Thailand. The first refugee camps were established on the Thai side of the border (TBBC, 2007). In 1995 conflicts within KNU resulted in a split up among the Karen, and The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) was established. Fighting between the two Karen groups resulted in another stream of refugees across the border (Sawade, 2009).

2.3 Migrants and refugees, from Burma to Thailand

Migrants are people who flee their country and get a status as a refugee, or people who for any other reason move legally or illegally across a national border. *Refugees* are people who have crossed a national border because they may be or have been persecuted in their homeland (OHCHR, 1951). A refugee is reckoned to be a person under protection of the United Nations High Commissionaire of Refugees (UNHCR). The people who live as refugees in the many refugee camps along the Thai/ Burma border are not acknowledged as refugees by the Thai government, but classified as illegal immigrants or displaced people. It is not easy to distinguish between migrants and refugees in this area (Arnold, 2005). Many of the migrants have left their homes in Burma because they have been exposed to the same kind of abuses as the people living inside the refugee camps. People move in and out of refugee camps. Inside them they get protection, food and accommodation, outside the camps they search for jobs (IOM, 2011). Some people move back and forth across the border to Burma. There are also migrants who move to other places in Thailand or to other countries in search for jobs (Fox, 2009). Many migrants settle down in Thailand and some of the refugees resettle in a third country (IOM, 2011).

In this thesis the term *migrant* will mostly mean Burmese people who live outside the refugee camps and the term *refugee* will mostly mean people living inside a refugee camp. Many Burmese living as migrants in Thailand are stateless, both those living in the refugee camps and those living as migrants outside the camps (IOM, 2011). Some of the migrant and refugee children living in this area may have been exposed to atrocities before they came to Thailand.

2.3.1 Refugees under protection of the UNHCR

In 1984 the Thai government let the Burmese refugees build temporary shelter in 9 camps along the border (TBBC, 2007). The United Nations, as well as other international and local humanitarian organisations has been heavily involved in the area since then, giving help to the Burmese refugees in Thailand as well as to the hundreds of thousands internally displaced people (IDP's) in Burma. Today there are around 100 000 registered refugees and more than 30 000 unregistered residents from Burma living in the refugee camps in Thailand (TBBC, 2011). More than 90% of the people in the refugee camps come from rural areas in Burma. In most of the camps, the Karen people are the dominant ethnic group (Oh & Van Der Stouwe, 2008).

The people who live in the refugee camps have become completely dependent on external help (IOM, 2011). Local organisations and international non-governmental organizations (NGO's) support the camp residents with education, health care, shelter and food (Oh, 2010). The refugees are secured their basic needs; however, the camps are overcrowded, unemployment is widespread and there are limited possibilities for education and development (KWO, 2012). People in the camps are afraid that the Thai authorities will send them back to Burma (KWO, 2012). Several times the Burmese army and allied military groups have crossed the border, attacked and burned down camps in Thailand, leaving thousands of refugees homeless (HRW, 2012).

The Thai authorities do not allow the camp residents to travel outside the camp area without permission. If they leave the camps to try to get employment they will risk losing their status as registered displaced persons (IOM, 2011). Even if it is illegal, in a survey from 2010, 9, 3% out of more than 2400 residents in 7 of the camps, say that "*day labour outside camp*" is their main occupation (Oh, 2010, p. 7). As many as 40 % of the camp residents leave the restricted areas to look for jobs outside the camp (IOM, 2011). A camp resident described the situation like this: "*We have no money in camp. If we go out for work, we are paid very little. Sometimes we're not paid at all, but you don't dare to complain or you could be arrested and charged with illegal entry*" (Doo, 2010). Two thirds of the population in the camps earn 2 Euros or less per month (IOM, 2011).

In 2004 and 2005 there was an official registration of the people living in the 9 refugee camps. All camp residents at that time were given the status as refugees under protection of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (TBBC, 2011). Since 2005 the refugees have been permitted to apply for resettlement in a third country (IOM, 2011). In the period from 2004 to 2010 more than 68 000 residents from the camps in Thailand have been resettled through the UNHCR resettlement program (IOM, 2011). Most of the refugees have moved to USA, and more than 3000 have come to Norway (SSB, 2012). However, the 60 000 people who have sought refuge in the camps after the UNHCR offensive in 2004/2005, have not received any refugee status, and therefore they have no option to move to a third country (TBBC, 2011). The need for resettlement is ten times the number that has got resettlement, and some people have been living in the refugee camps for more than 20 years (IOM, 2011).

2.3.2 Statelessness and displaced persons

As a result of the ethnic conflict, a great amount of people living inside Burma are denied citizenship. Issuing a passport in Burma is a difficult process (Landinfo, 2010). Many of the refugees and migrants who cross the border to Thailand lack legal documents. In addition to the approximately 150 000 refugees in the camps there are around 200 000 refugees in Thailand living outside the camps (IOM, 2011). However, the number of migrants is much higher. There is an estimate of around 1, 3 million legal migrants from Burma living in Thailand and maybe around 2 million illegal migrants all together in Thailand, mostly from Burma (Sawade, 2009; IOM, 2011). Not having papers leave people exposed to exploitation, and illegal migrants are not able to report incidents of abuse because they are afraid of being deported (IOM, 2011).

The illegal migrants are important to the Thai economy; therefore they have been permitted temporary work (IOM, 2011). The migrant workers are cheap labour for agriculture, industry and trade in Thailand. A normal salary for a migrant worker is around 60 to 100 Thai baht (2 – 3 US dollar) a day while the minimum wage for Thai employers vary between 160 – 220 baht (Business-in-Asia, 2011; Htwee, 2011). Some of the migrants stay in Thailand only for a few months, looking for seasonal work, others are travelling through. Some migrants can be forced to cross the border while others come freely. Some of them settle down and become integrated in the Thai communities (Fox, 2009).

2.4 Education for migrants and refugees

Around 3 000 000 children in Burma do not attend school (Sawade, 2009). Many of the Karen refugee children in Thailand did not have a chance to go to school when they lived in Burma. In some parts of Eastern Burma in 2009 only 48% of the children between 5 and 13 were attending school regularly (TBBC, 2010). In some areas in Karen state, insecurity, due to the military conflict, is a main reason why children do not go to school (TBBC, 2010). Burmese SPDC soldiers target Karen schools, confiscate non Burmese school material, prohibit teaching in Karen language and destroy schools as a part of their relocation programs (Sawade, 2009). Many parents rather send their children to Thailand to get education.

The availability and quality of the schools in the refugee camps in Thailand are reckoned to be better than schools on the Burmese side (IOM, 2011). The camp residents have from the

very beginning staffed and managed the refugee camps and the schools, believing strongly in the importance of education (Oh, 2010). Around 40 000 children go to school in the 7 Karen dominated camps, and around 1600 teachers work in the schools (Paul, 2010). Approximately 46% of the population in the refugee camps are below 18 years old. The Royal Thai Government has the responsibility for the education in the camps through the Ministry of Education (MOE). Thai migration law gives *displaced persons* an administrative status as long as they stay inside the camps. If they leave the camps they are reckoned as illegal immigrants, and have no right to official enrolment in Thai schools (IOM, 2011). The refugees' chance of having an education is restricted to the schools inside the camps.

The first schools for Burmese refugees were established in Thailand around 1990, and from 1994 the Thai government allowed NGO's to work in the education sector with migrants and refugees (Sawade, 2009). The schools in the refugee camps are supported by UN-related organisations as well as local and international NGO's. The main actor in the Karen dominated refugee camps is a Dutch NGO named ZOA. The first schools for Burmese migrants living outside the refugee camps were also established in the early 1990's (Sawade, 2009). In these schools, the American NGO World Education Thailand (WET) is the main actor (Sawade, 2009). The Karen Refugee Committee - Education Entity (KRCEE) has developed the curriculum and certification system which is used both in the refugee camps and in many of the migrant schools. However, these education certificates are not accredited by the Thai government (Sawade, 2009).

Different international NGO's help supporting the refugee camps with school buildings, acquirement of school supplies, teacher training and teacher salary (Paul, 2010). The refugee camps have had difficulties finding educated teachers to work in the schools. Many of the teachers have been resettled in third countries, leaving a gap of competency and educated people in the refugee camps (Purkey, 2010; IOM, 2011). The lack of educated personnel is marked also in the migrant schools, and therefore they use voluntaries from the western world. In 2009 teacher training courses were started in the camps for residents who wanted to work as teachers. New teachers go through a one month training program before they start teaching in the camp schools (Paul, 2010). The salary for teachers in the refugee camps was in 2010, 700 Thai baht per month, approximately 22 US dollar (USD). If you work within the health care system in the refugee camps, your salary would be 2 or 3 times this much (Paul, 2010).

The Thai government has done much to help migrant children getting access to schools (Oh, 2010; IOM, 2011). The enrolment of migrant children has increased the last years, due to a Thai education decision from 2005 giving all children, registered or not, access to education in Thailand (IOM, 2011). In addition to all the Burmese children who attend the schools provided for the refugees and migrants from Burma more and more migrant children are enrolled in Thai government schools (Antos, 2010; IOM, 2011). However, some migrants do not send their children to the Thai schools because they fear discrimination and the possibility of being arrested and deported. Cultural barriers and lack of money are additional reasons. The economy is also a barrier for many of the migrant parents (IOM, 2011). School uniforms and books are expensive in the Thai school, therefore the parents instead send their children to migrant schools that are more affordable (Sawade, 2009).

The migrant schools are an alternative for Burmese children who often have a very low education level or do not speak Thai well enough to attend the Thai schools (IOM, 2011). There is much concern related to the quality of the migrant schools which often have very poor facilities and are very crowded (IOM, 2011). Many of the migrant schools have mostly followed the Burmese educational system, using mainly Burmese and English as the languages of instruction (IOM, 2011). The schools are also concerned with education in the migrants' own culture and language, and therefore the curricula is often a hybrid between the Burmese curriculum and the KRCEE curriculum developed in the refugee camps (Sawade, 2009). After the law from 2005, the Thai Ministry Of Education (MOE) have increased the regulation of the migrant schools, and Thai has become a compulsory language. When Thai authorities have become more engaged in the schools it can open up new educational opportunities for the migrant youth (Purkey, 2010).

Most of the Burmese children in Thailand, however, do not have access to school. The number of migrant children in Thailand not attending schools counts several hundred thousand (IOM, 2011). Migrants who send their children to Thai schools have to write a guarantee that the children will attend school, and not just follow their moving parents around, as many of the migrants do (IOM, 2011). There is an ambiguous school policy from the Thai government concerning the migrants. The MOE allow the illegal migrant children in the Thai schools, however, when they set up the school budgets they do not account for students without proper identity cards. This places a heavy economic burden on the Thai schools that allow a lot of illegal migrant students (IOM, 2011).

Education after 10th grade is very restricted, both for youth within the camps, as well as for the migrant youth (Sawade, 2009; Purkey, 2010; IOM, 2011). Some Thai post-secondary schools demand Thai citizenship from their students. In the refugee camps there are nursery schools, elementary and secondary schools, as well as some post-secondary schools and adult education. During the last few years, post-secondary educational programs for migrant youth have been established, both inside the mostly rural refugee camps and also in more urban areas (Purkey, 2010). Some of the education programs give a possibility for vocational education while other programs focus on academic skills. The first class of migrant youth graduated from high school in 2009. Illegal migrant youth who have finished school face a great risk of being abused or deported to Burma (Purkey, 2010). They may be exposed to exploitation in the labour marked with heavy burdens and low payment, as well as to systematic violence, “*extortion, unlawful arrest, detention and other kinds of exploitation in their everyday lives*” (IOM, 2011, p. 66). Women working in the domestic sector, as well as children are also vulnerable to violence and sexual abuse (IOM, 2011).

2.5 Research site

I visited two schools for Burmese children in Thailand. The first school will be called ‘the Migrant School’ in my thesis. Most of the children in this school have parents who live as legal or illegal migrants in or in the outskirts of a town near the Burmese border. There are more than 60 migrant schools in the area with all together more than 10 000 students. The other school I visited, an elementary school in a refugee camp, will be called ‘the Refugee Camp School. While the Migrant School lies in an urban area the refugee camp lies in a forest area, one hour drive from the nearest town.

2.5.1 The Migrant School

In the Migrant School all the students were children of Karen migrants. Some of the older students were migrant youth who had their parents living in Burma. All the students were Buddhists. In 2010 the school had around 400 students, aged 4 to 20 +, and consisted of classes from Kindergarten up till grade 10. The youngest students (4 – 14 years) mostly lived together with their migrant parents or other relatives, while most of the oldest students (15 – 20 + years) lived in boarding houses at the school area. Two months before my visit, the school had moved from a very crowded and noisy block in the middle of town. At the new

school, there were playgrounds around the school buildings and a lot of space to do sports and to play and stroll around.

Except from the nice out door area the school appeared to have poor facilities. There was electricity, but no tap water. Drinking water was brought in daily by an NGO, and so was also the daily lunch for students and teachers. NGO's also helped with teacher salaries, school uniforms, books and other school supplies. The youngest children had no chairs to sit on; they sat on plastic mats on the concrete floor while they had low benches to lay their books on. The school faced great financial challenges, and the school principal used a lot of his time to search for school funding. The school curriculum consisted of four languages (Burmese, Karen, English and Thai), mathematics, geography, science and Karen national culture. Computer science was also in the curriculum; however, I saw neither students nor teachers using computers in the school. The teaching languages were Karen and Burmese. School hours were from 9.00 AM to 3.00 PM, with a one and a half hours lunch break, giving the children time to play or relax.

2.5.2 The Refugee Camp School

The refugee camp lies in a very green forest area. Almost all of the houses in the crowded camp were made out of bamboo. Only a few of the houses had tap water, while most of the camp residents carried the water they needed in the household from a nearby well. Though some households had electricity, others did not. Lack of access to electricity and insufficient water supply made household work hard and time consuming. Very few people in the camp had access to television stations from satellite dishes, while more people had TV-sets which they used for watching DVD's. The school I visited had 332 students from Kindergarten to grade 4. The school buildings were also made out of bamboo, and the children sat on bamboo benches. There was no electricity and no tap water in the school. The outdoor area was very narrow and crowded, with no space to play ball or other space demanding games. The children in this school were also all Karen, some of them Christian, others Buddhists. The teaching language was Skaw Karen. The teachers who work in the schools in the refugee camps are often very young, about the same age as the oldest students (Paul, 2010). The curriculum in the Refugee Camp School seemed to be very similar to that in the Migrant School. In addition, Health Care was a teaching subject. The children went to school from

around 9.00 AM to 12.00 AM. Then the students all went home to have lunch. They returned to school after lunch at 1.00 PM and stayed in school to 3.00 PM.

In the next chapter I will present the theoretical framework related to my research.

Chapter 3: Theory

3.0 Introduction

This chapter consists of three parts. I start by looking at the background for the modern western conceptualising of childhood. Ideas about children and childhood have differed throughout time and space. The 18th century romantic philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau's ideas of the *natural* and *innocent* child have had great influence on the way children are viewed in western culture (Woodhead & Montgomery, 2002). Together with 20th century's ideas about a *universal child*, western constructs of childhood have been exported to the rest of the world through globalisation. Idealised norms of a care free *proper childhood*, consisting of play and school do not provide righteousness for children living in the global South (Kesby, Gwanzura-Ottmoller, & Chizororo, 2006). Early studies by social anthropologists support the ideas in the *social studies of childhood*, that childhood is constructed and not universal (Prout & James, 1990).

When presenting some of the theoretical framework in the *new social studies of childhood*, I found the concepts *human beings* and *human becomings* especially paramount in my thesis, where I search for the children's *meaning of school*. School is important in the time being as well as a means for a future adult life. The children I met in a refugee camp had clear images of themselves in their future lives, and highlighted the necessity for education. Some theorists claim the importance of viewing children both as human beings and human becomings. I found interesting perspectives both in Nick Lee's writings (1998; 2001), as well as in Lesley Ann Gallacher and Michael Gallagher (2008) and Emma Uprichard (2008). Uprichard argues that the 'being and becoming' approach highlight the children's own perceptions of their childhood's temporality.

In the second part of the theory chapter I present theoretical framework and studies related to children's *school, work and play* in the global South. School and play are the main activities in the western idealised proper childhood. Children in the South also go to school and play; in addition they work (Punch, 2001). In my field work in Thailand, I wanted to search for the children's perspectives on school as well as on other activities in the children's *everyday lives*. Samantha Punch (2003) has conducted a study among children in Bolivia, and she used James, Jenks & Prout's (1998) concepts; the *tribal child* and the *minority child* to show how

children can go in and out of a working (adult) world and a playing (child) world (Punch, 2003).

The last part of the theory chapter is related to *identity*. Jonathan Scourfield *et al.* (2006) have studied place identity and national identity among children in Wales, children at about the same age as the ones I met in Thailand. Even if their study is done in a very different context I found interesting perspectives relevant for my study. Scourfield *et al.* (2006) draw on work both from social psychological and social constructionist theories in their studies of children's place and national identities. I focus on the part of their work that is in accordance with the theoretical framework within the social studies of children and let out their discussion of identity construction within a developmental psychological framework.

In relation to national identity I also look into the background for the construction of *Karen nationalism*. I met *migrant children* and *refugee children*, and I will also elaborate on the meaning of these concepts. Children relate to physical places and to the persons they interact with in their *local communities*. How do children living as migrants and refugees relate to the place they live? Where do the children picture themselves in relation to *national identity* and *place identity* in the time being and in the future? These questions rose from my data, and in Jason Hart's studies (2002; 2004) among Palestinian children and youth in a refugee camp in Jordan I found a discussion on identity being illuminated in another protracted refugee setting.

3.1 The 20th Century western childhood

In the western *modern childhood*, developed throughout the 20th century, children have become separated from the adult world (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). The child has been constructed as a person distinctively different from adults; being innocent, immature, incompetent and in need of protection (Cunningham, 2005). *Child labour* did not fit into this picture; children were pushed out of the labour market and became economically dependent on their parents (Qvortrup, 2002). The child's base became the intimate and private family with the father as the breadwinner and the mother as the caretaker. The child's main activities comprised *play* and *school*, and childhood a time for learning and apprenticeship. The child was mostly seen as a part of the family and less as an individual and independent human being (Qvortrup, 2002).

The image of *the dependent child* built on ideas about *biological immaturity* and a child who develops through *ages* and fixed *stages*. Adulthood as the result of natural growth, has been linked to abilities like rationality, intellectual capacity, complexity in thinking and civilisation, while the immature child has been reckoned as irrational, simple and savaged (Prout & James, 1990). Developmental psychologists in the 20th century claimed the *universal nature* of the child. From experimental studies on children in France in the 1950's and 1960's, Jean Piaget constructed a cognitive development theory that has moulded many of western society's *taken for granted* ideas about children and childhood (Jenks, 1996). Piaget claimed the universality of fixed stages in childhood development, and his theories have had a great impact on child rearing practises throughout the world (Jenks, 1996). Socialisation theory supported ideas from development psychology; the immature, not competent, *human becoming* was socialised to become a fully *human being* by accepting the adult roles, norms and values in society (Prout & James, 1990). However, theories on the natural and universal childhood have been highly contested (Prout & James, 1990).

3.1.1 The start of a 'new paradigm'

The historian Philippe Ariés (1982) questioned the idea of universality in childhood. He argued that the notion *childhood* as understood in a modern western context, did not exist in the past. In medieval time people had no awareness of a child being any different to that of the category adult (Ariés, 1982). Childhood needs to be understood not only as a biological period in a human's life, following fixed stages. It must be understood as a sociological *phenomenon* that exists in a specific cultural context. There can be no such thing as a universal childhood, because childhood cannot be isolated from society and culture (Prout & James, 1990). Childhood, as any other social phenomenon, is socially constructed.

In the last decades of the 20th century what has been called a *new paradigm* emerged in the way children and childhood was conceptualised (Prout & James, 1990). The sociology of childhood's early writers challenged the developmental psychology and socialisation theory, and argued that the theoretical framework in these disciplines was not suitable for understanding children and childhood (Prout & James, 1990). Constructionist ideas led the way to ideas about *the active child* who does not passively adapt to an existing culture (Prout & James, 1990). Children, as adults, live in a social world that is constantly changing through *construction, deconstruction and reconstruction* (Prout & James, 1990). The new sociology of

childhood view children as active *agents* who are competent and capable of, together with adults, constructing their own social world; constructing their childhood.

The 1970's feminist movement in many western countries claimed women's rights, seeing women as a muted group in society that needed to be emancipated. As women, children have also been silenced throughout history; now was the time to give children a *voice* (Prout & James, 1990). Children and childhood can no longer be viewed only through the eyes of adults. Experimental, artificial situations are discarded as proper methods to understand the lives of children (Prout & James, 1990). Adults, researchers, politicians, teachers and parents must listen to children because their insights and meanings will contribute to the understanding of the social and cultural context which they inhabit. Children are the experts on their lives (Prout & James, 1990).

Adult concern for the child's welfare in the 20th century also raised a discourse on *children's rights*. The well-being of children have been problematized, all the way from the European nation states' implementation of schools and the abolition of child labour in the 19th century and all throughout the 20th *century of the child* (Cunningham, 2005). In the pre 2nd world war the children's rights course was raised through Eglantyne Jebb and Save the Children Fund. In the post 2nd world war area the human rights discourse has continued, and the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989, was ratified by almost all nations in the world (UNTC, 2012).

The articles of the UNCRC that stresses the child's right to be heard, to participate and to have a voice, are controversial and disputed, while the articles that highlights children's right to special *protection* have been more agreeable for the adult world (Alderson, 2000). Article 3 in the UNCRC states that: "*the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration*". Article 12, the participation article, formulates children's right to be heard in matters concerning themselves (UNCRC, 2007). These two articles support essential ideas in the social studies of childhood; adults' obligation to listen to children, to take into consideration children's perspectives, and to give children a voice (Lee, 2001).

3.1.2 Human beings and human becomings

Children have been seen as incomplete and not yet competent, as “*adults in the making rather than children in the state of being*” (Holloway & Valentine, 2000, p. 763). As earlier mentioned, childhood has been viewed as lacking characteristics associated with adults, like rationality and competence. The child has been pictured as a *human becoming*, rather than as a *human being*.

“*The human being is, or should be, stable, complete, self-possessed and self-controlling. The human being is, or should be capable of independent thought and action, an independence that merits respect. The human becoming, on the other hand, is changeable and incomplete and lacks the self-possession and self-control that would allow it the independence of thought and action that merits respect*” (Lee, 2001, p. 5).

Nick Lee (2001) has discussed the construction of the *human becoming* child. Childhood’s instability and dependency was constructed as a dichotomy to the stability and independence of adult life. Adult, married working men in the industrial area would not experience any big changes later in their lives. They had reached *the journey’s end*, the stable adulthood (Lee, 2001). Hand in hand with the development of the European nation states the notion of the *dependent child* developed (Lee, 2001). Adults’ and children’ lives became more separated. The nation states wanted to control the future by moulding the children into educated and conformal citizens (Lee, 2001). The separation of adult’s and children’s worlds created the view of children as future becomings: “*The clear contrast between adulthood and childhood, between beings and becomings, meant that it was hard to understand children as beings in their own right*” (Lee, 2001, p. 8).

To imagine a child only as a future adult, focusing on what the child is to become, neglects the value of the child’s everyday life experiences, as well as ignores the child’s competences in the time being (Prout & James, 1990). The sociology of childhood claimed that children must be viewed as human beings in their own right (Prout & James, 1990). Children are not merely *human becomings*, incompetent and in lack of properties and qualities, they are *human beings* and competent agents in their own social worlds (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998).

However, the temporality of childhood as an important feature of being a child must not be neglected (Qvortrup, 2004). Children can be viewed both as human beings and as human becomings: “*By ignoring the future, we are prevented from exploring the ways in which this*

may itself shape experiences of being children” (Uprichard, 2008, p. 306). We cannot isolate the past or the future, from the child in the present time being; neither can we do so with adults (Lee, 2001). Changeability in childhood need not be tied to fixed developmental stages (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008).

Lesley Ann Gallacher and Michael Gallagher (2008) argue that the concept *human becoming* need not be related to a person’s ‘lack of ability’. *Human becoming* and ‘immature’ should rather than being used negatively, be used as synonymous with ‘potential’ (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). All human beings are also human becomings. To be human beings, means that we are always in the making, always unfinished and incomplete becomings (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008).

In the modern post-industrial world, the former and stable completed adult has been eroded, neither jobs nor love relations are stable and there is no longer a clear ‘journey’s end’ (Lee, 2001). Instability and changeability affect the adult live. The distinction between adults and children is not clear, and that makes it more difficult to see the child completely different from the adult (Lee, 2001). The ‘age of uncertainty’ has blurred the boundaries between the child and the adult (Lee, 2001).

In the second half of the 20th century there has been a change in the power relations between adults and children (Lee, 2001). The image of the child as a dependent, human becoming justified the adults’ power over children. Today the nation state and the parents have lost some of their power over children. The children do not ‘belong’ to their family or to the state; they are themselves entitled to human rights: “*In the age of uncertainty, children are becoming objects of concern in their own right*” (Lee, 2001, p. 31). The international community has made the UNCRC’s *best interest of the child* a major principle (Lee, 2001).

To look at children as incompetent and adults as competent is problematic both for children and for adults (Uprichard, 2008). Competency cannot be isolated from the context, and children and adults can be both competent and less competent (Uprichard, 2008). Viewing children as both ‘beings’ and ‘becomings’ does not mean to see them as incompetent and incomplete (Uprichard, 2008). Emma Uprichard (2008) made a study with French and English children. When the children in the study reflected on their self-competence they compared themselves both with peers and with adults (Uprichard, 2008). They compared

themselves as more or less competent related to an 'other', and the 'other' could be a child or an adult. Related to some issues, the children saw themselves as more competent than adults.

How we conceptualise the future will influence how we conceptualise our lives in the present time (Uprichard, 2008). The awareness the children have of the ageing within themselves together with reflections on how the world changes is important for how children perceive themselves in the time being (Uprichard, 2008). Children actively construct themselves as 'beings' and 'becomings' and they construct their future lives in different ways. Some anticipating growing up, while others do not look forward to it (Uprichard, 2008). By highlighting children's perceptions of themselves both in the time being and in the future we may learn more about "*how issues of empowerment and agency vary throughout the life course*" (Uprichard, 2008, p. 310). Children are growing up to become adults. Their future lives as adults are also shaped by how they construct their childhood today (Uprichard, 2008).

3.2 Other childhoods

Other childhoods is a concept used to highlight the different childhoods experienced by children throughout the world (Holt & Holloway, 2006). Many children in the global South live their lives very far from the playful, dependent and work-free childhood in the western world (Abebe, 2007; Punch, 2003). Research on children in the South has mainly been focusing on children in extreme situations as child soldiers, prostitutes and street children, as well as on child labour (Punch, 2003). To view children in the global South, as if they are living in extreme situations or living *abnormal childhoods*, is to obfuscate the childhoods lived by most children in the majority world (Punch, 2003).

More normal *daily life childhoods* in the global South have not been that much explored (Punch, 2003). Ideas about *the proper childhood* is built on the image of a *natural* and *universal* child living a happy and innocent childhood (Montgomery, 2001). Western ideas about childhood development have been spread throughout the world by globalisation, and have heavily influenced school systems in many countries (Woodhead & Montgomery, 2002). Also through the United Nation and International NGO's, western ideas about childhood have taken hold throughout the world (Woodhead & Montgomery, 2002).

The notions *global North* and *global South* (or only North and South) have been used to describe differences between what was earlier known as developed countries (Western-Europe and North-America) and underdeveloped or developing countries (Asia, Africa, South-America). These terms no longer fit into a changing, globalised world (Punch, 2003). Some authors have started to use the concepts *majority world* (the global South) and *minority world* (the global North). Using the terms minority world and majority world remind us that the majority of the people in the world live in the economically poorer regions in the South. It is worth reflecting upon the inequality between these two worlds (Punch, 2003).

There are more children in the world today who experience a childhood dominated by school and work, than there are children who live their childhoods without working (Punch, 2003). The western proper childhood consists of play and school and is experienced by children in the minority world. The more normal majority world childhood consists of school, work and play (Punch, 2003). However, neither the minority world, nor the majority world is homogeneous, and there are great differences in childhoods within the minority world and the majority world (Punch, 2003; Holt & Holloway, 2006). Both the terms *global South* and *global North*, as well as *majority world* and *minority world* will be used in this thesis.

In the western construction of the proper childhood, the majority world's working children are seen as a problem (Punch, 2003). A work-free childhood is a proper childhood. In the western world there has existed a dichotomy between the child as a player, and the adult as a worker, while in other parts of the world, children can be, as Margaret Mead already observed in 1962, both players and workers (Montgomery, 2001). The UNCRC defines the child as any person less than 18 years, though many places around the world young people are expected to take adult responsibility before that age. Some have already families of their own. Most youngsters in the western world are dependent on their parents until they are 18, and some even longer (Montgomery, 2001). Exporting the western ideas of childhood to the rest of the world is disrespect to other cultures traditional *rites of passage* from child to adult, and it does not acknowledge the necessity for children to work (Montgomery, 2001; Woodhead & Montgomery, 2002).

3.2.1 Education

The United Nations stated in 1948 that education is a human right (Dyer, 2002). Since that time earlier colonies around the world have put much effort in increasing the literacy rate in their population, increasing school enrolment and providing basic education for its citizens (Ansell, 2002; Dyer, 2002). Primary school is the main tool to provide basic life skills like writing and reading (Dyer, 2002). Education is associated with economic growth and other developmental benefits like better health, lower birth rates and a more sufficient labor force (Dyer, 2002; UNESCO, 2011). However The UN Millennium goal to secure primary education for all children by 2015 is still far away. Today there are more than 60 million children in the world that do not attend school, and 40 % of these children live in conflict affected areas (UNESCO, 2011).

Focus on quantity in school enrolment in the global South has overshadowed the issue of quality (Ansell, 2002; Dyer, 2002). Caroline Dyer (2002) studied primary education in South Asia, Nicola Ansell (2002) secondary education among girls in Lesotho and Zimbabwe and Sharon Bessel (2009) has created workshops among youth on Fiji. Their findings indicate that the school system in these countries in the majority world maybe has not changed much since the colonial time (Ansell, 2002; Dyer, 2002; Bessel, 2009). The school curricula often fail to meet the children's needs for education (Dyer, 2002; Ansell, 2002). The school system often increases the social and economic differences among the students, and the lessons are often a one way education with the teacher as the expert (Dyer, 2002). Students are often not encouraged to create knowledge, to interact or to be critical (Ansell, 2002; Dyer, 2002; Bessel, 2009). The exams are a testing of memorised 'facts' (Ansell, 2002). The school tradition builds often on a centralised education system with a teacher who has little influence over what is taught in school. Decentralisation of educational power is necessary to build better understanding between teachers and local communities (Dyer, 2002).

In the schools, society's social norms are reproduced, and knowledge and skills are learned (Oh & Van Der Stouwe, 2008). In areas with ethnic conflicts school may have a peace building effect or it may increase the conflict (Oh & Van Der Stouwe, 2008). Authoritarian ways of teaching is common in conflict and refugee situations (Oh & Van Der Stouwe, 2008). The isolation in refugee camps may hinder both teachers and students to be aware of different teaching practices and to appreciate diversity and critical thinking. Teachers in conflict situations may use their position to claim the ideas of their own political or ethnical group,

and they may fear open discussion and opposition from the students (Oh & Van Der Stouwe, 2008).

3.2.2 Work and household chores

Children's work can mean a lot of different things (Ennew, Myers, & Plateau, 2005). In this thesis, *work* is mostly understood as the unpaid *household chores* that children carry out, as well as *helping the family* also in paid work. By acknowledging household chores as work, the importance of children's contribution to the household economy is recognised (Punch, 2001). Most of the children in the world grow up with work as a key feature (Woodhead & Montgomery, 2002). Children in the global South contribute to the household chores from they are very young, and they perform more complex tasks and take more responsibility as they get older (Punch, 2001). Children in the majority world are expected to participate in household activities, and they tend to take responsibility earlier than children in the minority world (Punch, 2001).

Punch (2001) studied children's household activities in Bolivia. She found that the gendered specific division of labour among adults were not mirrored in the household tasks performed by boys and girls. Abebe (2007) found in a study in Ethiopia that household chores were mainly done by women and girls and that

“Children's division of labour in household production and reproduction is, in part, a reflection of how the adult world is structured in terms of participation and decision-making in the public and domestic sphere” (Abebe, 2007, p. 86).

Punch (2001) found in her study that birth order, sibling composition and age was more important than gender, when understanding the performance of children's household work roles. She also found that girls tended to take more responsibility in household activities than boys did. Many of the chores that were performed by children were the same as those of the adults (Punch, 2001).

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) does not recognise children's contribution in domestic area as work (Nieuwenhuys, 2007). Nieuwenhuys (2007) showed how 90% of the working children in India in 1980 were let out of the *working children* statistics, because children working with household chores, in agriculture, as unpaid housemaids or in other informal sectors, did not fit into ILO's definition of child labour. Adults do not always

acknowledge the work done by children (Punch, 2001). Children's contribution in work is often invisible, both in the eyes of adults, and in the eyes of children. In so doing, children's life worlds are misrecognised (Nieuwenhuys, 2007).

3.2.3 Play and childhood culture

Play can be described as activities that are voluntary, pleasurable and do not have any external goals (Punch, 2003) Play is "*what children do*" (James, Jenks & Prout in Punch, 2003, p. 278). Play includes a lot of different activities:

"...play activities include those identified by Göncü et al. (1999: 160): object play (using a toy or object), language play (words and sounds), physical play (having fun using sensory and motor actions), pretend play (using ideas or objects to represent the meaning of something else) and games (routinized activity with rules)"

(Punch, 2003, p. 278)

Play is reckoned as an important part of *childhood culture*:

"Childhood culture has been defined as a form of social action, a way of being a child among other children, a particular cultural style, resonant with particular times and places" (James, Jenks & Prout in Punch, 2003, p. 286).

Children's culture differs in relation to the children's surroundings; what space and resources they have access to (Punch, 2003). Children engage in and construct their own childhood culture separated from the adults, so do also working children (Punch, 2003).

A powerful western construct of the differences between adults and children, is that adults work and children play (Punch, 2003). Children are seen as vulnerable and in need of protection from adult responsibilities, often meaning that they are excluded from the adult world (Punch, 2003). The globalisation of the minority world concept, *the playing child*, has created an image of the majority world childhood as an *abnormal childhood*, characterised by a working child with burdens and responsibility (Punch, 2003).

3.2.4 School, work and play

James, Jenks & Prout (1998) identified 4 approaches useful in researching childhood: *the socially constructed child*, *the social structural child*, *the minority group child* and *the tribal child*. Punch (2003) used what she called the two more politicised approaches to childhood; *the tribal child approach* and *the minority child approach* in discussing her findings of

Bolivian children's everyday lives. The tribal child approach views children as distinctively different from adults and is based on the 'otherness' of childhood (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Punch, 2003). The tribal child approach builds on the idea of children's social worlds as places where children's activities are structured in ways that are not familiar to adults. Children's life worlds are meaningful places for children (Holloway & Valentine, 2000). In the minority child approach, the child is not seen as a person who is distinctively different from an adult; the child is rather seen as belonging to a marginalised, muted group in society. Children live in an adult-centred world where their status and power is low (Punch, 2003).

Most of research with children in the majority world has focused on children's work, using a minority child approach (Punch, 2003). Research with majority world children has focussed on the *working child* and neglected other aspects of their childhood, like their *ordinary everyday lives* (Punch, 2003). Majority world children's everyday lives consist of work and play, often in combination, and their activities often resemble play more than work (Punch, 2003). Children can walk between a player role and a worker role, switching between being the minority child in an adult world, and the tribal child within a unique childhood culture (Punch, 2003). Combining the tribal child approach with the minority child approach acknowledge the way children go in and out of adult-centred and child-centred worlds, and it can contribute to new knowledge about children's everyday lives (Punch, 2003).

As opposed to play, work is defined as activities of production and services (Punch, 2003). Punch quotes James, Jenks & Prout (1998), who wrote that in the global South there is an "*absence of any well-developed "children's culture," for in these contexts children's and adults' worlds are less socially divided and culturally distinguished*" (James, Jenks & Prout in Punch, 2003, p. 287). However, children's lives in the majority world can be distinctively different from the adults' lives. Children construct their own culture that exists partly separated from the adults' social world (Punch, 2003). Punch (2003) found in her study in Bolivia that children played with friends and siblings and rarely with adults.

When children combine work and play useful knowledge and competencies are acquired (Katz, 1991; Punch, 2003). Adults tend to see children's play separated from work as childish and not as a serious activity, while when work and play "*are combined, they have a mutually enhancing socialization and educational value*" (Punch, 2003, p. 289). Children in the majority world may have restricted time to play and they often have limited access to

commercial toys, however they create their own “*use of space, by combining both work and school with play and by making full use of their natural surroundings*” (Punch, 2003, p. 287).

3.3 The construction of social identities

We are shaped through the social world we live in, and gender, ethnicity and class are important categories shaping the self (Hemming & Madge, 2012). The construction of social identity is related to the perception of similarities or differences with others (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). Collective identity is “*a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal.*” (Hall in Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006, p. 6). In this construction the ‘we’ relates to the people belonging to the same group as us, as opposed to an ‘other’. The construction of *we* and *they* becomes more complicated in a globalised world where displacement, migration and mobility give mixed cultural identities (Gupta and Fergusson 1992).

Belonging to a specific group is related to characteristics that often have a *symbolic meaning* like belonging to a *nation*. The sense of belonging to a *place* is a mix of daily life experiences and the wider, more symbolic and cultural representations of place (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). Nationality is not only connected to a physical place, but also to powerful symbols like; the nation flag, language, clothing, religion, food and so on. These symbols help creating identification with the nation in both institutions and individuals (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). Michael Billig (1995) established the notion ‘banal nationalism’ to show how these symbols work in the continuous reproduction of a nation (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006).

3.3.1 Place identity and national identity

Sharing a geographical territory, language, customs and religion can help develop a national consciousness (Stephens, 1997). “*At base, identifying with nation means expressing the sense of a positive link between the self and others who dwell in the same territorial space*” (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006, p. 6). Benedict Anderson (1983) introduced the concept *imagined community*, referring to a nation with clear boundaries and a coherent national culture. The nation consists of many people who will never meet, but who share a bounded area and culture that divide the nation from other people (Stephens, 1997).

Living in the same geographical territory, however, is not enough to establish a national identification; in addition a lot of ideological labour has to be invested to establish a belonging to an *imagined community*, perceived as more important than issues that differ; dialect, culture, religion and so on (Stephens, 1997).

National identity and ethnic identity are both built on symbolic constructions of community, and common features like: “*the belief shared by its members that, however distantly, they are of common descent*” (Jenkins in Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006, p. 40). Thus, ethnic groups have a looser connection to geographical space, than a nation has. National consciousness means that one has to let go of some of the local identification and replace it with a sense of belonging to an abstract collectivity. Local-level is also important in building the national self, and the two are intertwined (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006).

We construct a sense of place in interacting with people around us. Nation boundaries are there to separate ‘us’ the natives from ‘them’ the foreigners (Stephens, 1997). Social identity is about connecting to a specific culture as well as connecting to a local place (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). Experience of own locality and of ‘elsewhere’ are determinant factors in the construction of belonging (*ibid*). As adults, children present contradictory views on how they relate to places. There is no such thing as the ‘authentic child’s voice’ (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). The children’s voices are always multiple and the researcher must not present the children as ‘the other’ with norms totally different from those in dominant adult society (*ibid*).

Children construct their identities and belonging in interaction with others, and the schools are important places for children’s interaction (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). In a nation’s schools, the identification with the nation is instilled. Belonging to a local community, as well as belonging to a nation are both social constructs. To understand how children interact with these constructs, we need to look for the children’s own perspectives on their belongings (*ibid*).

Identification with a nation is created in childhood (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). Nationalism has proved to be a strong sentiment, even in a world with a high degree of mobility. There are different discourses on how these processes are taking place. Ernst Gellner (1983) argues that the idea of nationalism was established through the national states

in Europe and implemented through mass-education in the late nineteenth century (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). Anthony D. Smith (1999) did not see nationalism as a product of the modern nations, but argued that nationalism functioned because it was built on pre-existing ethnic traditions in the nation state cultures (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). These traditions are according to Smith passed on through generations. However, Smith shares Gellner's idea that national consciousness is established in childhood (*ibid*).

Scourfield *et al.* (2006) cite Homi Bhabha (1990) who saw the 'other' not as a construction of an outsider. Bhabha argues that the otherness and sameness related to the 'we' is a constant process *within the culture* where national identity is constructed. How the cultural norms that are instilled top down will be met, depends on how 'the people' respond to those cultural norms. National narratives will always live in a negotiating process with the people within a culture (Bhabha in Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006).

Boundaries and mobility are crucial to whether it is possible to grasp a more concrete sense of place. Persons with more constrained social networks may have a stronger feeling of belonging to local community (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). Children often have a more restricted mobility than adults and they are therefore more locally oriented. However "...children do operate some quite surprisingly clear spatial demarcations, such as those between 'here' and 'there' and between 'us' and 'them'" (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006, p. 17).

Identity related to collectives is changing in a world with increased mobility (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). Some authors argue that access to media in a globalised world weakens identity related to local place and that young people rather identify themselves with dispersed subgroups they communicate with through modern media. Scourfield *et al.* (2006) refers to Robertson (1995) who does not accept any dichotomy between the *local* and *global*, claiming that even if information is spread all over the globe, culture will not be standardised and a strong link between place and culture will continue to exist (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). There will instead be a globalised language built on local representation. Locality may then be seen as a part of globalisation, not as a contradiction to it (*ibid*). Even if there is a tendency to detach cultures from geographical space, people still identify strongly with place (Gupta & Ferguson, 2006).

3.3.2 The construction of a Karen nationalism

Nationalism is constructed. Ananda Rajah argued that ethnic identity has its roots in the construction of shared ‘ethno-histories’ and that nationalism has developed from ‘ethno-nationalism’ (Rajah, 2002). Oral and written narratives create a common shared descent which forms the basis for the identity. The ‘identity markers’ as language, religion, clothing and so on are expressions of the common identity while the underlying presumption of the group’s common origin is what underlies the whole construction of ethnic identity. Modern nations are phenomenon built on a political ideology of nationalism utilised by an educated elite (*ibid*). Rajah argued that this elite formed new social groups which transcended the older more locally related identities into ‘the imagined communities’ of modern nationalism. Colonialism brought the ideas of ethno-nationalism and nationalism to the majority world and created the basis for the development of nation states throughout the world. It also “*made it possible for separatist and local autonomy movements to emerge*” (Rajah, 2002, p. 520).

Rajah (2002) argued that the meeting between the Karen and the missionaries led to the idea of the ‘Karen Nation’. The ideas of a Karen nation developed in Burma with help from British missionaries. “*Thus, Karen national consciousness developed in the late 1880s encouraged by the missionaries’ influence to accept uncritically their traditional tales*” (Renard in Rajah, 2002, p. 527). The Karen nationalism developed from the “*cultural commonality and uniqueness, essentialised attributes, and the reification of questionable history and ethnology*” building on an idea of an ‘imagined community’ (Rajah, 2002). The ethnic Karen identity which developed into a Karen national identity was “*constructed in opposition to an oppressive Burman ‘Other’*” and could as a nation claim its right to territorial sovereignty (*ibid*).

A literate tradition was established among the Karen when the Burmese alphabet was used to create a written Skaw Karen language, and the written language was implemented in schools and printing presses (Rajah, 2002). The claim for an independent Karen nation came from ‘the father of the Karen nation’: Dr. San C. Po in 1928 that linked Karen ethnicity to territorial space and sovereignty. After the Second World War the Karen national Union (KNU) started their war against the Burmese army. KNU ensured that the “*Karen ethno-history, ethno-nationalism and nationalism*” was reproduced in the primary and secondary schools (Rajah, 2002, p. 528). National symbols as “*a national coat-of-arms based on bronze frog drums,*

Karen dress, a national flag, a national anthem and Liberation Day parades” were established: (Rajah, 2002, p. 529).

David Brown (1988) used other perspectives than Ananda Rajah (2002) to explain the rise of ethnic separatist movements in Southeast Asia, like the Karen nationalism. State nationalism and ethnic minority groups have not been able to negotiate political solutions, and have opposed against each other (Brown, 1988). People from ethnic minorities were not accepted as fully members of the nation states because the states’ ideology was to establish the dominant group’s culture, and to connect this culture to the national identity. The minority groups became second hand citizens in a country belonging to someone else (*ibid*).

After Burma’s independence from Britain, the ‘mono-ethnic’ Burman government’s policy was to assimilate the ethnic minority groups and to expand Burman culture and language, as well as Buddhism (Brown, 1988). The Burmese policies of centralisation and assimilation led to the establishment of the minority group identities. Ethnic minority group identity was established as opposed to the ‘other’ majority culture. *The minority consciousness* is referring to a group that feels inferior to the dominant ‘other’ (*ibid*).

The rise of the Karen national identity must also be seen in the light of a Karen elite “*who had been generated by the long contact with Christianity and colonialism*” (Brown, 1988). The Karen leaders felt betrayed by a government that undermined and threatened the position they earlier had possessed. These leaders now searched for legitimacy and leading roles in the Karen communities while the masses searched for a communal identity and security (*ibid*). The Karen leaders found new roles as opposing to the state and to idealize, articulate and develop the idea of ‘the Karen nation’. The dominant Burman mono-ethnic state led to the Karen minority consciousness and nationalism. The explanation for the separatist movement and the ethnic rebel is “*to be found in the character of the state*” (Brown, 1988, p. 77).

Historically the Karen people have consisted of subgroups with different culture, language, religion and political ideologies (Oh & Van Der Stouwe, 2008). The Burman dominance of within Burma and the ethnic conflict, created the need for a common Karen culture. This culture came to be dominated by the western-oriented Christian Skaw Karen elite (*ibid*). In the refugee camps along the Burman border in Thailand the dominating Skaw Karen group have been criticized for “*Skawization*” of the Karen community in the same way as the Karen

people have “*criticized the Burmese government for “Burmanizing” national culture*” inside Burma (Oh & Van Der Stouwe, 2008, p. 611). Skaw Karen is the dominating teaching language in the refugee camp schools, while in many of the refugee camps around 50% of the students have Pow Karen or Burmese as their mother tongue.

3.3.3 Migrants

As mentioned in the introduction chapter *migration* is a term that covers both refugees and all other forms of movement across a national border. In the whole world there are almost 200 million people living outside their country of origin (IOM, 2011). The reasons why people migrate are many and multiple. People have migrated legally and illegally from Burma to Thailand because of violation of human rights, abuse, forced labour and lack of jobs, education and health care.

“Many visitors to Thailand mistakenly assume that many of the human fixtures working in the shops, construction sites and factories of Thailand are in fact Thai-nationals. The reality is that many of them are as foreign to Thailand as the ordinary Western tourist. They are the cleaning ladies, the construction workers, the waiters, and the laborers fuelling Thailand’s economy” (Fox, 2009).

Some children cross the border without their parents, becoming *migrant children*. Others travel with their parents or other family members, or they are born in Thailand of migrant parents, becoming *children of migrants*. The Thailand Migration Report (2011) states that this distinction is important when issuing the migrant children living in Thailand (IOM, 2011). In this thesis I will mostly use the easier term *migrant children*, and meaning children of migrants, as I did not meet children who had crossed the border on their own.

3.3.4 Refugees

A *refugee* is according to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to Refugees, a person:

“..owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (OHCHR, 1951).

Refugees have crossed a nation border while some become displaced in their country of origin:

“Refugees are people who have crossed an international frontier and are at risk or have been victims of persecution in their country of origin. Internally displaced persons (IDPs), on the other hand, have not crossed an international frontier, but have, for whatever reason, also fled their homes” (ICRC, 2010).

The UNHCR guarantees the protection and well-being of all refugees. In addition the refugees are also guaranteed *non-refoulement*; no one shall forcibly be sent back to their home country (OHCHR, 1951).

Thailand has not ratified the 1951 United Nation Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Therefore the people living in the camps along the Thai/Burmese border are not classified as refugees in Thailand. The Thai immigration Act 1979 state that they are illegal immigrants or displaced persons (IOM, 2011). The agreement was that they should return to Burma when it was safe for them (Oh, 2010). However, the refugees are still in the camps, making the Burmese refugee problem one of the most protracted in the world.

“Loescher and Milner (2006) describe a protracted situation as one in which refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile. A refugee in this situation is often unable to break free from enforced reliance on external assistance” (IOM, 2011).

A refugee status also gives a right to apply for *resettlement* in a third country (Walker & Maxwell, 2009). The term *displaced person* is often used as synonymous to refugee, while the notion *internally displaced person* is a person who has not crossed a national border and is not entitled to a formal refugee status (*ibid*).

3.3.5 Statelessness

A huge problem related to migration is the issue of statelessness (IOM, 2011). “A *stateless person is any individual who is not considered by any state to possess its nationality*” (Malkki, 1995, p. 501). “*Not all stateless people are refugees, nor are all refugees technically stateless... Statelessness is not the essential quality of being a refugee, though many refugees are in fact stateless people*” (Simpson in Malkki, 1995, pp. 501-502). A child’s right to nationality is embodied in the UNCRC’s article 7, 1: “*The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.*” (UNCRC, 2007).

Many children in the world today do not have the right to nationality, whether living within their origin of birth country, or living as refugees and migrants in another country. Birth registration has been a problematic issue for illegal migrants in Thailand. However after the country in 2010 removed a reservation on the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, Article 7; the country has been legally obliged to register all the children, and to give them birth certification (IOM, 2011). A birth registration, however, does not give the migrant children a Thai citizenship, and without a Burmese citizenship many of them also end up stateless. I do not elaborate on the statelessness issue in the discussion in my thesis. The issue itself deserves a whole master thesis; however I raise the issue because most certain, many of the children in my case study face the problems with statelessness.

3.3.6 Refugees, homeland and identity

The idea of the nation-states as they were established in Europe in the 19th century builds on a nation that is heavily challenged in the globalised world of migration, displacement and ethnic minorities (Stephens, 1997). Mobility and displacement has created a more unbound relationship between space and culture (Hart, 2002). When people move around and settle far away from their place of birth, identity connected to nation and place of origin becomes problematic (Gupta & Ferguson, 2006). The notion ‘homeland’ can have a very strong symbolic meaning for displaced people and migrants (Hart, 2002). Even so, if the home is somewhat far away, or if there is a doubt whether this home as a certain place, really exists, people will, tend to focus on their local lives, and where they are staying in the nearest future (Gupta & Ferguson, 2006).

Hart (2002; 2004) studied the construction of identities in a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan and argues that Palestinian adult refugees had a strong sentiment to instil in the younger generation their hopes and dreams of returning to Palestine. The adults used the children as objects for their ideas about the 'homeland'. Both the older and the younger generation in Husseini camp created images of 'the lost Paradise' when remembering their homeland village, a village that a former generation left in 1948. The older generation transferred their dreams about returning to their homeland to the younger generation, calling them "*jeel al-awdeh (generation of the return)*" (Hart 2002:9). Stories are still told and songs are sung by the children about the place where 'they come from'. This Palestinian nationalism was mostly expressed by camp residents older than 40 years. Those adults within the camp who identified with the Palestinian national movement put a pressure on the younger generation to reproduce knowledge about the homeland (Hart 2002).

Hart argues that political leaders, humanitarian actors and even the UNCRC "*assume that the youngest generation is a replica of those preceding in terms of identity and aspiration*" (2004, p. 168). Refugee children tend to be positioned as 'refugee children', hampering the discourse of differences among them. Political leaders and NGO's generally fail to distinguish "*between group identity and personal identity*" (Hart, 2004, p. 167). Hart argues that individual and collective identities are differently constructed, and that children's individual identities may push the limits of the older generation's group identities. When studying refugee children researchers must acknowledge that children "*develop their own individual and collective identities*" (Hart, 2004, p. 168).

In a refugee camp, however, it may be difficult for the younger generation to construct their own identities different from those of the older generation (Hart, 2004). The adult generation have ambitions and hopes for the young ones which can limit the children's right to freely develop their own identities, built on their own personal thoughts and aspirations as well as to their belonging to the communities they live in (*ibid*).

The children do not inherit the same identity as their parents (Hart 2002, 2004). The young third generation refugees in Jordan expressed a varied set of belongings to multiple cultures; sometimes they were Palestinian, other times Jordanian, approving of Islamic culture, like wearing a head scarf, but not rejecting the western way of style in music and way of living (Hart 2002). Hart showed how this mix of cultural identities made up the identity of the young

camp residents, as well as a style in clothing and hair dress combined with a strong loyalty to the camp, and knowledge about Islam and Palestinian history (Hart 2002).

Older generation have a tendency to transfer their group conflict to the younger generation, and this is especially pertinent among people who live outside the actual conflict area. This is a main reason why conflicts persist (Anderson, 1999). In an intergroup conflict situation it is especially important to be aware that children's identities are fluid and not bounded (Hart, 2004). The children might, to a greater extent than the older generation, have a will to strengthen the social *connectors* in a conflict situation: the values that are shared by different parties in a conflict (Hart, 2004). "*In all societies there are capacities for peace*" (Anderson, 1999, p. 23). Instead of focusing on the tension that divides the fighting parties, it is important to focus on what *connects* them (Anderson, 1999). By understanding the less bounded identities of the children, the way to reconciliation in a conflict may be easier (Hart, 2004).

Palestinians have lived as refugees since 1948. The first Burmese refugees sought permanent shelter in Thailand in the 1980's.

"As shelters at the Thai-Myanmar border have been set up for more than twenty years and many displaced persons have been living there from the early days, displacement in the shelters may now be recognized as a protracted refugee situation" (IOM, 2011, p. 120).

Hart (2002) refers to Marc Augé (1995) who claimed that living in a refugee camp means living a life where you do not "invest any meaning". It is like 'living in limbo'. You only exist, you do not invest anything because you soon will go somewhere else (Augé in Hart, 2002). Living in a refugee camp is reckoned to be a transient stage of living, and not, as the refugee camps in Jordan, a permanent settlement for more than 60 years. In Thailand, people from Burma have lived in the refugee camps for more than 25 years.

I have now presented the theoretical framework and relevant studies that I want to use in my analysis and discussion chapters, I now turn to the presentation of the methodology used in my field work.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I want to describe and discuss the methods I used in my field work. The aim of my research was to try to grasp the children's perspectives on their school experiences and their daily lives. Children are, as much as adults, entitled to be studied in their own right, as human beings and as social and active subjects (Prout & James, 1990). Research is to be done *with* children and not *on* children. Qualitative studies like ethnography, as well as participant- and child friendly research methods acknowledge the child as an active human being (Prout & James, 1990).

I went to the field with an open approach, wanting to explore topics that the children found essential in their lives. I used *a phenomenological approach*. A phenomenological approach means that the researcher's aim is to understand the social phenomena as they are experienced by the social actor (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). When using a phenomenological approach the subject's own perspectives and descriptions of reality is the main interest (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I wanted to look for the children's perspectives on their everyday lives with main focus on school. I chose research tools which I believed to be adequate to shed light on my original research question: *What is the meaning of school for Karen children aged 10 – 13, living as migrants or refugees in Thailand?*

My research approach is inspired by Judith Ennew and others' (2009) *participatory approach* to child research, as well as Alison Clark's "the Mosaic approach" using a "*range of methods for listening to young children's perspectives on their lives*" (Clark, 2005, p. 29). The children have many ways of expressing themselves, and their different 'languages' will be recognised when using multiple research methods (Clark, 2005). Children cannot use words in the same way as adults, so using techniques that are less dependent on words is a more child-centred approach (Ennew & Boyden, 1997). These research methods can give children the opportunity to be *the experts in the field* and to decrease the power relations between the adult and the child. The child may experience empowerment and gain new knowledge (Ennew & Boyden, 1997; Clark, 2005). By involving the children actively in the research and by building on the children's own potential and capacity, it is possible to grasp the children's perspectives (Ennew & Boyden, 1997).

4.1 Access to the field

4.1.1 Access to The Migrant School

Before I went to the field site, one of my supervisors, Judith Ennew, connected me with two local Karen men living in the area. They agreed to be my assistants, guides, translators and interpreters during my field work. Both men come from Burma and they speak Burmese and Karen, as well as English and some Thai. Through Judith Ennew I also got contact with a western NGO in the region. In this NGO a Burmese woman helped me to get access to a local migrant school.

To get access to an ethnographic field *sponsors* are often necessary as well as a permission given by *gatekeepers* (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Judith Ennew, my interpreters, the NGO and the Burmese woman sponsored me into the field and made it easy for me to get in touch with the right gatekeepers. The Burmese woman had contact with all the 60 migrant schools in the area. In discussion with her and other people working in the NGO I chose one of the schools for my research field. The Burmese woman phoned the school Principal. He gave me the permission to do research in this school right ahead.

In the first meeting at school I gave the Principal a letter of introduction from The Norwegian Centre for Child Research (NOSEB) at the University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Norway, as well as a presentation letter of me and my project. The Principal was asked to sign a consent form, giving me permission to visit the school for about 3 weeks' time, to observe the children in the classroom, and to conduct workshops in one of the classes. We agreed that I could work with the children in grade 4.

4.1.2 Access to The Refugee Camp School

I very much wanted to visit one of the refugee camps in the area. One of my interpreters lived with his wife and three small children in a camp, and he offered me to come and visit them. I gladly accepted his hospitality, as I was aware that camp residents not normally are allowed to invite foreigners. After having stayed for a few days as a guest with this family and visited many camp residents, I asked my interpreter if I could come back and conduct workshops in one of the many camp schools. At this point I already had started the workshops in the Migrant School, and I thought it would be very interesting for my research also to meet

children living in a refugee camp. I assumed that their everyday life experiences would be somewhat different from those of the migrant children living outside the camps.

The sponsor into the refugee camp, my interpreter, helped me in contact with the gatekeepers in the refugee camp; the local camp authorities. They gave me permission to conduct a workshop in one of the elementary schools. My interpreter and I went to visit the school and to negotiate with the school Principal about the workshops. As it was the camp authorities who were the gatekeepers, I did not know whether my visit would be approved by the Principal or not. However, I assumed that she accepted the decision from the camp authorities to allow me to conduct the workshops. She turned out to be very cooperative and helpful all the way. I gave her the information letters and an informed consent form to sign. We agreed on having a two day workshop with all the children in grade 3. From the experience I then had concerning the research tools, I assumed that two days would be sufficient time for the workshops.

4.2 Main informants, age and gender

I wanted to meet children living as migrants in Thailand. I chose the age 10 – 13 as I wanted to work with children in a pre-puberty age. *Middle childhood* is a label often used about children in the primary school age. This age group has not been as much researched pre-schoolers and teenagers have been (Kellett & Ding, 2008). As essay writing was one of my research tools, I wanted the children to be at least 10 years as I assumed they then would be able to write. In my part of the world, all children in one grade are born the same year. In the schools I visited in Thailand the age difference between the youngest and oldest in one grade was as much as 5 years. As I wanted to work with all the children in one class, and not a selected sample, I had to widen the intended “*children aged 10 to 13*” to “*children aged 8 – 13*”.

At the first meeting with children in the Migrant School, I had made a power point presentation for them, so that they could learn a little about me and my background. I showed them pictures from Norway, from nature and animals, from my family and from my students back in Norway, students at the same age as the children I met in Thailand. When I spoke to the children, one of my interpreters simultaneously translated what I said. After the presentation, the Principal let me know that the children sitting in front of me were not in

grade 4, but in grade 2. They were between 9 and 13 years. I could not send the children away, claiming that I wanted to work with grade 4 instead, as we had agreed upon. Instead I decided to do the best out of the situation, and go on with my case study together with these children.

Age	Girls	Boys	Total
9	6	1	7
10	1		1
11	2	1	3
12	4		4
13		1	1
Total	13	3	16

The Migrant School

Age	Girls	Boys	Total
8	1	1	2
9	2	2	4
10	6	2	8
11	4	1	5
12	6	3	9
13	4	3	7
Total	23	12	35

The Refugee Camp School

Table 1: Age and gender of the children in the two different schools in my field work.

4.3 Pilot group

Before conducting the first workshops, I wanted to test out the research tools I had planned to use. Testing out the tools in a pilot group is necessary to correct any mistakes related to the use of the tools (Ennew, *et al.*, 2009). I had to find out if the instructions made for the children were understandable for them and how much time the children needed for each tool. 4 of the girls in the Migrant School were asked to be a pilot group. They were all eager to participate. There were only 4 boys in the class, (one of the boys was not at school when I conducted the workshops, so he is not in my sample). The children were seated girls and girls and boys and boys together in the class room. Because of this and because there were only 3 boys in the class I found it better to choose only girls for the pilot project.

4.4 Research tools

4.4.1 Participant observation

“Observation is the basis of all good research” (Ennew, *et al.*, 2009, p. 5.9). I spent one week doing observation in the class room in the Migrant School, mostly without my interpreters. Participant observation in the classroom gives the children an opportunity to get accustomed to the researcher (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). I wanted the children to learn to know me, and not feel embarrassed or insecure together with me before I conducted the workshops. Secondly, I wanted to learn about the children’s school day, what sort of activities they were doing, how they interacted with each other and with their teachers. I got a chair in the class room, by the side wall. Here I sat during the lessons. In the classroom there were 16 children sitting on plastic mats on a concrete floor. In front of them they had low benches to place their books on. Ahead of the children were a wall with a white board and a chart with the Thai alphabet.

I will come back to the observation period when later discussing research role and ethical issues.

4.4.2 The workshops

After a week together with the children in the Migrant School, and after the piloting project the interpreters and I were ready to start the workshops. Doing the workshops in the class room was not easy as there was a lot of noise from the other class rooms. The Principal offered us a place we could use, a 100 meters away from the other school buildings. Here there was a building with only a floor and a roof, and it gave us an opportunity to work without too much disturbance from other children or adults. The students brought their mats to sit on, their low desks and their school bags from the class room to this outdoor space. We conducted the workshops on 3 different days during a week. We started around 9.30 AM and finished at 3 PM, interrupted by a few short breaks, and a one and a half hours lunch break. The children were given both oral and written information about the different tasks, and they were asked to repeat the instructions. When the children repeat, using their own words, the researcher can be ensured that they had understood what to do (Ennew, *et al.*, 2009).

4.4.3 Essay writing

The first workshop task was writing essays. With the task “Me and my school” I wanted the children to describe their ideas about themselves in the school setting, and by continuing with “What I want to do after I have graduated” I also wanted to explore their ideas about their future life as adults. Being a migrant or a refugee is an unstable situation. I wanted to study what this means for how refugee or migrant children perceive their future lives. When using essay writing, I chose a method that I assumed school children would be familiar with. Children’s writings can “*be the clearest and most honest (data) that can be collected.*” (Ennew, *et al.*, 2009, p. 5.30). The data collected from essay writing, could also easily be translated and interpreted later on, a good thing concerning the short time I had in the field.

The piloting project in the Migrant School revealed that the children had not yet learned to write, and therefore the essay writing was not possible to implement in the Migrant School. The girls in the pilot group looked really troubled when they were asked to write essays. I quickly changed the tools and asked the children to draw instead. In the Refugee Camp School, I worked with grade 3, and they could all write. Therefore I chose to conduct the essay writing there as I had planned. All the children in the Refugee Camp School wrote short essays on “Me and my school” and “What I want to do after I have graduated” the first workshop day.

4.4.4 Drawings with interviews

The children in the Migrant School were asked to draw: “Me and my school” and “What I want to do after I have graduated.” They were not able to write, however they were capable of drawing. Children can put forward their views better in other ways than by using a lot of words (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). The children were asked to write down their gender and age on the drawing paper. I had brought good crayons in different colours for them to use. The children worked very concentrated, and some of them spent more than one and a half hours on the two drawings. I had noticed when conducting the pilot group, that the girls had been copying each other’s drawings. Therefore I asked the children to focus on their own drawings and not to disturb each other or to copy each other while working.

When the children had finished their drawings, I had small talks with all of them. By using open questions the researcher allows the children to express their own interpretations of their

drawings. When using visual tools like drawings and photography it is crucial to let the children explain the meaning of what they have drawn or pictured, if not, there is a big chance of misinterpretation (Clark, 2005; Ennew, *et al.*, 2009). The children told me about their drawings, and if there were items in the drawings they let out, I would ask about them. When the interpreter translated, I wrote the answers. These interviews were very time consuming. The first workshop day I only had time to talk to half of the 16 children. In the interviews in the Migrant School I chose to use note taking. Writing a lot in the interview situation, can be a disturbing factor (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Using an interpreter already made the free communication process impossible. However, the children seemed eager to talk about their drawings, and no one seemed to be bothered in the situation.

In the Refugee Camp School I did not have time to interview the children about their drawings. Since all the children in this school were able to write, their interpretation of their drawings was not as important as it was in the Migrant School. Instead I spontaneously found an opportunity to have a few minutes interview with some of the children when they had finished the workshop activities. As I started to talk with some of the children the others queued up, waiting for their turn to be interviewed. I could not disappoint them, and I ended up with talking with the lot, 35 children, who seemed more than eager to talk with the interpreter and me. I used a tape recorder and recorded all the interviews. The interpreter translated simultaneously. Not taking notes when interviewing gives the interviewer a possibility to focus on the communication process, as well as the opportunity to play the recorded interview again and again, picking up a lot of details from the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

I had in mind the experience from the Migrant School, how time consuming the interview process was. A tape recorder was convenient because I could transcribe the interviews after I came home. When transcribing the recorded interviews I found it many times hard to understand what the children or the interpreter said, because of all the noise in the Refugee Camp School. Very often during the interviews I used the technique to repeat what the children or interpreter said. I experienced that my own voice was easier to remember and to understand, and also that transcribing tapes takes a lot of time.

4.4.5 Time use chart

A time use chart gives the children an opportunity to recall everyday experiences and special events in their lives (Ennew, *et al.*, 2009). The children were asked to write or draw: “What I do on week days, weekends and holidays” and “The people I live together with and what they do when I am in school”. When conducting this task, the children were given 4 sheets of paper, and the children were asked to write or draw what they did during weekdays, weekends and holidays. On the last sheet the children were asked to draw the people they lived together with and what they did during the day.

On the time use chart I did not use minutes and hours, because the children would probably not be familiar with relating to the clock. Instead, I divided the day into 5 different periods of time; sunrise, morning, midday, afternoon and sunset. I believe that dividing the day according to the clock would have given me more imprecise answers than when dividing the day according to the sun. When using time use charts also for weekends and holidays I wanted to learn about the children’s lives outside the school. Giving the children the opportunity to decide whether to write or draw, they could choose the activity they preferred. In the Migrant School the children had spent such a long time with their drawings the first workshop day, therefore they were now asked not to use their rulers and not to use so much time on each drawing. The children in the Migrant School made 4 different drawings, and even if they worked intense also this second day of the workshop, they seemed less concentrated than the first day, and were talking more together as they were working. I continued to interview the children about their drawings.

When giving the children the task: “The people I live together with and what they are doing when I am not in school” I wanted to learn about the children’s families and what school activities and jobs siblings and parents were occupied with. I wanted the children to draw the names of their family members: Mother, brother and so on. However, something went wrong in the translation process in the Refugee Camp School so the family members did not always appear in the children’s drawings. As I made the small interviews with all the children, I could later ask further questions about their family members.

4.4.6 Photography

Photography is a research tool used by many researchers (Ennew, *et al.*, 2009). Alison Clark (2005) gave very small children cameras when she wanted to find out how the children related to their physical environment in order to incorporate the children's points of view in the planning of an outdoor Kindergarten area. I wanted the children to explore their surrounding environment by giving them cameras and the task: 'The places I like and the places I dislike' (in or near by the school area). Afterwards they were going to present the pictures with the *like* and *dislike* to their classmates, the interpreters and me. When taking pictures the children can choose their own images and gain empowerment by expressing their ideas in a nonverbal way (Ennew, *et al.*, 2009). By giving the children disposable cameras in their hands and letting them run away and take pictures of whatever they wanted to I gave the children a chance to voice their opinion on their surroundings in a non-verbal way and to focus on what they found most interesting. The children showed great pleasure when we gave them the cameras. They were also very excited when we had developed the pictures.

They worked in groups with 4 – 6 children, each group given a disposable camera. A day or two later, when the pictures were developed, the same group worked together. Then the children were given 2 big sheets of cardboard where they could stick the photos. They were told to make one poster with the likes, and another with the dislikes. The children worked eagerly in both schools with their posters and presented them for their classes. In the Migrant School the children seemed a bit embarrassed when standing in front of their classmates. The situation was probably completely new for them, and their presentations were all very short. The interpreter translated simultaneously what the children said.

Soon I realised that the children had not understood the distinction between likes and dislikes as I had hoped. What they liked were the nice and bright pictures and what they disliked were the blurred pictures. I was very disappointed, and that hindered me from being watchful in the situation. I do not believe that the children saw my disappointment, however, after the incident I realised that I had not been thoroughly aware of the photos that the children had in fact taken and what they had told about them. New insights may be gained when children do not act in the way the researcher have expected (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). However, I was in this setting very self-centred, focusing mainly on the data that I had expected to get, instead of being in the situation and observe what really emerged in the field.

I had this experience in mind when presenting the photography tool in the Refugee Camp School. I explained the difference between 'likes' and 'dislikes' to the children by repeating the words and using my face and body to show the difference between likes and dislikes. The children were then asked to repeat what I had told them, to ensure that they had understood the task. Then they ran happily away with the cameras. In the Migrant School the children were limited to the school area, but in the Refugee Camp School the children could also go outside the school area to take pictures.

The interpreter and I came back to the Refugee Camp School with the developed pictures on a Friday. That day the school normally finished at 12.00 AM, a fact that no one had told me. I believed that the school closed at 3.00 PM as it did the first day, and we had planned the presentation of the photography task in the afternoon. Anyhow, I asked the students to come back to school after their lunch break and present their photos, and they all came back. The rest of the students and teachers had gone home and the school was now very quiet. However, children and adults came to watch grade 3's activities in the classroom. Some of the adults started to instruct the children how to work with their posters. Several times my interpreter and I asked the adults not to disturb the children while they were working. I tried to explain that I was interested in exploring the children's work, and that it was important for my research that the children were the ones in charge.

After an hour of sticking pictures to the posters, it was time to start the presentation. I had planned the audience only to be the interpreter, the class mates and me. However the class room was soon filled up with other students, parents, teachers and the school Principal. My concern in the situation was that the children's presentation could be negatively affected by their teachers being there. As the session was about to start I realised I could do nothing about it. Asking the audience to leave would have been very impolite. When the Principal and other adults took their time to listen to the children, the session became even more serious and gave the children's voices an important audience. The children seemed relatively confident in the situation and their reflections around what they liked and disliked in their surroundings impressed me and I believe also the rest of the audience.

I asked the children to present the photos with their dislikes first, as I thought it would be better for the children to end each presentation and the whole session with talking about the nice things. It is important that the children leave a workshop with good feelings (Ennew, *et*

al., 2009). The first group of children consisted of 5 boys, between 10 and 13 years. I experienced that in the beginning the children seemed a bit embarrassed and maybe doubted whether it was okay to put forward the things they did not like. I reflected upon the possibility that there was a taboo for the children to talk about “forbidden” things to the teachers who were watching. As the children told about the pictures, and the interpreter translated them into English I followed up with further questions. It seemed like they tried their best to satisfy my questions. When searching for the children’s ideas of their belonging, the researcher needs to be aware of children’s desire to satisfy the adults, and that their answers are influenced by what they believe the adults want to hear (Greene and Hill in Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). I believe this was a new and strange situation for the children. Presenting the photos they had taken gave them a good chance to voice their opinion on important issues in their lives, one of them being the nature around them.

4.5 Language challenges

As I do not speak Karen or Burmese I was prepared that language would be a big challenge in my field work. I was lucky to have local interpreters who had experience from doing research with children. We had a good dialogue. Before I visited the schools they had to translate into Karen the informed consent forms and the written presentation of me and my project to the Principals, and also consent forms and research tools to be used in the workshops with the children.

I was told that all the children in the Migrant School had Karen as their Mother tongue. The teachers used both Karen and Burmese as teaching language. When translating from English to Karen, my interpreters used *back translation*, a process to ensure “*an agreed version of the research tool*” (Ennew, et al., 2009, p. 5.46). One of them would translate the English text into Karen language, and the other would translate it back into English. If there were any contradictions the interpreters and I would discuss the meanings until we agreed upon them. This was a time consuming, though very necessary process, in terms of finding the most precise and understandable expressions for the children.

The piloting process revealed that the children in the Migrant School were not at all able to read Karen, however they could read a little Burmese. They could not write any of the languages. My interpreters had translated the consent form and all the information to the

children from English to Karen, and now they had to do it all once more, this time into Burmese. Back translation was used also this time. In the Refugee Camp School we could use the Karen translation, as all the children there could read Karen.

4.6 Ethics and research strategy

As I was a complete stranger, only staying in the field for a short time, not being able to understand the children's language, not knowing much of the cultural context, I chose a very open research question, with no prior purpose than trying to understand as much as possible about the meaning the children lay in their experience of school and their everyday lives.

“It seems to us that, if research is to achieve anything, it should proceed from a position of ignorance. For us, research is fundamentally a process of muddling through, sometimes feeling lost and out of place, asking stupid questions, being corrected and having our preconceptions destroyed” (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008, p. 512).

When I introduced myself in the schools, I told that I had not come there to teach, my aim was to learn from the children. I explained to the children in words and pictures that I came from a world very different from their world. I also told them that I was a teacher and that my interest in children and in education had brought me to their part of the world, to learn to know about their lives. My aim with the presentation was to let the children learn to know a little about me to hopefully reduce the power inequality. I was the ‘novice’ and the children were the experts and the ones that could teach me. This role reversal between the expert and the novice was of course difficult for the children to understand. However, I wanted to give them the opportunity to know as much as possible about my aim.

Before conducting the workshops I gave the children a consent form to sign. The consent form guaranteed the children's anonymity as well as their right to refuse to participate or to withdraw their consent at any time during the workshops without any disadvantage for them. They were then asked to agree to take part in the research project. One of the interpreters read the informed consent form together with the children, and they all signed without any objections or further questions.

However, asking for the children's informed consent in a school setting is questionable (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). The children may interpret the research as schoolwork, and the children's *informed consent* can be understood as *education consent*. The high response rate in school based research is due to this hidden pressure (Kellett & Ding, 2008). Even if I told the children that they had a right to dissent from the workshops, one can question whether they really had this choice; to say no to a western woman visiting their school.

I had already been in the school for two weeks when I did the interviews with the children in the Migrant School, so they were accustomed to me and to the interpreter and maybe felt quite safe and not too shy together with us. However, I was very aware of the ethical issues concerning the interview situation. I did not want to ask intrusive questions or to put any pressure on the children because they were in a strange situation where they might feel uncomfortable.

In the Refugee Camp School I was a completely stranger when we started the workshops and the interviews. After two interviews, I started to get some ethical concerns. Even if the children rowed up and seemed eager to talk with me, I felt as an intruder in the situation. My solution was to interview groups of 3 to 4 children instead of talking to them one by one. Then the children at least had some friends around, when speaking to two strange adults.

I had learned to know the children and some of the school teachers in the Migrant School for more than two weeks' time, and when it was time to say goodbye the Principal had arranged for photographs to be taken, and I had bought ice cream. We had a small goodbye party. They asked me if I would come back. I said I could not promise anything, but I hoped to do so.

4.6.1 Research role and power relations

An important issue in research is power relations. Physical appearance, among them dress code, is of importance (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). I used clothes similar to what other women were wearing in the schools and in the refugee camp and I even bought Karen clothes to use in the schools. It was necessary for a woman to have a shirt that covered the shoulders and to have a skirt or trousers that covered most of the legs. However, as a blond, tall, white woman I always stood out from the locals.

Even more crucial than dressing, when concerning power relations, are issues like age, gender, education, knowledge, ethnicity and so forth. Robinson and Kellett (2008) argue that “*school is a context where the adult-child power imbalance is particularly acute*” and they question the ethics when doing research with “captive subjects” and what effect this has on research conducted in schools (Robinson & Kellett, 2008, p. 91). School is compulsory and not a chosen setting for children. Adults make the curriculum and the time-tables; they are in power and exert control over children. The children also have expectations about what views they are allowed to put forward in school (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006).

Power inequality between adults and children has a root in a belief in adult superiority, while this is undoubtedly wrong when it comes to knowing how it is to be a child in a particular place and time (Robinson & Kellett, 2008). Children are the experts in their own world. William Corsaro and Molinari (2000) used the term *novice* to show how adults lack competence about children’s life (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). So, even if I knew that both adults and children in school may be viewed me as ‘an adult superior’ I presented myself as a novice in a world where the children were the experts and where I wanted to learn about their lives.

Participant observation was not as easy as I had hoped. The first observation day in the Migrant School I felt very embarrassed when sitting in the classroom, I felt I disturbed the children. I had to sit, very visible, by the side wall, and the children could watch me all the time. Ennew argues that researchers should not sit on a chair while the children sit on the floor (Ennew, *et al.*, 2009). I could not understand how it was possible for the children to sit on the concrete floor for hours every day, I could not have done it even for one hour. My idea and intention of being together with the children without disturbing too much the normal school day, did not work out that well. The children’s interest in me made the situation “not normal” in the observation period.

Another challenge concerning my research role was that the class teacher had lessons both in grade 2 and grade 1 at the same time, so he walked between the classrooms. Sometimes he could be away for more than 20 minutes. By that time all the children had finished the tasks he had given them before he went. With no teacher in the classroom to hold the children’s attention, they soon started to approach me. The first day, they came to me with drawings. Soon I had my hands full of drawings and other small things that the children had made for

me. The next day they wanted me to draw. One by one the children came forward with sheets of paper and I drew dogs and cars, houses and trees, and when the school bell rang at 3.00 PM I was completely exhausted.

Drawing was fine, but when the teacher was away, I met greater challenges. The school children were accustomed to meet Western volunteers working as teachers in the school, mostly in the upper grades. I guess it was easy both for the children and for the teachers to associate me with the volunteering teachers, and the children kept calling me *Teacher Laila*. I experienced that a main challenge concerning my role, had to do with the language barrier. Very few of the teachers in The Migrant School spoke English. I asked one of my interpreters to come to school to help me communicate once more to the class teacher my role as a researcher. The interpreter came, and we had a meeting with the class teacher.

As a way of dealing with the fact that the children often were left alone, and I was the only adult in the class room, I offered to have a few English lessons with the children. Both the teacher and the children seemed happy with this arrangement. Fine and Sandstrom (1988) described different roles that the researcher can take when working with children. My role in the classroom in the observation period was not to be an authoritarian adult as a *supervisor* or a *leader* who told the children what to do and how to behave. Ennew *et al.* argue that researchers should not act like teachers (2009). However it was not easy for me to follow the intention of not acting as a teacher. Even if I tried to explain my role for the Principal and the class teacher I had the feeling that both children and adults at school placed me as 'the one in charge' in the class room.

4.7 Analysing the data

The analysing process starts already with the research question, and is an on-going process that should lead our thinking, "*back and forth between ideas and data*" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 159). I went home from Thailand with my field notes, the children's essays, drawings, time use charts and photos, as well as a tape recorder with recorded interviews from children and adults. All the data material was transcribed and categorised. Transcribing the interviews was very time consuming, and a secretary would have been convenient. However the children's texts and interviews were quite short, so it was manageable. All the writings from the children were transferred to the computer, and

drawings, photos and essays ordered in themes. *Open coding* is a process much used in *grounded theory*, where research data is broken down, examined, conceptualised and categorized (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) gave qualitative researchers strategies to grasp the content in the phenomenon being researched, by a continuous back and forth process between the empiric data and theory (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Analysing my data has been an on-going process between my field work material and relevant theory. “*Analysis is a systematic process of sorting and re-sorting the data in different ways so that the trends, links, similarities and gaps are identified*” (Ennew, *et al.*, 2009, p. 7.26). *Meaning condensation* is a process where the text is extracted into a few words, compressed into units of meaning applicable for further interpretation and analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Further interpretation means to go deeper into the text to look for structures and connections that are not so evident (*ibid*). I searched for the issues that the children raised, and I made a lot of tables, coded and categorised the material in many different ways, reorganised and reread the data and wrote down my reflections connected to the different themes I found interesting.

The analysing process develops from description to theorising (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). My aim in the process has been to search for the concepts which can give me a theoretical framework to analyse and discuss the experiences of the children’s everyday lives as they were revealed to me. I also compared the data from the two different schools to look at similarities and differences and I also looked at age and gender differences. While the coding and the meaning condensation is a de-contextualisation process the *interpretation* re-contextualises the text. In analysing a text the researcher’s presuppositions will influence the analysis process (*ibid*).

4.7.1 Validity and reliability

Wanting to learn about the children’s everyday life experiences, I often during the field period and more often after asked myself the question; have I really grasped anything essential related to these children’s lives? Are my findings reliable? Is the interview a good way of getting data, or do the children answer what they believe the researcher wants to hear? Scourfield *et al.* (2006) raised the last question and it may be asked both related to what the children said and what they wrote. A research’s *reliability* has to do with the trustworthiness

and the consistence of the findings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). “*Validity has in the social sciences pertained to whether a method investigated what it purports to investigate*” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 246). The whole research process, not only the final report needs to be validated to ensure the quality of the research.

Ennew *et al.* focused on the importance of using *triangulation*, which is to use several different research tools “*in order to increase the validity of research analysis*” (2009, p. 10.22). Different research methods give the possibility to cross-check the data, to compare them and to analyse similarities and differences (Ennew, *et al.*, 2009). I used a lot of different methods in my research, which gave me a possibility to compare findings from the different research tools. In this way the validity of my findings has been strengthened.

Using a tape recorder was difficult because of the noise in the crowded Refugee Camp School, so in many of the interviews it was hard to understand what the children said. When transcribing the interviews I had problems with hearing the interpreter. However, I heard myself quite well, as I was holding the tape recorder. I used a method where I often repeated what the interpreter said, in order to reassure that I had understood the answer in a right way. I also kept asking around the theme when I did not understand the answer that was given. It could either be the child’s answer that was not clear to me, it could be that I did not understand what the interpreter said, or it could be my lack of knowledge about the cultural context. This sending of meaning back and forth is equivalent to “*the self-correcting interview*” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 195). Sometimes this process led to discussion with me and the interpreter trying to clear out a matter. To include the children in this process, I asked the interpreter to explain to the children what we were discussing. Had I not used this method, it would have been very difficult to get any meaning out of many of the interviews, as the children and the interpreter’s voices disappeared in the noise.

If my interview objects were not so far away, it would have been very clarifying to re-interview the children and to give my interpretations back to the children in the course of giving them a chance to correct my interpretations. Another problem with asking questions like: “What are your thoughts about school, and what do you want to do after graduation” in a group setting, is that the first child’s answer seemed to set a standard for the rest of the children’s answers. Then it is good to have the children’s writings to compare the interviews with, using the triangulation method. I used lay interpreters who were also my sponsors into

the field. Using an interpreter will inevitably influence the reliability of the findings. I will elaborate more on the language challenges in the next chapters where I present, analyse and discuss my findings.

4.7.2 Language interpretation and culture

Some of the written material from the children was difficult to understand. I discussed much of it in retrospect with my interpreters, and after I came back to Norway I used a Karen translator to help me shed light on some ambiguities. However, all the three translators found some of the writings difficult to interpret. The children may have used an incorrect grammar in their writings, and by so doing, meaning may be blurred. If I would have had time to talk to the children about their essays, I would probably have understood more. In the analysis I have concentrated my findings on the writings I could understand, and left out the ambiguous material. A lot of the material on my tape recorder has also been left out because of too much noise in the Refugee Camp School. Because I have such rich data material I see no harm leaving out some of the texts or oral material.

Interpretation of the children's expressions was sometimes challenging. Some of the expressions used by the translators may be interpreted in different ways. I want to illustrate this challenge with an example. One boy wrote a sentence that the interpreter translated as: "*That day we have to eat rice*" (Boy 9 RS). This expression could for me easily be understood as something that was not so pleasurable, and maybe as something that did not happen that often. However, when the same child used the expression 'have to' also when presenting other activities like: "*On the right time we have to play*" (Boy 9 RS), it was difficult to interpret the expression 'have to' as meaning any sort of compulsive or coercive activity. It should maybe just be understood as an activity the child was engaged in.

I will give another example related to the language challenges. In the small interviews in the Refugee Camp School I asked the children: "*What do you like to do when you are not in school?*" The children gave answers like: "*I look after my siblings*", "*I carry water*", "*I cook for my mother*". With my western normative heritage with an interest in children's *leisure* activities I had expected answers about joyful activities and play. Instead the children told about house hold chores. I therefore asked my interpreter how he had translated the question. He said he had translated it with words that meant: "*What do you do when you are not in*

school?” I tried to explain to him that my intention with the question was to learn about what the children preferred to do, what they liked to do. My interpreter replied that he found the two questions to have almost the same meaning.

In the culture where I come from it would be adequate to ask the question: “*What do you like to do when you are not in school*”, when wanting to learn about children’s leisure time activities. My interpreter did not see the same distinction as I did between the two questions: ‘what you *do*’ and ‘what you *like to do*’. The former expression relates to the actual activities you are engaged in, the latter to what you enjoy doing. Reflections around whether you ‘like’ or ‘not like’ related to activities like school work, household chores and play is maybe not so prominent in this cultural context, or maybe there were some distinctions in the language that were not possible for me to grasp here.

The example shows that language interpretation is related to cultural context, and that our knowledge and understanding of the world is related to the language we use. Some postmodern philosophers understand knowledge as constituted through language. They believe that there is no such thing as an objective world; language itself constitutes the reality (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). In this perspective we can say that reality will be perceived and understood in different ways in all languages. It can also explain why communication across cultures and languages can be so challenging.

Chapter 5: Analysis 1, School and everyday life

5.0 Introduction

My first analysis chapter will be related to my first research question: “*What is the meaning of school for Karen children from Burma living as refugees and migrants in Thailand?*” There are similarities and differences between the lives of migrant children in an urban area and refugee children living in a rural refugee camp in Thailand. I will present and analyse some of the differences I found between the two groups of children. The two following quotes, the first one from a girl in the Migrant School, the second from a girl in the Refugee Camp School, illustrates some of the differences in the children’s daily life experiences:

“I am going to buy snack with my sister. We are waiting for the school car to take us to school. We eat rice for lunch. I play with my friends. I am eating and my sister and my mother are watching a video. A friend gives me a flower. My mother is shopping. My mother is selling juice on the street. I carry water” (Girl 9 MS).

“In the early morning, I get up to cook, wash my face and brush my teeth. I then eat and go to school. During the lunch break I go home to eat and come back to school again. In the afternoon I return to have a shower. I then read my book and have dinner. I go to sleep in the evening” (Girl 10 RS).

The girl in the Migrant School spoke about taking the school car. In the refugee camp I saw no cars, only a few motor bikes. There were mostly narrow paths between the houses, only suitable for walking. The migrant girl also told about shopping, selling juice and watching video. These issues, that seemed to be daily experiences for many of the migrant children, were hardly mentioned by the refugee camp children. This illustrates that the refugee children had access to fewer material goods than the migrant children had.

In my analysis I will use many quotes from the children to let the children’s voices be heard. The quotes are both from the essays and the time use charts, as well as from the oral material; the small interviews and the group presentation of the photos in the classroom. The quotes will be marked with school, age and gender. A 10 year old girl from the Migrant School will be marked like this: (Girl 10 MS) and e.g. a 13 year old boy from the Refugee Camp School will be marked like this: (Boy 13 RS). In the group presentation of the photos I have marked the age of the children in the group like this: (Girls 10 – 13 RS). I choose to use only the

English version of the texts and the oral material because I do not understand the Karen writing or speaking. I have mostly used the quotes exactly as they were translated to me by the interpreters. Sometimes I have taken the quotes that I found interesting out of longer essays. I have also corrected orthography and grammar to make the content more clear.

The children described through drawings, essays, time-use charts and small interviews what sort of activities they were engaged in during weekdays, weekends and holidays. I will start by looking at my findings related to the children's thoughts about their school experiences. Since school was my main focus, this part of the chapter will be given more space. Thereafter I will analyse my findings related to the other daily life activities; work and play. The children showed that there were differences in their activities during weekdays, weekends and holidays. Some of these differences will also be presented. In the last part of the chapter I will present some of the other issues put forward by the children. They told me about health, hygiene and daily meals. In the time use charts about weekend and holiday time activities they wrote and talked about travelling, religion, feasts, festivals, and other leisure activities.

5.1 The importance of education

Karen people and refugees in particular, have a strong emphasis on education and see it as a way to a better life for themselves and for their community (Oh & Van Der Stouwe, 2008). The children I met in the refugee camp also valued education highly. Here is what a 13 year old boy wrote about school:

“I am so happy when I study, and my teachers love me very much. I help my parents carrying water. I take a little break and then I go to school. When I go to school I am so happy to play with my friends. Before the school starts we play and we draw. My parents love me very much. I always greet my teachers when I see them on the way. My friends love me very much when I go to school. When I was in my village I did not have a chance to study, but when I came to Thailand my auntie took me to school and I am very happy” (Boy 13 RS)

This text, as many of the other texts written by the children in the Refugee Camp School, is full of positive words about being able to attend school. Here is another text showing the gratitude that was expressed by so many of the refugee children:

“During my school time I like studying a lot. That is why I want to thank all my teachers. Since I started my school time the teachers have taught me nicely, and I want to thank all of them. Every teacher, everybody, thank you very much for coming and teaching us so that we understand more things” (Girl 12 RS).

In their small essays the refugee camp children told me the name of their school; they wrote about the physical surrounding, they told what grade they were in and what subjects they attended, as these three small texts show:

“I live in a refugee camp. I study grade 3. My school is in NN refugee camp. I am a student. There are some flowers around my school. There are classes in my school. There are also groups in my school. I always have smile” (Boy 12 RS).

“During the school time I get learning at school, and I love that at school we have trees and bamboos. Behind my school we have mountains (and) rocks” (Girl 10 RS).

The children did not write much about the content in the different school subjects, however some of the children told about their favourite subject, like these two girls:

“When I start my school, my subjects are English....My second favourite subject is Karen subject. The third one is social subject....The fourth one is Burmese” (Girl 10 RS).

“When I study I want to study English, but my school has up to grade 4 only. In my school my teachers teach me, and I am so happy. I want to understand more about English. We are so happy that you visit us. But I can’t speak English” (Girl 11 RS).

This last quote might imply that the refugee children had a desire to communicate with people from outside the refugee camp, and they saw language learning as a way of acquiring knowledge and understanding of the outside world.

The children also wrote about the importance of passing exams. They had to pass exams every year already from Kindergarten (from around 5 years). If the children did not pass the exam they had to study for another year in the same grade. A couple of the children in the

Refugee Camp School wrote about the importance of passing the exams and attending grade 4 next year: *“Now I am at grade 3. I like to attend school. I hope I will pass year by year of my grade”* (Girl 12 RS). *“I am so glad I am in school, I passed my exam.”* (Girl 13 RS).

5.1.1 ‘I love my school’

Many of the children in the refugee camp constructed a school that they were proud of, a school where they engaged in learning activities and where the teachers were loving and caring. The Refugee Camp School children highlighted their feelings and thoughts related to *going to school* and they spoke warmly about their love and gratitude of being a student:

“My school is good, and I like studying very much” (Boy 13 RS).

“I am very happy that I have an opportunity to study. I want to be educated”
(Girl 11 RS).

“I am so happy that I have an opportunity to study” (Boy 9 RS).

As mentioned above, the children hardly put forward expression related to the content in the different subjects they studied. However, their gratitude towards the school and the teachers were profound. Children, who had lived in Burma before they came to the refugee camp, may have experienced that they could not go to school. Many Karen people sent their children to the refugee camps and to the migrant schools to get education (IOM, 2011). Education is not a taken for granted right in this area. The gratitude that the children expressed because they could go to school must be seen in this light.

Many of the refugee camp students showed a strong belief that attending school was important for them. Several children wrote about being a ‘good’ student, like these two girls:

“I am a good person when I study” (Girl 13 RS).

“All my teachers love me very much because I am a good student and obedient”
(Girl 11 RS).

In the essays from the children in the Refugee Camp School there was a unanimous choir of praising of the children’s lives as students. The vast majority of the refugee children wrote that they were happy to attend school. They thanked their family members who brought them to school, and they thanked their teachers and their school friends. They promised to study hard and to do their best to be good and obedient students. Some of the students wrote they were sorry that their school was up to 4th grade only. They would have wanted to attend the

school longer, as they loved their school. In this praising ‘of the school I found not one dissenting voice.

5.1.2 Being a good and obedient student

The word *obedience* was used in some of the children’s writings, related to being a *good student*. Some wrote that if you are obedient and listen to the teachers, you will succeed in your education:

“If I obey I will be a nurse” (Girl 10 RS).

“I listen to them when they teach, and I do everything that they ask me. I try to be still when they teach me, and I listen to them. My teachers thank me for being obedient. My friends play when I listen to my teacher” (Girl 8 RS).

I discussed the last sentence from this girl with my interpreter, and he suggested that when the girl wrote that she was listening while her friends were playing; she meant that listening to the teacher was right and playing was wrong. She listened to her teachers and obeyed them, and therefore she was a good student, while her friends were not good students because they were playing. The expression *“I try to be still”* might indicate that it is not always easy to be an obedient student.

One girl had the opinion that all the children were good and obedient students: *“We are students and we all listen and obey to the teachers”* (Girl 11 RS). Many of the children in the refugee camp brought in the importance of education for their future life.

“When we study I have to listen to the teachers carefully. When we are young we have to learn more education so that it will be helpful in our lives. I should be respectful always. I am a good student” (Girl 13 RS).

Some of the children also used the term *rude words* to express what a good student is not:

“Now I am grade 3. I have to try my best. I should not have to use my rude words” (Boy 9 RS). *Rude signs* were also apparent related to *like* and *dislike* in the photos taken by the children. ‘Finger-language’ was a feature in almost all of the pictures they had taken of their friends and other children. With their fingers they could make *good signs* and *bad signs*. In the photo-session I asked the boys what they disliked in a particular picture. One of them answered that it was: *“(It is) a rude sign that means disobedience”* (Boys 10 – 13 RS). In the

pictures showing their likes there were also many fingers pointing to the camera: *“These are my friends, that is a victory sign, 3 fingers mean I love you”* (Boys 9 – 12 RS).

As mentioned earlier, being a ‘good’ and ‘obedient’ student was highlighted by many of the refugee children: *“I hope in my life I will be a good person. The same time I will be an obedient person”* (Girl 12 RS). Many of the refugee children wrote that the school they attended was the best school. To attend school and to study was by many children constructed as the ‘good life’: *“The study that I am studying now is the best thing for me”* (Girl 11 RS). *“When I study, I have a good life”* (Girl 11 RS). By studying, the children saw themselves as ‘becoming’ educated persons in their future lives: *“I want to learn the best subject, so that I will be educated”* (Girl 11 RS). They felt pride and a positive identification related to both ‘being a good student’ as well as attending this particular school.

5.1.3 Reading and homework

There was a library very near to the school. The library appeared in the photos as a place that the children liked:

“We often go to the library. We like it. It can improve our education” (Girls 10 – 13 RS)



The library



A class room in the Refugee Camp School

Reading was an activity much spoken of by the children in the refugee camp: *“In the morning my teacher asks me to write a lesson or read a book, we must be quiet the time they read in the book”* (Girl 13 RS). Neither of the schools I visited was very quiet. In the Migrant School some of the classrooms had 3 concrete walls, the fourth wall was open. The other classrooms only had bamboo walls. The Refugee Camp School had no walls at all between the

classrooms. Very often the whole class was reading, reciting or singing, making the schools very lively.

The children in the Refugee Camp School wrote a lot about doing homework, and the main issue was reading. They read in the morning before they went to school, and they read in the evening before they went to bed:

“Before I go to school I practise reading the lesson” (Girl 12 RS).

“We cook for my mother, clean, hang up the swing, collect water, we shower, we feed our siblings, we have dinner, we read book and go to bed” (Girl 12 RS).

“In the afternoon I take dinner, and have to read all the lessons that my teacher has taught” (Boy 12 RS).

Reading was an issue put forward by almost all the children in the Refugee Camp School, and one of the daily activities that appeared most often in the refugee camp children’s time use charts. There was a significant difference between how much the children were reading during weekdays, weekends and holidays. 33 out of 35 children wrote that they read during weekdays, 25 read in the weekend, while only 12 children wrote about reading during holidays. While almost all the 35 children in the Refugee Camp School children wrote and spoke about their love for their school, not many wrote about liking or loving related to homework. They just told that they were reading. None of the migrant children told about reading or any other kind of school homework; however they spoke more about work and play.

After having presented perspectives on school put forward by the children I now turn to presenting school content from an adult perspective.

5.1.4 School curriculum and resources

I wanted to know more about the content in the education, so I asked the Principals if I could see the school curriculum. I come from a culture where education goals and learning agreement are implemented in national curricula. Childhood in the western world is a period dominated of schooling. The school curricula define what is to be learned (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). In the Refugee Camp School they gave me a few sheets of paper, (In Karen, and then translated into English by someone) nicely hand written by some of the teachers in grade 3. They had been kind and written down what they had been doing in the different lessons last

week. The aim for the mathematic lesson was in addition to learn calculation, to make the children into “*famous people in the future*” (Teacher RS). In the geography lesson one aim was “*to be able to measure, so that they can be leaders in the future*” (Teacher RS). In the Karen lesson the aim was to learn the advantage of education, while in the Burmese and English lessons the more formal sides of language teaching were in focus.

From the Migrant School I received a pamphlet written by the school Principal. The pamphlet gives a historical background for the school and highlights the necessity to give Karen youth from Burma an education. The school’s aim was to give the students knowledge in Karen and Burmese language and culture, and also to give them a chance to “*think for themselves so they can determine their own truths. Sharing ideas among the students is prioritized instead of the typical “Teacher-centred system”*” (Principal MS). The different subjects taught in school are listed together with the school’s intention to develop self-discipline, self-confidence, and good moral in the students so they can be able to “*work together for democracy and humanitarianism*” (Principal MS).

Educators in the migrant and refugee schools have been “*eager to provide a meaningful educational experience for the displaced youth*” (Purkey, 2010, p. 97). The schools seem to want to build its curricula on their own Karen culture. Karen is the teaching language and school uniforms are Karen clothes. However, the schools are totally dependent on NGO’s for funding, teacher training and curriculum design, and also on a good relationship with the local Thai community. Close collaboration between the different educational actors and mutual understand is necessary in order to let the Karen and Burmese educators define “*their own needs and aspirations*” and to use their agency and creativity in developing the education system for the migrants and refugee youth (Purkey, 2010, p. 98).

The schools’ resources are very limited, and lack of facilities and educated personnel in the migrant schools may force the schools to accept funding and teachers wherever they come from, educators that not necessarily understand the cultural context these schools are located in (Purkey, 2010). Both the schools I visited were rich in number of students but lacked all kind of facilities as well as enough educated teachers. Some of the children in the Refugee Camp School were concerned with increasing their school’s quality:

“*I want more education so that I can improve my school and make my school famous*”
(Girl 12 RS).

“I hope this school will be more developed too” (Girl 12 RS).

In many countries in the majority world the school system has not changed much since the colonial time, the teachers are still the experts, the curricula does not meet the children’s needs and the students are not encouraged to be creative, critical and interactive (Ansell, 2002; Dyer, 2002; Bessel, 2009). The intention to create a meaningful school for the students was prominent in the small bits I saw of the curricula in the schools I visited. The Principal in The Migrant School highlighted the development of the students’ own thinking, and the sharing of ideas as opposed to the teacher centered education. However I assume that the lack of resources and educated teachers in the schools may be a great hinder for quality development in the daily school practice. From the short time of my visit it is hard to tell if there were many remnants from the colonial school system in the curricula and in the teaching practices.

5.2. Work

5.2.1 Migrant workers

As mentioned in the theory chapter, the meaning of work in this thesis is mostly related to household chores, and the children’s contribution to the daily household activities in the families they live. However, I will start this section by looking at what jobs the migrant children’s family members were engaged in. To understand the lives of children it is important to understand the cultural context in which they live (Prout & James, 1990). I asked the children to draw or write about their family and what their family members were doing when the children were at school. The refugee children mostly told about housework when writing about what their parents were doing while they were in school.

The Migrant School children told me about their family and what sorts of jobs their parents and siblings had. Most of the children in the Migrant School lived with their parents:

“I live with my parents and my siblings. My brother who is 16 goes to work, washes dishes and cooks for Thai people. My other 2 brothers come with me to school to study. Mum is cleaning toilets to get some money, and father is doing mechanic work, repairing cars” (Girl 12 MS).

Only 2 of the 16 children in the Migrant School did not live with their parents: *“I live with my grandparents. My mother and father go to Bangkok to work. Grandma does house work and grandpa goes to work with construction”* (Girl 12 MS). Some of the migrant children had siblings who did not attend school, but engaged instead in paid labour. The migrant workers, also many of the children, contribute a lot to the local economy in the border area (IOM, 2011). In some areas *“the local economy survives on low-wage Refugee work and bribes”* (WCRWC, 2008). Some of the older children leave the area to find jobs elsewhere in Thailand, like this Migrant School girl told about:

“I live with my parents and my sisters. One sister is 12. She is in Bangkok and works in a cloth factory. My sister at 10 and my sister at 5 are at home and look after the house. My mother works as a house cleaner. My father works on the corn field”
(Girl 9 MS).

In the above quote the parents have jobs common for Burmese migrants in the area. Together the parents can probably earn around 20 – 40 Norwegian kroner a day. Health care is insufficient among migrant workers, and protecting labour laws hardly exist (IOM, 2011). The twelve year old sister in the above quote worked in one of the many cloth factories in Thailand. Many children in Thailand start working at this age, even if it is illegal for children under 14 years to work (Montgomery, 2001).

Domestic work and agricultural work dominated the work of the migrant children’s parents. The most common occupation for the mothers of the Migrant School children was to work as a cleaner or a house keeper for a Thai family. Two of the mothers sell food in the market. The fathers are mostly occupied in the rice – and cornfields in the outskirts of town, others work in construction, mechanics or service. Not only parents and siblings, but also some of the children I met in the Migrant School told me that they had paid jobs. In the small talks about their daily life activities in the time use charts drawings, these girls wrote that they had to work to earn money:

“I go to work, wash dishes for Thai people, cook for Thai employer to earn some money, sell soft drinks” (Girl 12 MS).

“I have to sell vegetables every day, before and after school to earn money to pay for food.” (Girl 12 MS).

Many of the migrant workers in Thailand work in unsafe and health damaging environments with heavy work. The wages are low and they often experience exploitation.

“Moreover, many migrant workers fall into semi-forced employment as they are prohibited from leaving their workplace due to the strictness of their employers or debt bondage related to the high costs of unregulated registration/regularization processes often paid by their employers first and then deducted from their salaries over many years” (IOM, 2011, p. 66).

Some of the migrant workers have experienced systematic violence, blackmail, illegal imprisonment and detention. Women and children are more exposed to abuse than males, as they often work in domestic isolation, and they are also prone to sexual abuse and trafficking (IOM, 2011).

5.2.2 Household chores

Almost all the children in my findings wrote and spoke about doing household chores. Most of the children I met did not have paid labour as a daily experience. However *work* seemed to be a big part of their daily lives. Many children in the majority world work (Punch, 2003). Contribution in daily chores seemed to be a *taken for granted* activity in these children’s lives and the children seemed to contribute a lot to the household activities. The children helped their parents, as well as other relatives. It is common for children in the majority world to contribute in household activities from a very young age (Punch, 2001). Both the migrant and the refugee children told a lot about engaging in chores. Girls and boys were ‘giving a hand’ to their parents, they were cooking, carrying water, sweeping, looking after siblings and engaging in outdoor activities like feeding animals and fetching vegetables in the forest. In the Refugee Camp School 34 out of 35 children wrote about household chores as a daily activity. In the Migrant School, 11 out of 16 children talked about chores.

I could not find big gender differences related to household chores, however when the children wrote about ‘giving a hand’ to their parents, that could probably relate to different activities for girls and boys. Female and male adult gender roles in household activities are not necessarily mirrored among children (Punch, 2001). One of the household activities was more spoken about by the girls than by the boys; girls told much more about looking after

their siblings than the boys did. However, also boys wrote about looking after siblings or cousins: *“After finishing cooking, when my auntie is eating, I take care of the children”* (Boy 13 RS).

There were also other gender and age differences in my findings. The younger boys wrote more about chores, than the youngest girls did. In the time use charts, I found a tendency that the oldest girls contributed more to the household chores than the younger ones. At least they put more emphasis on it to me. It might also be that the expectations towards contributing in the household stronger for the girls than for the boys. Studies have shown that children’s engagement in chores increase with age and also that girls tend to work more than boys (Punch, 2001).

I was curious to know if the children contributed more in the household during weekends and holidays when they did not attend school. More spare time could maybe mean more time to engage in household chores as this girl implied. *“In the morning, because my school is closed, I stay at home and carry water* (Girl 10 RS). However, the children did not write much about chores in their weekend and holiday time use charts. These findings may be interpreted in two ways: Either they in fact work less in weekends and holidays or they associate weekends and holidays with other activities and therefore the daily activities were not that much in their mind.

As with the readings the children did not reveal much about their ideas about doing chores, they mainly described what chores they were engaged in. These activities probably took much of their time in their daily lives. Working is the main activity limiting children’s possibility to engage in a childhood culture (Punch, 2003). In the next two quotes the girls’ statements about work and play may reveal a conflict experienced between what the girls ‘must’ do, and what they ‘want’ to do:

“My mother allows me to go out to play just for five minutes” (Girl 12 RS).

“When we cook rice with my friends, my friends ask me to go with them. I said I am not free, next time” (Girl 12 RS).

Engaging in household chores seemed to be an activity that the children took for granted while playing and being with friends were often described as pleasurable activities: *“In the weekend I am so happy to play with my friends”* (Boy 9 RS). The refugee children wrote much more about household chores than they wrote about play, while the migrant children wrote a little more about play than about work.

The children told about activities that could be seen both as play and work. Children often negotiate their time to combine work and play (Punch, 2003). Two of the migrant boys wrote about going fishing in the weekends. Some work-activities are also perceived as pleasurable: *“In the morning we go to find the vegetables. We also relax in the forest with our friends, auntie and uncle. We go out many people; we pick the food for the pig with happiness”* (Girl 12 RS).

5.3 Play

In the time use charts the children in the Migrant School drew themselves when they were playing, while the refugee camp children wrote small texts. The children in the Refugee Camp School wrote about playing without much specification of what sort of play: *“After noon time I have fun with playing”* (Girl 13 RS). A few of the boys told that they watched and played football; some played cards and the girls told about skipping ropes. Rope skipping was an activity I saw many girls engaged in when I walked around in the refugee camp.

The refugee and migrant children played with friends and with siblings. They played before school and they played at school: *“During the recess, we play, chasing each other”* (Boy 13 RS). The children also played after school: *“I take a break and go out to play football”* (Boy 13 RS). However, most of the children in the refugee camp did not write about playing during weekdays.

There are marked differences in how the children’s describe their activities during schooldays, weekends and holidays. I wondered if the children spent more time playing when they were free from school, and it looks like they were more engaged in play during weekends and holidays, like this girl tells: *“In the morning, after I eat, I go out and play. During the noontime, when the school is not open, I play with my young sisters until they sleep”* (Girl 11 RS).

In the Migrant School there were only 3 boys in the class. They all talked about playing football on weekdays: *“I play football with my friends”* (Boy 9 MS). Many of the girls talked about skipping ropes: *“I skip outside my house”* (Girl 11 MS). *“There is a long row for skipping. I am the last one”* (Girl 9 MS). The Chinese jump rope was an activity the children were practising every day in the school breaks. There were mostly girls, but also some boys attending the rope skipping. Other games I saw in the Migrant School were cane ball (a Burmese game where they kick a small ball over a net) and football, two team games that were mostly played by the older boys. Some of the older students used the football field in the lunch breaks every day. Many students and some teachers acted as an enthusiastic cheering audience. The football game seemed to be a big, daily entertaining event for the whole school. As mentioned earlier, the school had moved from a crowded street in the middle of the town only two months earlier. In the new school the students had access to much space, and many of the children said they were very happy because they now had more space to play.

It looked as if the football ground was reserved for the older boys, maybe because of a hierarchical structure where the oldest students got access to the most status characterised and interesting games. As a present I gave the children in both schools a volleyball and a football. The 3 boys in the Migrant School were happy to be able to use the football ground with their own ball, probably for the first time, while the other students at school had their lessons.

In the Refugee Camp School there were not much room for ball games. However, when I gave them a football and a volleyball the children told me that they sometimes were allowed to go outside the schoolyard to play in a ball field. I saw older boys playing cane ball there, and I saw young boys running home-made kites high up in the sky.

Having a lot of space, the children in the Migrant School also engaged in chasing games, running after each other. This was popular among the youngest students. Older students were engaged in guitar playing and singing during the breaks. The migrant children told about a leisure time filled with play and other activities. One activity which I only found among the girls in the Migrant School was *the watching of nature*:

“I go out to see the flowers in the garden” (Girl 10 MS).

“I am sitting and looking at the flowers, I go to see the flowers and to water the flowers, I see the butterflies resting under the tree” (Girl 9 MS).

“I watch the fishes in the pond” (Girl 9 MS).

How the refugee children revealed their thoughts about nature is one of the issues I will analyse further in the next chapter in relation to *place identity*.

5.4 Media

The children in the Migrant School seemed to be higher consumers of modern media than the children in the refugee camp. 9 of the 16 migrant children talked about watching TV, video or playing videogame in their time use charts. 7 of the 12 girls said that they watched TV, while 2 of the 3 boys said that they played computer games. Only 4 of 35 children in the Refugee Camp School wrote that they watched TV, and none of them spoke about using a computer. During weekdays only one boy in the Refugee Camp School wrote that he watched TV. None of the children in the two schools said anything about using radio or phones.

In the refugee camp I did not see many cellular phones. The family I lived with had cellular phones as well as a TV set. The TV was used to watch DVD's, however they did not have any satellite dish as was required if they wanted to watch TV-channels. I did not see many satellite dishes in the refugee camp. In neither of the schools I visited, I saw any computers in use. Only one child in the refugee camp spoke about computers. She told me that she would like to work with computers when she grew up. When I asked her if she had any experience with computers, she told me no, she had not, but she had once seen a computer.

The rest of this chapter will be a presentation of other issues prevalent in the children's writings and drawings. These issues will not be topics for further discussion in my thesis; however I will present them to reveal the matters highlighted by the children. By so doing I hope to give a more complete picture of the children's everyday lives.

5.5 Religion, feasts and festivals

Religion seemed to have an important meaning in the children's lives. I was told in the Migrant School that all the children in school were Buddhists, in the Refugee Camp School there were both Buddhists and Christian children. Some of the children wrote much about going to the monastery, the pagodas or the church, about praying, worshipping and offering. In the weekdays' time use chart, only a few of the children talked about religious activity, going to church or monastery seemed to be more of a weekend activity. And when it comes to

holidays, the importance of religion also appeared when the children wrote about different religious feasts.

The children in both schools told about many different feasts and festivals. They had the Water festival, the Full Moon feast which is a Buddhist tradition to celebrate the moon and the Wrist Tying festival, an old animist tradition where they bind protecting threads around everybody's wrists.

In the photography task the children showed that the symbols of religion were among the things they liked. Above the refugee camp there was a monastery and a cave where Buddhist monks lived. Near the cave there were two golden pagodas. The children liked the place: "*Behind here is the monastery*" (Girls 8-12 RS). "*Near the pagodas, there is the Monastery and the cave, Goutama Buddha and the monk's meditation place*" (Boys 9-12 RS). There were six groups in the photography task. Five of the groups pictured and told that they liked the pagodas and the monastery, even though it seemed as if most children in the class came from Christian families. It was not always clear to see what religion a child belonged to when he said he offered to Buddha on weekdays and went to church on Sundays, or to the church on Sundays and to the monastery on holidays. Maybe the child said church when he meant temple, or as the interpreter explained; Buddhist children sometimes go to church with their Christian friends.

The children in the refugee camp also told about playing the piano, singing in the church and watching drama, dancing and other performances inside the refugee camp. The migrant children told about going to a park and using a carousel.

5.6 Health and Hygiene

Health was a school subject and clearly an important issue for the children. The refugee camp children wrote much about health. They wanted to learn about health, and they wanted themselves and their teachers to be healthy. A few of the children also wrote about illness and told that they or their siblings had been ill.

Malaria is common disease among the children in the refugee camps. The number of people dying from malaria has decreased the last years because of the free and efficient health care

system in the camps (SMRU, 2012). However, health authorities and the World Health Organisation (WHO) are much concerned about the increase in drug-resistant malaria parasites in the area (WHO, 2012). Another feared disease that especially affects children is dengue fever, a disease that, like malaria, is transferred to humans by mosquitoes (WHO, 2007). One of the girls in the Migrant School had fever one day in school. Some of the adults in school said it was dengue fever. There was not much fuss about it, and the girl refused our request to take her home.

Hygiene is an issue that both the children in the Migrant School and in the Refugee Camp School wrote much about. There is a lot of showering, bathing and tooth brushing in the children's time use charts. The school subject 'Health' probably helps the children to deal with the risk of getting infectious diseases.

5.7 Food, snacks and money

The main food for the migrant and refugee children is likely to be white rice. Both the migrant children and the children in the refugee camp wrote a lot about cooking and eating in their time use charts. It is mostly about rice: "*When the sun raises my mother wakes up and cook rise*" (Girl 13 RS). "*I cook rice. The same every day*" (Girl 11 MS). In addition to rice, vegetables were also a part of the menu. The children in the refugee school told about fetching vegetables in the forest: "*In the morning we go to find the vegetables*" (Girl 12 RS). The migrant children bought or sold the vegetables: "*I watch TV, wash clothes and sell vegetables*" (Girl 12 MS). The Thai people however, being house owners and neighbours, eat both cakes and rice curry:

"My mother makes cakes for the house owner. We eat rice for lunch (Girl 9 MS).

"My neighbours are Thai. They cook rice curry" (Boy 9 MS).

The Karen children in Thailand are mostly very poor, both those living in the camps along the border as well as the other migrant children (IOM, 2011). A high level of consumption did not seem to be a big part of the children's everyday lives. The consumption level did appear to be higher among the Migrant School children, as they spoke more about using money than the children living in the camp.

Buying and eating snack was an issue that appeared often in the migrant children's drawings and talking. Only very few of the refugee children wrote or talked about money, or snacks.

However, a few of the refugee children had access to a little money: “*My mother gives me some money, 1 and 2 baht to buy a snack when I go to school*” (Boy 13 RS). 2 baht is around 0,4 Norwegian kroner. The Migrant School children had probably access to more money and *snacks* seemed to be an important issue. Many girls told about buying snacks, both during their school day and after school time. Some of the girls also talked about selling snacks.

In this chapter I have analysed my findings related to the children’s daily activities; school, work and play, the everyday life that I had planned to explore in my field work. I have also presented the children’s use of mass media as well as other issues in the children’s daily life experiences. In the next chapter I will analyse some other perspectives that the children revealed to me. Some of the issues they put forward aroused my curiosity, among them the refugee children’s construction of their future adult lives and their responsibility for the community they lived in.

Chapter 6: Analysis 2, Social identity

6.0 Introduction

The children's answers and what I learned through my field work made me expand my original research focus, which was to explore the children's everyday lives with main focus on school. When the refugee children expressed their thoughts about the importance of school they also revealed other themes. The children's concern for their 'nation people' made me curious to understand more about the construction of *national identity*. The photography task in the refugee camp raised questions concerning *place identity*.

When going into the field with a broad research question I wanted to be open to what emerged in the field, and in this chapter I will focus on my second research question: *How do Karen migrants and refugees from Burma living in Thailand construct their social identities in the time being and in the future?* What did the Karen children in Thailand relate to, where did they feel they belonged? Did they see themselves as a 'Nation in exile' (Hart 2002) or as members of the local community in their local neighbourhood? (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). Did they identify with Thailand as their country, since many of them were born here and will probably continue living their lives here? Is it possible to feel a belonging in a refugee camp, or did they feel as Burmese or belonging in Karen state?

The refugee children revealed to me a sense of belonging, both to the place they lived in as well as to the ethnic Karen group, or 'the Karen nation'. Most of the material I refer to here was collected among the refugee children, as the migrant children did not express their belonging to place and to the 'Karen nation' in the same way. I will present some of the cultural 'identity markers' the children used presenting themselves as Karen, the *flag* being an important one.

I start this second analysis chapter by looking into the children's social relations; family, friends and teachers.

6.1 Social life

6.1.1 Family

Most of the children, both in the Refugee Camp School and in the Migrant School, live with their parents and their siblings; others live with grandparents or other relatives. The children in the Refugee Camp School wrote and talked a lot about their parents, mostly about mother. Some children wrote how happy they were to have parents or other relatives who took them to school. The refugee children said that they also helped their parents by attending school. 'Father' did not appear often in either the migrant or the refugee children's writings. Most of the children's siblings attended school, however, as earlier mentioned some of the siblings of the migrant children were working or staying at home even if they were in school age. The children in both schools wrote much about being together with their siblings, both playing with them and looking after them.

6.1.2 Friends

Peers seemed to be important both for the migrant and refugee children. School can be an important place to meet friends, and many children play with their friends both on the way to school, during school time and after school (Punch, 2003). Boys and girls in both schools told a lot about being with friends. The refugee camp children wrote much about their appreciation for their school mates: *"In my class room all my friends are good"* (Girl 13 RS).

Peers also often appeared in the children's photos and drawings. The children connected friends with good feelings and with playing. The children in the schools seemed very friendly to each other. In the Migrant School I asked a teacher if the children used to fight. He replied that since all the children in the school were Karen, they hardly ever fought. I saw sometimes children who hit and kicked each other; it was always followed with laughter, and it did not seem to be any aggression between the children in the situation. The children in the Refugee Camp School wrote that the students loved each other, and they used many nice words to describe their friends: *"And my school friends are very nice to me"* (Boy 10 RS). *"My friends love me very much when I go to school"* (Boy 13 RS). None of the children spoke negatively about their schoolmates.

When observing the children's behaviour in the Migrant School, as well as the teacher's behaviour towards the children, I reflected upon the way they seemed to relate to each other. I

am accustomed to a Norwegian school where focusing on the social behaviour has been a central issue in the pedagogics the last decades. Many schools have implemented big anti bullying programs to create a good social environment, to teach the children social behaviour and to stop tendencies of bullying among the children. I hardly believe any such programs were carried out in the schools I visited in Thailand. However, I never spotted anything that I could interpret as aggression or hostility between the children.

6.1.3 Teachers

Another observation from both schools was that I hardly saw teachers who sanctioned the children's behaviour. Once I saw a female teacher talking a bit harshly to some of the youngest students who could not stop themselves from gazing into the class room at that tall, pale, strange woman (me) who was visiting their school. I saw children hitting a young teacher without him doing anything to stop them, however, the expression on his face was not that of approval.

Most children seemed to be relaxed when relating to their teachers. One exception was a child who winced when standing in front of the teacher and being confronted with some fault in the school work. The power relations were quite obvious in the situation, the child looking really bothered. Later, during the workshop, the same child drew a picture of a teacher in a class room. The teacher had a stick in the hand. When I asked: "*What does the teacher use the stick for?*", the child replied: "*If the students are naughty or not listening, the teacher will beat them with the stick*". After this interview I also asked other children who had drawn a stick in the hand of a teacher, what the teacher used the stick for. The other children replied that the teacher used the stick to point at the board. This child might have had some bad experience with a stick, maybe in the hand of a teacher. Even so, teacher was the preferred future occupation for the child. Corporal and emotional punishment of children in schools is widespread in the countries in Southeast Asia (Save the Children , 2006). The child wincing in front of the teacher was prone to emotional punishment. I never saw any corporal punishment in the schools and none of the children told anything about it. Many of the refugee children told that they loved their teachers and that the teachers loved them.

6. 2 Identity and belonging

6.2.1 The alien researcher

The children in the migrant school seemed to be much more accustomed to meeting strangers, than children in the refugee camp. I want to share an experience I had one morning when my interpreter and I passed one of the many schools in the camp. The schoolyard was full of children waiting for the school to start. When crossing the schoolyard, all the children were staring at us, not at my interpreter, I guess, who was a camp resident. I had a feeling of being an ‘other’. When we had passed the yard, I had this strange feeling of being followed; when I turned my head I saw almost all the 200 children standing in the schoolyard and following us with their eyes. I was surprised to experience that I seemed to be an *alien* in the camp, as I believed the children would be accustomed to western aid workers from the many NGO’s working in the camp. My interpreter claimed that aid workers seldom walked around in the camp, and the children therefore very seldom met Europeans. In the migrant school however, the children were used to volunteers working as teachers, and was not a ‘stranger’ in the same way. Now I continue to present how the children presented themselves as ‘we’ compared to the ‘other’.

6.2.2 ‘We’ and the ‘other’

None of the migrant children used the name Burma. However the name ‘Karen’ was used by many of the children. They talked about the Karen flag, Karen clothes and bags and about the Karen National Anthem. The name ‘Karen’ only appeared when the children told about their school day and not in the time use charts. Only one girl used ‘Karen’ when she talked about her future life. She wanted to teach Karen language. Many of the children drew the Karen flag, an issue I will come back to later. The name ‘Thai’ was often used by the children in the Migrant School:

“These are my brothers, 10 and 7. They go to a Thai – school. My father works for a Thai – boss” (Boy 13 MS).

“My mother is a cleaner for a Thai” (Girl 10 MS).

“My mother looks after an old Thai-lady” (Girl 11 MS).

“My father drives a car for a Thai” (Girl 9 MS).

The migrant children seemed to see themselves as ‘Karen’ opposed to ‘the other’, the Thai people. The ‘Thai’ were mostly constructed as being ‘a boss’, but also as the house owner and neighbour.

The refugee children hardly used the words Thai or Thailand. They used very much the expression ‘my people’. However, they did not tell about any ‘other’ as opposed to ‘my people’. The migrant children had constructed the Thai people as ‘the other’. In the Refugee Camp School the children lived in families who belonged to at least two different religions in. However, none of the refugee children used other labels than ‘my people’ when relating to any other in the camp. They did not talk about the Christian or the Buddhist, the Burmese or the Thai as an ‘other’, though the researcher appeared to be an ‘other’, as a stranger, coming from the western world.

When starting to look at the children’s drawings of their school, one element in the drawings attracted my attention; almost all the children had drawn flags. This was perhaps not so strange, since the Thai flag was raised in both schools all days when I was there. However, I found interesting aspects in the flag drawings.

6.2.3 The flag



The Thai flag



The Karen flag

Children and teachers in the Migrant School gathered together every morning in a ceremony to sing the Thai National Anthem and to raise the Thai flag. The children’s representation of the flag was not that straightforward. In many of the drawings the flag did not resemble the Thai flag. I soon learned that this was the Karen flag. Why did the children draw the Karen flag, when they saw the Thai flag raised at school every day? Did the flags have different symbolic meanings to the children? The Karen flag has been used politically by the Karen resistance movement, symbolising the Karen people’s fight against the Burmese army. The Thai flag is the symbol of the country that the migrant and refugee children now lived in.

When looking more thoroughly into the children’s drawings I noticed that many of the youngest children had drawn a flag that was neither a Karen flag nor a Thai flag. They had

drawn more imaginary flags, while the oldest children seemed to have a more clear representation of the proper flags.

In addition to the age difference there was also a gender difference in the representation of the flag. There are some similarities between the Thai flag and the Karen flag. The Karen flag has got three stripes with a rising sun in the upper inner corner of the flag. The Thai flag has got the same colours, but has 5 stripes, red-white-blue-white-red. Two of the oldest boys drew the Thai flag, but all the other boys had drawn the Karen sunrise in the upper left corner of their flags, though some of them did not use the right colours. A few of the girls drew the Karen sunrise, and none of the girls drew the proper Thai flag. However, most of the girls drew “imaginary” flags, resembling neither the Thai nor the Karen flag.



“Me and my school”, Girl 13, Migrant School

There was a gender difference in the drawing of flags. All the 15 boys in my material had flag in their drawings. In the Migrant school 14 out of 16 children drew a flag, while in the Refugee Camp School only 12 out of 23 girls had a flag in their drawings. The girls, who in their drawings had used different colours and made imaginary flags not resembling the correct Thai or Karen flag talked about esthetical qualities of the flag: *“The flag is pretty”* (Girls 8 – 12 RS). *“It is nice, the flag in the wind”* (Girls 9 – 12 RS).

The children drew the flag, and they spoke and wrote about it: *“There is a flag in front of my school”* (Boy 12 RS). *“We have to respect the flag”* (Girl 9 MS). *“Culture. The flag. We like it”* (Boys 10 – 13 RS). In the photography task the flags also appeared. 4 of the 6 groups had

taken pictures of the flag. When asking a boy in the Migrant School why he had drawn the Karen flag when the Thai flag was raised in school, he answered: *“The Karen flag is sometimes up”* (Boy 11 MS). My interpreter however doubted that the Thai authorities would allow the Migrant School to use the Karen flag. In the refugee camp, being a bounded area, with camp residents managing the schools, maybe the Karen flag sometimes was raised.



Drawing from boy 11, Refugee Camp School

Two boys told about events related to the flag. In the Migrant School one of the boys had once been chosen to raise the flag at school. He had drawn the event and told us about his drawing: *“Me and the teacher have the duty of raising the flag”* (Boy 13 MS). One of the oldest boys in the Refugee Camp School seemed to connect a political meaning to the Karen flag when he wrote about the celebration of the Karen revolutionary day. He told how he had travelled to Karen state in Burma to celebrate the day. Along with the text he had a drawing from the ceremony. He drew soldiers with guns, one of them holding a huge Karen flag.

The flag was one of the items that most often appeared in the children's essays, drawings and photos. The Burmese flag never appeared in any of the children's drawings. What did the flag mean to the children? Could it be that the flag itself, and the daily ceremony following it was a strong 'identity marker' for the children, regardless if the flag was a Thai flag, a Karen flag or an imaginary flag? The flag might be a symbol of belonging and pride, not to the nation Thailand or to the 'homeland' Karen state, but instead to the local community, to the school they went to and to the people and the place they related to.

The children in the refugee camp also took pictures of the sign in front of the school and the neighbouring nursery, among the things that they liked. They liked the school sign as they liked their school:

“We like the symbols of the nursery and the school (Girls 10-13 RS).

“The symbol of the school, we like it” (Boys 10-13 RS)

“The school. We like it” (Girls 8-12 RS)

The school sign might have a similar meaning to the children as the flag. It seemed to be valued as an ‘identity marker’, representing their belonging to the school.

6.2.4 Place: Nice and not nice

The photography task also gave me knowledge on the refugee children’s relation to the place they lived. When the first group in the Refugee Camp School were about to present the photos they had taken, I was very excited to find out whether the children had understood the dichotomy *like* and *dislike*. In the Migrant School this task had been a failure. This time I was curious whether I would get any useful data from the task. The different groups of children had done a great job when pasting the photos on to two big posters. When they had finished this work, the first group started the presentation for their class mates, teachers, parents, the school Principal, the interpreter and me. They told us of what they *liked* and what they *disliked* in their surroundings.

In the presentation session the groups had many common thoughts about what they liked and what they disliked. When presenting their pictures, the children spoke much about *nature*. They loved the scenery and the nature in the refugee camp around the school; the mountain cliffs, the tall trees, the flowers, the gardens and the vegetables. All the groups had taken pictures of the scenery and told about what they liked. They were asked to tell us why they had pictured it and what they liked about it, and they used words like:

“The cliff, it is green, the coconut tree, we like it” (Girls 11 – 13 RS).

“We like the tall trees; it gives us a good feeling” (Girls 10 – 13 RS).

“The vegetables are good for the earth and good for the heart” (Boys 10 – 13 RS).

“There are perfumed flowers, nice flowers” (Boys 10 – 13 RS).

The most significant *dislike*, appearing in all the groups’ photos, was disapproval to the *dirt* in their surroundings, both within the school as well as other places in the camp. All 6 groups

related dirt to the toilet area in the school: *“Toilet area, it is dirty, strong smell”* (Boys 10 – 13 RS). *“We don’t like the area in front of the toilets, it is crowded and muddy”* (Girls 10 – 13 RS). Not all the children used the toilets; other areas were also used for peeing: *“It is dirty, younger students pee there, it smells. Behind here is a tank, it is a dirty place, a pee place”* (Girls 11 – 13 RS). One group had placed their photo of the toilets on the poster with the likes: *“The toilets, not good, but useful for us”* (Girls 10 – 13 RS). There were also other sorts of dirt inside the school area that the children did not approve: *“Dirty water inside a tank”* (Girls 9 – 12 RS). *“Garbage, not a right system, it should be put in a bag”* (Boys 10 – 13 RS). The children found that the students themselves had not done what they should to keep the school clean: *“We should clean in front of the schools. Students should have cleaned”* (Boys 10 – 13 RS).



“We like the tall trees; it gives us a good feeling.”



“We do not like dirty water with mosquitoes.”

Other sides of the life in the refugee camp was not approved, among them was crowdedness. This refugee camp is more densely populated than Bangkok (Solidarités International, 2009). *“The place is crowded, ugly and untidy”* (Girls 11 – 13 RS). One of the groups that had taken a photo of the toilets on the school told area and told about the picture: *“The bamboo is split, it is not safe”* (Girls 9 – 12 RS). When the toilet wall was split, someone could see you when you were in the toilet. Another issue related to high population density in a restricted area, was mud. When the rainy season comes the paths between the bamboo huts turn into mud-rivers: *“It is muddy and slippery. The pig garden, it smells shit* (Girls 11 – 13 RS). *“This is a blind man in a slippery area. It is difficult for him. Behind him is a muddy and dirty area where mosquitoes can breed”* (Boys 9 – 12 RS). What could appear to me in the photos as nice and green areas were sometimes explained very differently by the children: *“Grass and bushes, the pig shits in the grass* (Girls 11 – 13 RS). *“A bush, dirty and dangerous, there can be snakes”* (Boys 10 – 13 RS). ‘Twin-pictures’ also appeared in the photography task. Two

photos, taken by the same group and picturing what seemed to be exactly the same motive could be labelled both as a *like* and a *dislike*.

6.2.5 Adult life in the refugee camp

As mentioned earlier, when I was in the refugee camp, I visited a lot of families together with my interpreter, walking from one bamboo hut to another. Not many of the camp residents could speak English, so we mostly communicated through the interpreter. I visited around 8 families. The camp residents I met showed me great hospitality. They welcomed me like an honoured guest, and the people eagerly shared their tea, their food and their personal stories with me. One main issue was in focus in all the huts: The camp residents concern for the future life. Their concern was also naturally about the situation in Karen state and Burma and atrocities that were still going on there. I heard stories about people on the run who were crossing the border while I was visiting.

A main issue for the adult residents I met in the camp was the possibility of getting resettlement. They wondered how life would be if they moved to a western country. Some had got resettlement and were happy about it. One woman had her husband in the USA, and she would soon travel after him. Another woman, she was single with a 9 year old daughter, had just got resettlement, and she was soon leaving for the USA. She was anxious about the future and how she could manage the life on her own. Living in a refugee camp means to be totally dependent on the support from people outside (WCRWC, 2008; IOM, 2011). She said she was scared of the unknown and because she would have to find a job and be in charge of the economy for herself and her daughter. Life in the refugee camp is hard; however you receive enough to keep up your life. Coming out of dependency and taking responsibility frightened this woman.

Some residents I met had just been outside the camp to earn some money, and then been caught and fined by the Thai police. The police had taken all their money. Being caught outside the camp also meant that they might lose their right to apply for resettlement. Other residents were concerned with whether resettlement would be the right solution for them. Should they help themselves and their families and move to USA or Australia, or should they stay and work for the people in the camp and prepare for the day when they could return to their homeland? *“Others have waited patiently a number of years to be resettled to a third*

country but face tremendous uncertainty and anxiety about what awaits them and whether or not they will be allowed to leave” (WCRWC, 2008).

Meeting the adult camp residents gave me knowledge on how they experienced their everyday life, their concern for their homeland and for their future. It was a meeting with friendly and trustful people who all claimed that living in the refugee camp was far better than living in Burma. After having presented the adult camp residents thoughts about the future, I now turn to the question: How did the children imagine their future?

6.2.6 Future life

The whole idea of a refugee camp is that it is a temporary place. Many Palestinians have lived as refugees since 1948. They probably could not imagine that their grandchildren should grow up in the refugee camp; neither did the Karen people who fled Burma in the 1980’s believe that they would be living in the camps for a generation or more. When raising the question to the children about how they pictured their future, I was curious to know what the migrant and refugee children thought about what they would be doing and where they would be living.

Did the children picture their future in Burma where they or their parents came from? How did the ‘homeland’ live in their thoughts? Did they, as a lot of the adults I met in the camp, imagine their future lives in a western country? When asking the children about their future I was also curious to know what their focus would be. Would they mainly be thinking of where to live, would they be imagining a future family or a future occupation? I chose to ask; what will you do when you leave school (when you graduate), and let them choose the perspectives. Most of them spoke about their work when they became adults, and the answers opened up for further questions in the interviews. There were some significant differences between the answers I got from the two schools. I will present three tables to show what the children answered to the questions: ‘What will I do when I leave school’ or ‘What will I do when I graduate from school’

The Migrant school What I will do when I leave school.

Want to do	Girls	Boys	Total
Nurse	2		2
Teacher	2	1	3
Help parents	2		2
Cleaner	1		1
Work in a shop	4		4
Photographer	1		1
Football player		1	1
Policeman		1	1
Total	12	3	15

The Refugee Camp School What I will do when I graduate from school (essays).

Want to do	Girls	Boys	Total
Health care worker	15	4	19
Teacher/principal	3	6	9
Missionary	1		1
Soldier		1	1
Help my people	3	1	4
Continue my studies	1		1
Total	23	12	35

The Refugee Camp School What I will do when I graduate from school (interviews)

Want to do	Girls	Boys	Total
Health care worker	10	3	13
Teacher/principal	9	8	17
Help my people	1		1
Computer science	1		1
Not asked	2	1	3
	23	12	35

The children in the Refugee Camp School and the Migrant School had somewhat different ideas about their future lives. When I asked them what they would do after they graduated, the Migrant School children who lived in an urban area had many different future occupations to choose between. 16 children chose among these jobs: photographer, shop keeper, cleaner, football player, police, nurse and teacher. 2 said they wanted to help their parents when they finished school. In the Refugee Camp School 35 children chose between these jobs: teacher/principal, health care worker (nurse, medic, doctor), missionary, soldier and in computer science. One wanted to continue studies and some wanted to ‘help my people’.

Some of the children were followed up with a question related to where they pictured themselves in their future life:

Boy 9 MS: *“I want to be a football player.”*

Laila: *“Where do you want to be a football player?”*

Boy 9 MS: *“Here, in this school.”*

Another boy explained what he had drawn about his future life:

Boy 13 MS: *“A police man. It is me. I am directing the traffic. I have a whistle. The main road has the precedence. I must look after that.”*

Laila: *“Where do you want to be a police man?”*

Boy 13 MS: *“Here in NN town”*

The variety of occupations that the children from the Migrant School told about is a contrast to what the children in the Refugee Camp School wrote. As the above table showed, most of the refugee children told that they wanted to work either as a teacher or in the health services. *“I would like to be a good person and teach all the children”* (Boy 12 RS). *“When I graduate, I would like to be a medic* (Boy 9 RS). I followed up the answers with further questions and asked them why they wanted this occupation or what it was that they thought they would like with that particular job:

Laila: *“Can you say something about why you want to be a nurse.”*

Girl 13 RS: *“After I finish my school, if I become a nurse, I would like to help my nation people, and my neighbour and my friend. I would like to help them.”*

In the essays the refugee children wrote about their future aspirations:

“When I study, I want to do it until I finish school. My mother is happy to take me to school. As my parents tell me, and as my hope is, after I finish school I will help people in the refugee camp. When we are children we try to study. I will study in the refugee camp, and after I finish school I will work as a nurse. I will be an aid-worker” (Girl 12 RS).

“When I finish school I want to work in an area of nursing, I will treat patients. It is so horrible that there are a lot of diseases” (Boy 13 RS).

“When I graduate, I would like to be a teacher. I would like to teach everyone who needs education. I would like to be a good person and teach every child” (Boy 12 RS).

“I want to be a doctor after I finish school. I will also serve people who are in need, as I am a good person. My parents and my friends will be very happy when I graduate. In my life, when I become a doctor I will help and treat patients” (Girl 12 RS).

6.2.7 ‘Where will I live in the future’?

Rajah (2002) wrote about how Karen national identity built on a construction of the Burman people as ‘the other’. In my material none of the migrant or refugee children used the word Burman. Only a few of the refugee children and none of the migrant children used the name Burma, they only told about having Burmese language as a school subject. A few of the refugee camp girls used the notion ‘a western country’ as a place they wanted to move to when they finished school.

In the small interviews I conducted with the children in the Refugee Camp School I asked 27 children how long they have lived in the camp. 13 of the children had lived there for more than 6 years, 5 of them had lived in the camp their entire lives. I did not ask them where they had lived before they came to the camp. Probably at least some of them had come directly from Burma. I asked 21 of the refugee camp children where they thought they would be living when they had graduated. 2 would live in a western country and 1 boy said he wanted to go back to Burma. When I asked him why he wanted to go to Burma he answered: *“I have my*

parents in Burma, and I want to go back there. I will teach the people there" (Boy 13 RS). I was also curious to know what made the two girls wanting to go to a western country:

Laila: *"Why do you want to go to a western country to become a nurse?"*

Girl 12 RS: *"I would like to help the patients."*

Laila: *"But why in a western country?"*

Girl 12 RS: *"Because I want resettlement. My mother also wants resettlement. My grandparents do not allow us to go."*

The children said that they would help their Karen nation. I then assumed that the children connected the 'Karen nation' with the geographical region, Karen state in Burma. However, I soon realised that the children did not picture themselves as living their adult lives in Karen state:

Laila: *"You want to become a nurse. And where do you want to work as a nurse?"*

Girl 11 RS: *"In this refugee camp."*

Laila: *"And why do you want to become a nurse?"*

Girl 11 RS: *"I would like to help my nation people. For my country."*

Laila: *"And what is your nation people? And what is your country?"*

Girl 11 RS: *"Here."*

The girl in this interview showed me another meaning of *my nation people*. She did not seem to relate it to the geographical Karen state in Burma; she rather connected her *nation* and her *country* to the local community she was a part of, the refugee camp, as well as relating it to the people who inhabited her local space. When the children used the expressions 'my Karen people' or 'my country' they seemed to mean the people living inside the refugee camp, the camp residents. When I asked the Refugee Camp School children where they would be living after they finished school, 18 of 21 children told me that they would continue living in the refugee camp.

6.2.8 Commitment to my people

In chapter 5 I wrote about the refugee children's unanimous praising of their school life. In the images of the future two thirds of the children saw themselves as health workers or teachers. In the essays expression like 'help my people' were used by many of the children:

"I will also serve people who are in need; I will help and treat patients" (Girl 12 RS).

"I would like to teach everyone who needs education" (Boy 12 RS).

The responsibility the children felt for their community was also revealed in the small interviews:

Laila: *And what do you want to do when you grow up, when you graduate?*

Girl 13 RS: *I would like to be a nurse, and I would like to help my Nation people.*

Laila: *And what are your Nation people?*

Girl 13 RS: *Karen Nation people.*

Laila: *Karen, Nation people. Yes, and why do you want to become a nurse?*

Girl 13 RS: *Because my Karen people are very poor and very....*

Laila: *Karen people are poor.*

I asked the children who said that they wanted to become teachers what subjects they wanted to teach and what grade:

Laila: *Grade 1, and what subject?*

Girl 13 RS: *Health subject.*

Laila: *Health. Why do you want to teach health?*

Girl 13 RS: *Because in the whole commune there is quite a lot of sickness, and I would like to teach them.*

Commitment for their people was a main explanation for the occupations the refugee children wanted to take in their future, as well as commitment towards parents or other relatives:

Laila: *And why do you want to become a nurse?*

Girl 10 RS: *My mother wants for me.*

Laila: *Your mother wants you to be a nurse.*

As mentioned above, the Migrant School children used the word Karen when talking about language, clothes and flag. However they did not use the expression 'Karen people'. When

talking about their future occupation, however, also some of the migrant children expressed a commitment.

“I will sell snacks. I will stay at home and clean the house” (Girl 12 MS).

“When I leave school I will only stay at home with my parents. I will help them at home” (Girl 9 MS).

‘Helping’ for the migrant children, was not related to the Karen people, but to their families. They wanted to help their parents and their families.

6.2.9 The past

The future was an issue put forward in the refugee children’s essays and interviews. The past, however, was an issue that did not appear so much. I asked the children about how long they have lived in the camp. I did not ask questions related to experiences from Burma because I assumed that some of the children might have bad experiences. I did not want to upset the children. This girl was asked to talk about the life in the camp, but she spoke of her past:

Laila: *Can you tell me about your life in NN refugee camp? How is your life in NN?*

Girl 10 RS: *There is no more fighting.*

Laila: *There is no more fighting. Was there fighting before?*

Girl 10: *In Burma*

Another girl told about how a past experience would determine her future: *“My father passed away when I was younger. I do not have my father. If I shall continue my education, I need someone to help me”* (Girl 12 RS).

In the next chapter I will turn to further discussion on issues I found interesting related to the migrant and refugee children’s perceptions of their daily life and their sense of belonging to place and nation.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.0 Introduction

I will start this chapter with discussing whether children are trustworthy. The refugee children's unified answers raised the question. Thereafter I turn to discuss issues put forward by the children. *Work* was an activity the children seemed to take for granted, a normal part of everyday life, and *Play* was an activity the children engaged in for fun whenever they could find time to engage in it. I discuss children as workers and players, using the *minority group child* approach and the *tribal group child* approach (see James, Jenks & Prout 1998 in Punch, 2003), before I turn to the discussion on *the meaning of school*. The children in the Refugee Camp School presented *the meaning of school* as being very important in their lives. Attending school and studying was constructed as activities that could open up the *understanding* and give the children a chance to be *educated*. I then turn to discussion on these children's future opportunities, and this will put lights on *the meaning of school* from an adult perspective.

The last part of my discussion will be related to how the children constructed their *identity* and *belonging*, and how they saw themselves as different or similar to the people around them. The 'we' and 'the other' was constructed differently among the migrant and refugee children. I discuss how this is connected to the dissimilar experiences these two groups of children had. The refugee children more clearly expressed their belonging to the 'Karen nation', though they connected it more to the local community and the people who lived there, rather than to an abstract nation of unknown people.

7.1. Can we trust children?

A much used argument in research with children is that you cannot count on children. They have a strong desire to please adults and may therefore be more concerned by answering to what they believe to be the adult's agenda, rather than putting forward their own opinions (Greene and Hill 2005 in Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). The children in the refugee camp praised their chance of going to school. Was their praising a way of trying to please the researcher? Did the children believe that I wanted them to talk nicely about their school; did they believe that I was searching for their approval of education? Children are used to being directed by parents and teachers. Did they want to appear as 'good students' in letting out other views concerning their school lives? Adults' power over children is salient in

as school setting. Were the children merely ‘captive subject’ (see Robinson & Kellett, 2008) who only put forward views they thought adults found acceptable? Questions like this need to be raised on due to the refugee children’s unified positive construction of being a school child.

While I believe that the children were eager to please me, this does not mean that they were lying. Furthermore, the children put forward issues that hardly can be explained as an attempt to satisfy the researcher’s agenda. The children in the Refugee Camp School also told me about issues and items in their environment that they did not like. By so doing they showed that their agenda was not only but instead they saw an opportunity to raise their voices in confidence that the adult audience did not disapprove of their opinions. Children’s thoughts and opinions are no less reliable than those of adults, and what children bring forward must be taken just as seriously (Ennew, *et al.*, 2009, p. 8:19).

Children have been seen as human becomings who lack competence and individual thoughts (Lee, 2001). This view is probably still withstanding in many adults’ thoughts about children. To see children as incompetent human becomings neglects the experiences of the children. Children view themselves both as competent and incompetent in comparison with an ‘other’, and that ‘other’ can be an adult (Uprichard, 2008). I view the children I met to be trustworthy and competent human beings with the ability to voice their opinion about the social world they inhabited. In the workshops I arranged I gave the children an opportunity to voice their ideas about their daily life experiences and their thoughts about the future. To give voice to children’s experiences acknowledges their competencies and contribute to valuable knowledge about their social world (Prout & James, 1990).

7.2 Children as workers and players

The migrant and refugee children in Thailand contributed a lot in the daily household chores within their families. They told about carrying water, cooking, sweeping and looking after siblings. Chores seemed to be a taken for granted activity by the children. When the refugee children wrote about their daily school activities they used many positive words. The work activities were not followed by the same enthusiasm; they were merely a ‘natural’ part of daily life. The children did not seem to do more chores in the weekends and holidays even if they then had more time. Children’s contribution in daily chores is not always reckoned to be

work among adults (Punch, 2001). The children in my material seemed to take a lot of responsibility and surely did a lot of household work.

The children also told about engaging in play. The majority of the children in the world live their lives integrating school, work and play, though, the time they have to play maybe restricted. Children's identities are flexible and dynamic and they can change their roles while going in and out of different life-worlds almost simultaneously (Punch, 2003). In both of the schools I visited, it looked like most of the children, if not all, had an everyday life combining school, household chores and play. When the children told about play it was often combined with words like 'friends', 'siblings', 'fun' and 'happiness'.

Punch (2003) argues research in the global South mostly has been done more from the perspective of the 'minority group child', and that the main focus has been on children's work and children in especially difficult situations. Children's daily life and children's culture from a 'tribal child' approach has not been that much explored in the global South (Punch, 2003). The children I met spoke and wrote much about playing and engaging in activities together with other children. None of them said anything about playing with adults, they played with other children. They seemed to engage in their own 'childhood culture' (James, Jenks & Prout in Punch, 2003). When doing participant observation in the Migrant School I did not see any adults engaging in play with the children. The children never asked me to play with them during recesses even if I was around them. I did not take any initiative towards playing with the children because I did not want to intrude.

The *tribal child approach* sees the children's life worlds as existing outside the adults' life world (Punch, 2003). Punch cites Allison James (1998) who suggested that adults' and children's social and cultural life worlds are more closely linked in the global South than in the global North. In the global North a "*semi-autonomous children's culture*" has been described (James in Punch, 2003, p. 281). The playing, *tribal group child* living within a specific childhood culture seems to be less explored in the global South (Punch 2003). From her research in Bolivia Punch found that children in the global South also engage "*in their own well-developed childhood culture*" a culture "*where children act autonomously with their own rituals and rules*" (Punch, 2003, pp. 280-281).

The assumption that children's and adults' life worlds in the North are more separated than in the South may not always prove right. The children I met in Thailand also engaged in their own culture separated from the adult's life worlds. I never saw any adults who showed interest in or engaged in the children's play. I argue that in a sense, children's and adults' life worlds can be seen as more divided in the South than in the North. In the global North researchers, pedagogues and parents have been engaged in and explored 'childhood culture' activities for a long time. However, in the majority world, daily lives of ordinary children who attend school, work and play needs to be more explored (Punch, 2003).

7.3 The meaning of education

Qvortrup (2002) claimed that childhood has been viewed as a period consisting of 'purposeless' activity (play) in contrast to the adults' purposive activities (work), and that children therefore have been viewed as useless. When children have been doing purposeful activities (school), they have been preparing for grown up life. The meaning of school has thus been seen as a meaning that belongs to the future, in the children's lives as adult becomings. Qvortrup highlighted the need to acknowledge children's contribution in social life, here and now. School work must be seen as work. The school and children's school work has a meaning, not only in the future, but also in the present time (*ibid*).

Bessel's (2009) findings from a study in Fiji on how young people (age 12 to 19) experienced their school life showed resemblance to some of my findings in the Refugee Camp School. When the students in Fiji were asked what they valued about school, they answered that they saw:

"...education as an important part of their lives every day and as something that prepares them for the future. Many participants feel that school provides positive experiences that they would not otherwise have. The participants expressed a strong desire to learn" (Bessel, 2009, p. 12).

The youth in Fiji made recommendations to the actors in the school system, and students were recommended to respect their teachers and be grateful because they had the chance to go to school (Bessel, 2009). In a similar matter the refugee children in Thailand showed gratitude towards their school and their teachers. The word 'thanks' appeared very often in their writings. They loved their teachers, and the teachers loved them, especially if they were good

students. Being a good student, gave them the possibility to receive the good marks necessary for succeeding. Obeying and listening to the teachers were synonymous with being a good student.

In my findings, the desire to learn was strong among the refugee children. Education seemed to be highly valued both by adults and children in the refugee camp. Many of the refugee children had lived in eastern Burma where education is poor and where many children do not have access to education (TBBC, 2010). The refugee children's gratitude to their school can be related to the experience that education could not be taken for granted. The children who pictured themselves as teachers in the future used expressions like: *I will help those who need education*, when explaining why they wanted to become teachers. The children saw education as a means to improve their lives, maybe as a way to better health, to jobs and to a way out of poverty. By attending school they saw themselves as *competent students*.

When the refugee children talked about their daily life experiences, they constructed school as something that made them happy and proud. Because they viewed education as important, they had a positive identification with their school and with themselves as students. Being a student gave meaning to their lives, both in the time being and as a preparation for their future adult lives as contributors in working life. Bessel (2009) similarly found in Fiji, that even if the students opposed to authoritarian school practises they viewed school as a means to improve their lives. The students highlighted the necessity to study hard in order to achieve their educational goals.

Illiteracy and lack of education is often linked to poverty, high birth rates and poor health (UNESCO, 2011). The refugee children used expression like: 'My people are poor', 'my people are sick' and 'my people need education'. The refugee children had an image of 'not being sick, poor or in need of education', as values possessed by others. They also wanted to possess these values and they constructed a future life where they were educated adults who were able to help their people achieving these goals. In these constructions an 'other' can also be seen. Where there are ideas about poverty, sickness and uneducated people there must also be ideas of people who are not poor, sick and uneducated; people who are healthy, rich and educated. I assume that the children saw me as belonging to this 'other' people.

Being a student meant for some of the refugee children that they saw themselves as competent, not only in the future, but also in the time being: *“I am a child that has education and knowledge”* (Boy 10 RS). Around 25% of the adult population in the refugee camps in Thailand cannot read or write (Oh *et al.*, 2010). I assume therefore that some of the children I met in the camp school had illiterate parents. Many of the refugee children said that they helped their parents by attending school. Being competent in reading and writing gave the children an experience of possessing important qualifications in their communities. The meaning of school was not only related to the future, school activity was meaningful in the present time.

7.3.1 Different meaning in different schools

The refugee children and the migrant children performed their relation to school differently. The refugee children read a lot, and many children wrote that their parents asked them to read. Books seemed to be an important part of the children’s daily activities at home. None of the migrant children said anything about reading; they spoke about working and playing when they were not in school. I have limited knowledge about the cultural context, and therefore I cannot give any clear explanation why the refugee children seemed to be more concerned with their reading and school home work. The migrant children attended grade 2, and they were not yet able to read or write, while the refugee children were in grade 3 and maybe they had just learned it. Perhaps the refugee children had just discovered the joy of being able to read and therefore they told much about it. Another way of interpreting the differences is that in the migrant children’s worlds, the struggle for daily income dominated their family’s everyday life. The situation was very different in the refugee camp where the residents were dependent on outside help to survive. Food rations were provided by NGO’s, and unemployment was high.

During my time of observation in the Migrant School I learned more about the children’s school life. The children were actively engaging in the activities led by the teachers during lessons, as they were actively engaging in their own child led activities during the recesses. In the children’s talking about school they highlighted their relations to their friends and teachers, the classroom activities, the playing and the buying of snacks in the breaks. The migrant children did not say that they loved their teachers or friends, in the same way as the refugee children expressed their feelings. However, smiling, laughing, kind and enthusiastic

children seemed to enjoy each other and their school life much. Bessel found in her study with students in Fiji that the majority of the youth identified supportive friends to be among the most important aspects of their school life (Bessel, 2009). The refugee children wrote much about their friends. Friends were also an important issue in the photography task. The children wrote about love and affection among the school mates.

As mentioned earlier, when the children presented their views on their surroundings, it was in front of parents, teachers and adults, even though I had planned that only the interpreter and I should be there along with the children. The research ethics I have learned told me that the children were in risk of harm if they put forward opinions that were not accepted in front of teachers or parents (Ennew, *et al.*, 2009). I experienced, however, the presentation to be a good learning session both for the children, the audience and the researcher. The children put forward their opinions on good things and bad things in their environment. By so doing they showed that they were competent performers, being able to voice their opinions on important matters. The children's voices were heard, not only by their class mates, the interpreter and me, but also by significant adults in their local community.

7.3.2 Life tomorrow – affects life today

To view children as both human beings in their own right and as adult becomings acknowledge children's perceptions of themselves (Uprichard, 2008). The vast majority of the children in the Refugee Camp School constructed a future where they saw themselves helping their *people in need*. They saw 'their people' as poor and in need of education and health service. When the children became adults they wanted to work as teachers and health workers, they wanted to 'give back'. To 'give back' was an expression used by many of the children as an explanation for the job they said they wanted to have in the future. To become teachers and health workers they needed to gain knowledge, and education was seen as the ultimate possibility to a better life, a way to improve life in the future. The meaning of education cannot be constructed without taking the future into account. 'A better life' did not for these children seem to mean a better life for 'me', but a better life for "my people", "My Karen Nation" as well as for "my family".

Children know that they will change, that they will grow up to become adults, and that important for how they construct their lives in the time being (Uprichard, 2008). The refugee

children had ideas about ‘their people’ as uneducated, poor and sick. Even so, the refugee children viewed themselves as privileged and with competence. They attended school, and as students they had future options that they would not have had without schooling. The way we think about the future will affect how we see our lives today (*ibid*). The children imagined themselves as future educated persons, and these constructions of their future lives contributed to the construction of their present lives. The children knew that their future adult lives would give them opportunities they did not have as children: “*When I graduate, I would like to be a medic. Now I am grade 3... Now I am too young, I cannot do nothing*” (Boy 9 RS). Children perceive themselves as beings and becomings and they do so differently (Uprichard, 2008).

7.3.3 Different future images

The children in the Migrant School and in the Refugee Camp School constructed their future lives in different ways, and they put forward various thoughts about future jobs. The migrant children had a wider range of occupations to choose among when imagining themselves in their future lives. Many of the migrant children constructed a future life in jobs that not did require education, such as cleaners and shop keepers. They had ideas about helping their family in the future. However, none of them talked about ‘giving back’ or helping ‘their people’. They did not seem to construct the ‘we’ related to the Karen people in the same way as the refugee children did. Some of the migrant children seemed more concerned with ‘what *I want*’ (such as *a football player*), when constructing their future, compared to the refugee children’s focus on “what *my people need*”.

The refugee camp children saw themselves as teachers and health workers in the future, probably the two main occupations in the refugee camp. Many of the children had spent most of their lives in a refugee camp, and they seemed to have little contact with the world outside the camp. A few of the children wrote about visits to a nearby village or town or across the border to Burma. The refugee children had little access to media. Because they had little experience of the world outside the camp they did probably had not much knowledge about other job opportunities.

None of the children in any of the schools spoke about having a family of their own in their future lives. I would have imagined that some girls would tell about marriage and children as

part of their future life constructs, but these issues never emerged. How can I interpret that? Once more I must return to issues related to language and translation. I do not know exactly how my question was translated. “What will you do when you graduate or leave school?” could have been translated to expressions more related to a future occupation, which might explain why the children did not mention family.

By highlighting children’s perceptions of themselves both in the time being and in the future we may learn more about “*how issues of empowerment and agency vary throughout the life course*” (Uprichard, 2008, p. 310). The refugee children seemed to see themselves as competent adults contributing to the benefit of their people. By exploring the children’s ideas about themselves both in the present time and in the future we may understand more of the variation of agency and empowerment in different life periods (Uprichard, 2008). The meaning of school for the refugee children seemed to be empowerment both in their future lives and in the present. It was important in order to gain the competencies they needed to achieve their goals for the future, but also because what they learned in school made them feel competent here and now, as educated school children.

7.4 Opportunities for education and jobs

In the refugee camps along the Burmese border in Thailand the school enrolment is high, and the students may attend school for 10 years. However, many students tend to drop out late in primary school or early in secondary school (WCRWC, 2008). After 10 years of school the migrant and refugee students have few future options of continuing their studies (WCRWC, 2008; Sawade, 2009; Oh, 2010). The youth in the refugee camps also have very few chances to develop skills because there are few jobs available (WCRWC, 2008). They are totally dependent on the UN and the NGO’s (Oh, 2010; Purkey, 2010). In the camps there are some vocational programs running. However when a program is finished the young people have few opportunities to use the learned skills. The youth in the refugee camps tend to see training courses as a career opportunity in itself and take course after course that seldom give them any employment (WCRWC, 2008). During the last years different post 10 programs have started both teaching academic and vocational skills (Purkey, 2010; IOM, 2011).

The Thai government and the Thai Ministry of Education work to get the migrant children in to the Thai schools (Antos, 2010; IOM, 2011). However there are many obstacles, one is that

the migrant children lack necessary language skills (IOM, 2011). Another problem is funding. Only migrant youth with proper identity cards receive full funding from the Thai government when attending schools, which results in heavy economic burdens on Thai schools which have a lot of migrant student. This counts for all schools from pre-schools to upper secondary schools and may lead some schools to say no to migrant children without legal ID-papers (IOM, 2011).

The refugee and migrant schools are not internationally recognised. Nevertheless they hold their language and cultural customs high, and one of their educational goal is: *“to build up a true and lasting peace and justice by producing graduates who are critical and creative thinkers, leaders, good citizens and proud of their ethnicity”* (Sawade, 2009). Both some of the students and the teachers in the Refugee Camp School saw the students as future leaders for their people. Some of the students will hopefully achieve their goals. For most of the students, however, the opportunities diminish as they grow older (WCRWC, 2008).

Many of the children I met will probably be able to graduate after 10 years of school, others will probably drop out of school before that time, some because they marry and become parents, others because they search for jobs outside the camps. The future options for the migrant and refugee children are limited at the moment, though hopefully this will change (Purkey, 2010). For these children to be able to fulfil their educational goals and to become the future competent adults they imagine, much work needs to be done by different actors on the scene. A joint effort and collaboration among all the NGO’s working in the field, the Thai government and the local migrant and refugee communities is needed if there is to be any significant development in helping the youth to achieve good future prosperities. The different actors in the field have a responsibility to support these young people to develop their skills academically and vocationally so they can be able to become more self-reliant and not be prone to unemployment or an abusive labour market (WCRWC, 2008; Purkey, 2010). Part of the problem is that many of them lack legal papers and risk to be confined, deported or abused (Purkey, 2010).

The lack of future opportunities for the young migrant and refugee children is a great contrast to the laughing, hardworking and playing children I met in the migrant school. It is also a great contrast to the strong commitment and hope for the future put forward by the children in the refugee camp. The refugee children wanted to take responsibility for their people, and

they seemed to be willing to study hard to achieve their educational goals. With the limited opportunities the children have for further education it is hard to see how these children's hopes and dreams can be fulfilled. The refugee children showed a strong commitment to their 'Karen people'. What they related to when they used this expression will be discussed in the second part of this chapter where I focus on the children's construction of identity.

7.5 Construction of identities

In my findings there was a marked difference between the refugee children and the migrant children in the way that they constructed their future lives. They lived very different lives, which can explain some of these differences. Children in the refugee camps in Thailand live their lives with limited access to the world outside the camps (WCRWC, 2008). They cannot also have little access to mass media. The refugee children imagined their future lives within the camp. Was the refugee children's restricted knowledge about the outside world a crucial factor to explain why they saw themselves in the future as teachers and health workers within the boundaries of the camp? The migrant children, living in an urban area and with more access to media, had probably seen people in a greater variety of jobs, and that can explain why they had a wider range of occupations to choose between. Scourfield *et al.* (2006) questioned whether children who live with more confined social networks have closer relation to their local community. That might explain the refugee children's thoughts of a future within the camp and the strong commitment they had to local community and 'their people'.

Both Scourfield and others' (2006) and Hart's (2002; 2004) studies of identity show the impact mass media have for the construction of identities. In Hussein refugee camp in Jordan the youth had access to all kinds of mass media as well as knowledge about friends or relatives who have moved to a world where people are more wealthy and live more exciting and care-free lives (Hart, 2002). Hart showed how the Palestinian refugee children access to multiple cultures contributed to the construction of their own identity. Probably did the children in the Refugee Camp School also have access to stories from friends or family who have moved to a western country. However, because the Karen refugee children had little access to mass media, they had limited knowledge of multiple cultures to interact with when constructing their own identities.

7.5.1 Homeland

A refugee camp is established to answer to emergency needs, and settlements are supposed to be temporary. The ‘temporary’ camps in Thailand are more than 25 years old. Do the Burmese refugees in Thailand have any thoughts about going back to their homeland? How do the ideas about ‘the homeland’ live in the refugee children’s minds? I was surprised to find that very few of the children I met talked about going back to their homeland. However a few of the children mentioned the village they came from, such as this girl, who was one of the very few who spoke about Burma: “*(In the) holiday I will go to my village in Burma to visit my grandmother*” (Girl 10 RS). A couple of other children wrote about visiting their village without using the name Burma or the name Karen. Can it be that the children who had lived most of their lives in Thailand hardly remembered their former lives in Karen state?

Hart (2002, 2004) showed from his studies among Palestinian refugees how the older generation taught the children about their ‘homeland’. They also taught the children the Palestinian folk songs and folk dances (Hart, 2002). In this way the reproduction of the Palestinian culture was transferred to the younger generation. Hart (Hart, 2002) showed how this was done both by the parents and by teachers in the schools. This way of instilling a national culture among the Palestinian children is in line with Gellner’s (in Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006) theories that national identity is constructed top down through schools and other institutions.

‘Homeland’ as an important part of the identity, as Hart found in Jordan, was not put forward by the refugee children I met. Can it be that the Karen adult cultures within the refugee camp did not use the same effort in telling stories about the ‘homeland’ in the same way as the Palestinians in Jordan? As earlier mentioned, the adults I met in the refugee camp all agreed that the life in Burma was far worse than living in the refugee camp. Perhaps these negative ideas about ‘the homeland’ overshadowed ideas about the homeland as a ‘lost paradise’ (Hart, 2002). However, the expressions ‘my Karen people’ and ‘my country’ appeared often in the refugee children’s writings and talking. I will elaborate more on the children’s meaning of these expressions later in this chapter. I now turn to discuss how the Karen national identity was reproduced in the migrant and refugee schools.

7.5.2 Constructing 'we' and 'other'

Schools play an important role in reproduction of identity (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). Both in the Migrant School and in the Refugee Camp School they used curricula highlighting Karen language and Karen culture. However, the children in the two schools did not seem to reproduce their Karen identities in the same way. As Homi Bhabha (in Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006) argues, people will respond differently to the same national narratives. The national narratives that are taught in the schools will be met differently by different children. The Karen stories that the children in the Migrant School and in the Refugee Camp School learned, were maybe similar. However, their different life worlds led to different ways of constructing their Karen identities. Reproduction of culture is an ongoing process. New cultures and new identities are constantly reproduced through human interaction.

The migrant children interacted with more diverse cultures. They had more access to mass media. Although they also might have limited mobility it was likely to be broader than the refugee children's. The children in the refugee camp seemed to live more in a 'Karen country' while the migrant children more seemed to live their lives in Thailand. The migrant children had access to a Karen community in the school. However in their lives outside school they also had access to other cultures. They constructed the 'Thai people' as an 'other' with reference to the Thai being employers and eating other food than the Karen. The migrant children had more access to TV and computers, and thereby also to a much wider range of cultural input than the refugee children.

The Karen national stories continue to be told in the refugee camps in Thailand (Rajah, 2002). The Burman dominance over the territory Karen state has created a stronger 'we' among the Karen, focusing on the common 'identity markers' instead of focusing on what differs. The Karen people consist of subgroups with different cultures, religions, languages and ideologies (Oh & Van Der Stouwe, 2008). These differences, however, did not seem to be emphasized by the refugee children. The teachers in the Refugee Camp School wanted to see the children as famous leaders for 'their people' in the future. The refugee children seemed to respond to these constructions. The children committed themselves to work for 'their people' in their future adult lives. The Karen 'we' seemed to live much stronger among the refugee children than among the migrant children. The refugee children saw themselves as 'we', the Karen. How did they see 'the other'?

The Karen identity builds on the construction of a Burman oppressor (Brown, 1988; Rajah, 2002). Jeanette Habashi (2008) argues that Palestinian refugees on the West Bank in Israel had established a contemporary identity constructing the Israeli oppressor as the 'other'. Hart (2002) showed how the ideas of the Israeli oppressor continued to live among the refugee children in Hussein camp. I cannot tell if narratives of an 'oppressive Burman' were told to the migrant and refugee children in Thailand. One of the children wanted to become a soldier, and I assume the conflict between the Karen National Union and the Burmese Army also affected these children. However, the children I met did not reveal any thoughts about a Burman oppressive 'other'.

7.5.3 Constructing new identities

NGO's planners and politicians often believe that the older generation's identity is adopted by the younger, but Hart (2002; 2004) argues that identities are not simply passed on from adults to children. However, Habashi argues that construction of identity is an ongoing, emerging process. To understand more of these processes we need to study local community and interaction between generations and among children (Habashi, 2008). There is fluidity in the construction of children's identities (Hart, 2004). Children pick up elements from different cultures and develop their own way of seeing themselves related to the physical place and the social context they live in (Hart, 2002). The Palestinian refugees in Hart's study established an exile Palestine identity, rather than adopted their parents' identities. They created a specific local multi-culture which had elements from a lot of different discourses (Hart, 2004). Some of the children in Hussein camp also identified with Jordan as 'my country' (Hart, 2002).

There are similarities among the Palestinian situation and the Burmese refugees, both being among the most protracted refugee situations in the world. The lives of the children in the refugee camp are not marked by much mobility; they have little money and therefore little access to material goods. They also have little access to media and limited options to travel and to learn about the world outside the camp. Therefore the Karen refugees probably have a much more restricted range of cultures to interact with in the construction of their identity than the Palestinian youth in Hussein camp.

The Karen identity, as an ethnic minority group in Burma is strongly affiliated with the territory Karen state. Karen state is 'home' to most of the ethnic Karen Burmese. Karen

people have been scattered over a large area in a Thailand, and their culture is no longer bound only to the territory Karen state. In a modern world with increased mobility culture is no longer bound to a physical place; we need to understand the unboundedness of culture (Hart, 2002). The children in the refugee camp showed a strong sense of belonging to the 'Karen people'. This construction seemed not to relate to 'Karen nation' as an abstract, symbolic 'imagined community' of Karen people. I assume that the adults in the camp related their belonging to 'the Karen nation' more to the territory Karen state in Burma. However, the children did not connect 'My country' to Karen state. 'My country' seemed to be associated with local place, with 'here', meaning the refugee camp. 'My Karen people' was constructed among the refugee children as the people residing in the camp. The children's sense of belonging to the 'Karen people' was a local belonging.

Scourfield *et al.* (2006) asked the children in Wales what they would miss if they moved to another country, and the answers they got implied that it was not 'the nation' or their country that they would miss. They would miss the people who lived in their local community. Neither 'nation' nor geographical place seemed to be of importance. What mattered for the children, were the people they were connected with, their friends and their families. These findings suggested that local community meant more to the Welsh children than the nation. (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). Their sense of belonging was related to locality rather than to the more symbolic nation as an 'imagined community' (Anderson in Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006) of people who share a specific geographical area.

The children in the Refugee Camp School also seemed to be strongly connected with the people in their local community, the people they called 'My Karen people'. In addition they the place itself seemed to mean much to the children. They expressed different qualities related to different places within the refugee camp. They loved the places that were green, the mountains and the trees, the flowers and the vegetables. They related to the *nature* itself, not only, as in Scourfield and others' (2006) study, to places inhabited by people. When they told about the places they did not like, however, they always spoke of places inhabited by people (or animals). The children put forward their aversion for the crowdedness and dirt that contaminated the nature that they loved.

The refugee children did not seem to imagine themselves living in a future Karen state at the other side of the border, or as citizens in a western paradise of gold and honey. They pictured their future in the refugee camp, and they revealed clear ideas about their future mission; their people were in need of health care and education. The refugee children seemed not to see themselves as living in a changing world. When they constructed their future lives they saw themselves continuing their lives within the boundaries of the refugee camp. Furthermore, they seemed to imagine the future as being about the same as today; the camp residents would be in need of education, they would continue to be poor and they would still be lacking sufficient health care. If the children worked hard in school, passed their exams, obeyed and were good persons, they would succeed in helping their people. The refugee children wanted to help their 'Karen people' and they wanted to 'give back': "*I would like to give back to the kids again*" (Girl 11 RS).

7.5.4 Living in limbo?

Children express belonging to local communities, to nations and to transnational processes (Hart, 2002). Hart described how the sense of locality was created between the young Palestinian camp residents in their daily lives. Likewise, in the Refugee Camp School the children expressed their belonging to locality. The children voiced a much stronger connection to the local community, to the life within the refugee camp than to any wider national 'imagined community'. 'Their people' seemed not to be an abstract construct for them. They constructed their meaning in the time being and in the future in interaction with the people they knew and cared for in the camp.

Hart argues that the Palestinian children understood the camp itself: "*as a distinct, bounded space with its own character in social, moral and historical terms*" (Hart, 2002, p. 37). In a similar manner, the Refugee Camp School children invested meaning in their lives in the camp, both in the time being and when imagining their future lives. They did not think of their lives in the camp as a transient stage. The children did not seem to be going somewhere else, they did not think of themselves as if they were 'living in limbo' (See Augé in Hart, 2002).

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In my thesis I have searched for the Karen migrant and refugee children's thoughts about their everyday lives and their future. By listening to the children's voices I have gained knowledge about their life worlds. The migrant children and the refugee children lived lives that were both similar and different. Children in both schools told about a daily life that consisted of school, work and play. In this concluding chapter, I will sum up the main findings of my research, by relating them to my research questions:

What is the meaning of school for Karen children aged 10 – 13, living as migrants or refugees in Thailand?

How do Karen migrants and refugees from Burma living in Thailand construct their social identities in the time being and in the future?

8.1 The meaning of school

The migrant children did not put forward many thoughts about their school. However, when observing the children in school both during lessons and in their breaks, they showed a strong commitment to their school work. They also seemed to appreciate their schoolmates very much, and the opportunity to play with their friends. The school was important for them in the time being. Play and work seemed to be the main activities for these children when they were not in school. The migrant children did not say much about what education meant for their future lives. 8 of 16 children imagined themselves in future occupations where education was not needed. Many of the girls saw themselves as cleaners and shop-keepers like their mothers. Some of the migrant children were concerned with their families' daily effort to gain an income. They were also concerned with helping their families when they graduated from school.

The refugee children, living in a rural, restricted area with little access to knowledge about other life worlds were very grateful because they could attend school. For them education meant a way of improving their lives. The students' obligation was to be a good student, to obey the teachers and to study hard. The refugee children constructed the meaning of school today in close relation to the meaning of school in their future adult lives. The refugee

children imagined themselves as teachers and health workers. They wanted to help their people when they became grown-ups, and they saw themselves doing it within the borders of the refugee camp. They saw themselves as future *human becomings* with a mission in their society.

8.2 Social identity and belonging

I have shown how children's constructions of identity are related to their daily life experiences. The Karen children in the Migrant School and in the Refugee Camp School constructed their ideas of 'we' and 'other' in different ways. The migrant children perceived themselves as dissimilar from the 'Thai' who they spoke of as their parents' employers. They perceived the Thai people as opposed to themselves, the Karen people. The migrant children expressed their belonging to Karen culture mainly in the school setting, while outside school they were exposed to various cultural influences. The refugee children, however, were mainly influenced by the relatively homogenous culture within the boundaries of the camp. They seemed to have a closer relationship to 'My Karen people' than the migrant children. As Karen, they saw their people as poor, sick and uneducated. The children's concern was to do something about that.

Life in a refugee camp is often constructed as a life 'in limbo'. However, the children who participated in this research did not seem to experience it that way. They invested a meaning in the relationship with their friends and families, in their school life and in relationship with the nature in the refugee camp. The refugee children did not have much time for a carefree, playful daily life. Their everyday lives seemed to be consisting of obligations towards their families and their people. However, they found time to play within their school and within their work activities.

I found that the refugee children had a sense of belonging both to the physical surroundings and the social life in the camp. The children's identification with what they called 'My Karen people' seemed not to be much related to Karen state as an 'imagined community'. 'My Karen people' or 'My Karen Nation' had a much stronger connotation to the local place: to the community inside the refugee camp.

8.3 Concluding remarks and further research

In my master thesis I have explored how Karen migrant and refugee children experience their daily lives, and how they construct their identities in relation to place and nation. As I was in the field for a short time, I have only been able to get a brief glimpse into these matters. Constructions of identities are complex, and within the limits of this master thesis I could only study a few aspects of them. Exploring some of the theories and studies related to the construction of 'we' and 'other' raised my curiosity. More knowledge is needed on how children create their identities, and how they understand the similarities and differences between themselves and others. A further exploration into this field would increase our knowledge on how refugee children relate to the place they live and to the people they interact with. A refugee camp is reckoned to be a transient stage. However, the Karen children did not see the camp as a transient stage; it was home to them, a place where they imagined to be living their future adult lives.

8.4 Hope for the future?

The refugee children did not believe that life in the camp would change much. However, the world is changing. A lot has happened in Burma and in the border area in Thailand since I conducted my field work in 2010, exactly two years ago. The Burmese National League Party leader and Nobel Peace prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi visited one of the refugee camps in Thailand in June 2012 (KED, 2012). Thousands of refugees had gathered in hope to see and hear her. However, Aung San Suu Kyi was not able to speak to the residents, because no lectern was set up and no microphone was given her. She stood up on a chair, and the nearest people could hear her say that she had not forgotten the people in the refugee camps and that she would work for the refugees to come home. A lot of camp residents waved with flags, both the Thai flag and the National League Party flag. There were no Burmese flag in any of the pictures, and no Karen flags. Many residents had looked forward to her coming and many were disappointed after her visit because she had not been able to speak to them (Karen News, 2012).

In 2010, Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest. The same year the first democratic election in 20 years was held in Burma. After these events, there has been a slightly growing optimism among ethnic minorities living in Burma and neighbouring countries. The new political situation created hopes of repatriation and reconciliation for

refugees in Thailand. The Thai government assures that the refugees will not be forced to move back, but the conditions in the refugee camps have worsened due to the global economic crisis and the increase in rice prices. The monthly food rations per person in the refugee camps have decreased down below the international minimum standard of calories needed (TBBC, 2011).

A ceasefire was established between the Burmese government army and many of the ethnic minority armies in the beginning of 2012. After the election there is hope for a more democratic and peaceful Burma, and a solution to the protracted ethnic conflict. Many refugees and migrants are still in Thailand. However, the influx of people over the border has decreased lately, and some of the Burmese have already returned to Burma (Moe, 2012). In the refugee camps in Thailand the UNHCR has started the work for a possible repatriation of the camp residents. The commission has outlined a three year preparation time before the first voluntary refugees can be repatriated, while the Thai government might be eager to start the process earlier. However, many of the camp residents are anxious to go back because they are afraid of landmines in their home villages (Naing, 2012) .

A shutdown of the refugee camps and repatriation of the camp residents is a future option that seemed very far away two years ago, when I conducted my field work. The changes in Burma will probably alter the lives both of the refugee and migrant children who participated in the research. What will the changes in Burma mean for them? Will they be moving to Burma or will they continue to live in Thailand? I assume that the children's thoughts today about their present lives and in their lives in the future have changed along with the new situation in their 'homeland'.

Still, there is much uncertainty about the future. If their families decide to move back to Burma it will create new challenges for the migrant and refugee children. For many Karen migrants and refugees, repatriation to Burma and Karen state might feel like coming home. For many of the refugee children, however, the camp life is the only life they know, and for most of the migrant children and refugee children alike, Thailand is the only home they know. Children interact with a changing social world, and a new life will mean the construction of new identities and new meanings in their lives. Hopefully they will be able to adjust to their new lives and their new identities, create meaning in their everyday lives and continue to imagine a better future for their people.

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Appendices

Informed consent form - Children

Name:

I understand that Laila has come from a University in Norway to do a research on Karen children in Thailand. A University is a school, and there she studies children and childhood. She has come to Mae Sot because she wants to learn about how children here experience their everyday lives and their school day. When she has finished her work here in Mae Sot, she will go back to Norway to write a report on what she has learned.

1. My participation in Laila's research project is voluntary. I am the one to decide whether to take part or not. If I refuse to take part, that will be fine with Laila and have no disadvantage for me.
2. I am free to withdraw from the research at any time without any disadvantage for me.
3. Laila will ask me to write essays, to make drawings and to take photos. She will take these away and use them in her report.
4. No one here on the school, except for Laila and the interpreters will see my drawings and writings.
5. Laila will not use my name in her report.
6. Laila will also ask me questions about my everyday life and my school day.
7. If she asks me questions that I do not want to answer, I can just tell her that I do not want to answer. She will be fine with that.

I agree to take part in Laila's research project.

Place: Date:

Signature, Child:

Signature, Researcher:

Interview guide

Individual interviews and group interviews in the Refugee Camp School

11.8.2010 and 13.8.2010

L: How old are you?

L: How long have you been living in NN (refugee camp)?

L: What do you think about your school? What are your thoughts about your school?

L: What is the best about school?

L: What is your favourite subject?

L: What do you like to do when you are not in school?

L: What do you think about the tasks I gave you today, the essay writing and the photography task?

L: What do you want to do when you graduate, when you have finished school? What do you want to do then?

L: Why do you want to become a.....?

L: What is good about being a....?

L: Where do you want to live and where do you want to work as an adult?

L: How is your life here in NN (camp)? Can you tell me some other things about your life?

L: Tablu (Thank you in Skaw Karen language)! Thank you very much for your answers and for your writing and your drawings