

**TRANSLOCAL IDENTITIES**

**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT OF THE  
POLITICAL ECONOMY OF CHILDHOOD TRANSITIONS IN  
NORTHERN THAILAND**

*Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

*by*

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#### AUTHORSHIP DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this thesis is the result of my own work except where otherwise indicated and due acknowledgement is given.

SIGNED ..... DATE .....

## **Abstract**

### **Translocal identities: An ethnographic account of the political economy of Karen childhood transitions in northern Thailand**

This thesis examines Karen childhood transitions in a context of expansion of the cash economy, formal education and modern institutions. Since the 1960s, Thai state development has had a significant impact on the organisation of work and learning among highland populations. Today, household economies largely depend on cash income and children aspire towards an adult life in which paid work is central. Formal education is highly valued as a means to reach this goal. Children often migrate for education to better-resourced locations and access scholarships provided by national and international institutions.

On the basis of 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork undertaken between October 2007 and September 2009, the thesis seeks to understand the effects of globalisation on politically and economically marginalized children in northern Thailand through the lens of changing modes of production and learning.

Findings indicate that children's migration for education reflects broad political economic inequalities among Karen households as well as between them and mainstream Thai lowland populations. International dimensions of unequal relations are revealed in local peoples' collective negotiations with Japanese and Catholic Christian NGOs. Although socio-cultural constructs like 'gender', 'generation', and 'ethnicity' shape Karen childhoods, this study found that their economic and political status are more fundamental in shaping all aspects of their social lives, including their socio-cultural identities. Childhood transitions emerge as multidimensional learning processes towards mastery of 'translocal identities', the skill to manage identities and relationships across multiple spaces and institutions. This is a culturally valued skill evidenced when minority children tactfully negotiate differing modes of compliance, resistance, and adaptation, especially in the domains of work and education. Thus, children participate in the moulding of local versions of the modern political economy of northern Thailand.

Word count: 90,450

*In memoriam Aelee Boonlue, Chedi Moj*



*Deo gratias ex toto corde*

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## Glossary

### Karen words

|                         |                                                                               |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>bler thi hpo</i>     | people who immerse themselves in water<br>(Protetant Christians)              |
| <i>goz mauf s'kauf</i>  | friend, companion                                                             |
| <i>hkwiv lauz t'kax</i> | throwing rice bundles to the field                                            |
| <i>hkò hpè</i>          | female turban                                                                 |
| <i>hpa hkini</i>        | black trousers for men                                                        |
| <i>hpo hsi</i>          | baby                                                                          |
| <i>hposaf ho</i>        | child, little child                                                           |
| <i>hpo hkwa</i>         | son (boy)                                                                     |
| <i>hpo muf</i>          | girls                                                                         |
| <i>hsei gauz</i>        | red Karen shirt for men                                                       |
| <i>hsei soo</i>         | black blouse (for married women)                                              |
| <i>hsei wa</i>          | white Karen dress for unmarried girls and women                               |
| <i>hta</i>              | traditional Karen song                                                        |
| <i>kau k'ca</i>         | Lord of the Land (highest supreme being in Karen animist belief)              |
| <i>k'nav</i>            | one who has not arrived at maturity                                           |
| <i>laiz</i>             | to go                                                                         |
| <i>lauz qauz</i>        | a single person beyond the age of 35; literally: abandoned, left with nothing |
| <i>misato</i>           | chilli paste                                                                  |
| <i>moj</i>              | mother                                                                        |
| <i>moj dof</i>          | a religious sister                                                            |
| <i>muf k'nav</i>        | young lady, girl, maiden                                                      |
| <i>nauj</i>             | title for girls and unmarried women                                           |
| <i>nif</i>              | skirt for women                                                               |
| <i>paj</i>              | father                                                                        |
| <i>phei thi hpo</i>     | people who sprinkle water (Catholic Christians)                               |
| <i>tapopo</i>           | typical porridge-like Karen dish                                              |
| <i>ywa</i>              | creating deity                                                                |

### Thai words

|                    |                          |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>aai</i>         | shy                      |
| <i>amphoe</i>      | district                 |
| <i>à nú baan</i>   | kindergarten             |
| <i>bâan</i>        | home                     |
| <i>bpanha</i>      | problem                  |
| <i>bplùuk kâao</i> | to cultivate rice        |
| <i>bprà-tǒm</i>    | elementary school        |
| <i>bpùat-hǔa</i>   | headache                 |
| <i>bìra</i>        | tired of doing something |
| <i>changwat</i>    | province                 |

|                                |                                                                     |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>chao khao</i>               | (derogative) hill people                                            |
| <i>chə̀əi- chə̀əi</i>          | so-so (normal, without excitement)                                  |
| <i>chúai</i>                   | to assist                                                           |
| <i>chúai gan</i>               | to assist each other                                                |
| <i>chuai ngaan</i>             | assisting at work                                                   |
| <i>chûa-moong</i>              | hour                                                                |
| <i>dàa</i>                     | to curse; scold                                                     |
| <i>dèk</i>                     | a child below the age of 15                                         |
| <i>dèk chaai</i>               | boy child                                                           |
| <i>dèk yǐng</i>                | girl child                                                          |
| <i>dii</i>                     | good                                                                |
| <i>dii-jai</i>                 | happy                                                               |
| <i>dtə̀ng-ngaán</i>            | marriage                                                            |
| <i>dtùun-dtên</i>              | nervous; excited                                                    |
| <i>duu-lɛɛ</i>                 | take care; keep an eye on                                           |
| <i>fɛɛn</i>                    | loved one, boyfriend, girlfriend, fiancé, husband, wife             |
| <i>fǒn</i>                     | rain                                                                |
| <i>gap-kâao</i>                | side dish; literally: ‘with rice’                                   |
| <i>gèng</i>                    | to be intelligent, smart, good at (doing something), efficient etc. |
| <i>giào kâao</i>               | rice harvest                                                        |
| <i>glâa</i>                    | bold; fearless                                                      |
| <i>glua</i>                    | fear                                                                |
| <i>hǔng kâao</i>               | to cook rice                                                        |
| <i>jai</i>                     | heart                                                               |
| <i>jai yen</i>                 | a ‘cold heart’ (i.e. a balanced character)                          |
| <i>jai ron</i>                 | a ‘hot heart’ (i.e. a passionate character)                         |
| <i>kâao lăam</i>               | rice in bamboo                                                      |
| <i>kariang</i>                 | general Thai name for the Karen                                     |
| <i>kà yǎn</i>                  | diligent; industrious                                               |
| <i>kîi giat</i>                | lazy                                                                |
| <i>kít-tǔ̀ng</i>               | to miss                                                             |
| <i>kon muang</i>               | northern Thai person                                                |
| <i>kon pa</i>                  | (derogative) wild forest man                                        |
| <i>kon</i>                     | a person                                                            |
| <i>kon bprayot</i>             | a benefactor                                                        |
| <i>kon diao</i>                | alone                                                               |
| <i>kon dtít-dtoo</i>           | a person who provides contacts                                      |
| <i>kon isan</i>                | a person from Isan                                                  |
| <i>kon òp-pa-yóp</i>           | migrant                                                             |
| <i>krîat</i>                   | tensed                                                              |
| <i>krom bprà-chaá sǒng-kró</i> | Public Welfare Department                                           |
| <i>kru</i>                     | teacher                                                             |
| <i>kru kham son</i>            | catechist                                                           |
| <i>kun kaan</i>                | mature, unmarried woman                                             |
| <i>kwaam chà-láat</i>          | wisdom; intelligence                                                |
| <i>kwai</i>                    | buffalo                                                             |
| <i>maa-ra-yâat Thai</i>        | Thai code of conduct                                                |
| <i>mae</i>                     | mother                                                              |

|                     |                                                                                  |
|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>mâi</i>          | not                                                                              |
| <i>mâi-bpen-rai</i> | no worries; it doesn't matter; never mind                                        |
| <i>máttayom</i>     | secondary education level                                                        |
| <i>mii</i>          | to have                                                                          |
| <i>mǔan</i>         | similar to; like                                                                 |
| <i>mubaan</i>       | village                                                                          |
| <i>naa</i>          | maternal aunt                                                                    |
| <i>naai</i>         | men above 15, married or unmarried                                               |
| <i>náam oi</i>      | sugar cane candies                                                               |
| <i>naang sǎao</i>   | young woman (above 15 and unmarried)                                             |
| <i>naang</i>        | married woman                                                                    |
| <i>ngaan</i>        | work                                                                             |
| <i>ngaai</i>        | easy                                                                             |
| <i>nǐi</i>          | to escape                                                                        |
| <i>nísǎi</i>        | habit, behaviour; disposition; true nature                                       |
| <i>nóong</i>        | younger sibling, title used before the first name                                |
| <i>noon mâi lạp</i> | to lie down without sleeping                                                     |
| <i>núai</i>         | exhausted; tired                                                                 |
| <i>núat kâao</i>    | to thresh rice                                                                   |
| <i>pîi</i>          | elder brother or sister; a polite prefix of an older sibling; you, she, him, her |
| <i>pîi –chaai</i>   | older brother                                                                    |
| <i>pîi-nóong</i>    | relatives (senior and junior kin)                                                |
| <i>pomae</i>        | parents                                                                          |
| <i>pūan</i>         | friend; peer; companion (a person that is neither junior nor senior)             |
| <i>pūu-chaai</i>    | boy, man                                                                         |
| <i>pūut-lên</i>     | to joke                                                                          |
| <i>pūu-yǐng</i>     | girl, woman                                                                      |
| <i>pūu yài</i>      | adult                                                                            |
| <i>pūu yài baan</i> | head of village                                                                  |
| <i>râap rooi</i>    | well-mannered, neat, tidy, well-behaved                                          |
| <i>sabaai</i>       | comfortable                                                                      |
| <i>sanuk</i>        | fun, amusing, entertaining                                                       |
| <i>sia jai</i>      | sadness                                                                          |
| <i>songkran</i>     | Buddhist Water festival in April marking the onset of the New Year               |
| <i>sǔai</i>         | beautiful                                                                        |
| <i>taa rook</i>     | baby (also unborn)                                                               |
| <i>tǎi naa</i>      | to plough the paddy                                                              |
| <i>tambon</i>       | sub-district                                                                     |
| <i>tam ngaan</i>    | to work                                                                          |
| <i>tam-teen</i>     | to replace (at work)                                                             |
| <i>wâai</i>         | salute by placing hands palm against palm and raising them to the face           |
| <i>wai-rûn</i>      | youth, adolescent                                                                |
| <i>wan dèk</i>      | annual, national Child Day                                                       |
| <i>wan waai kru</i> | annual, national Teachers' Day                                                   |
| <i>wat</i>          | temple; monastery                                                                |
| <i>weelaa</i>       | time                                                                             |

*yaa baa*  
*yaa septic*  
*yang*  
*ya-wá-chon*  
*ying bpuun*  
*yùu*

drugs  
synthetic drugs  
(derogative) Karen people  
youth  
to hunt with a gun  
to be; to stay

## List of Abbreviations

|       |                                                                |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| BK    | Ban Kad                                                        |
| BPP   | Border Patrol Police                                           |
| COERR | Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees              |
| CPT   | Communist Party Thailand                                       |
| CUREC | Central University Research Ethics Committee                   |
| DISAC | Diocesan Action Center                                         |
| IMF   | International Monetary Fund                                    |
| JESS  | Jesuit Social Service                                          |
| NFN   | Northern Farmer's Network                                      |
| PRE   | Participatory Research Exercises                               |
| RCSD  | Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development |
| RFD   | Royal Forestry Department                                      |
| RP    | Royal Project                                                  |
| RTG   | Royal Thai Government                                          |
| UN    | United Nations                                                 |

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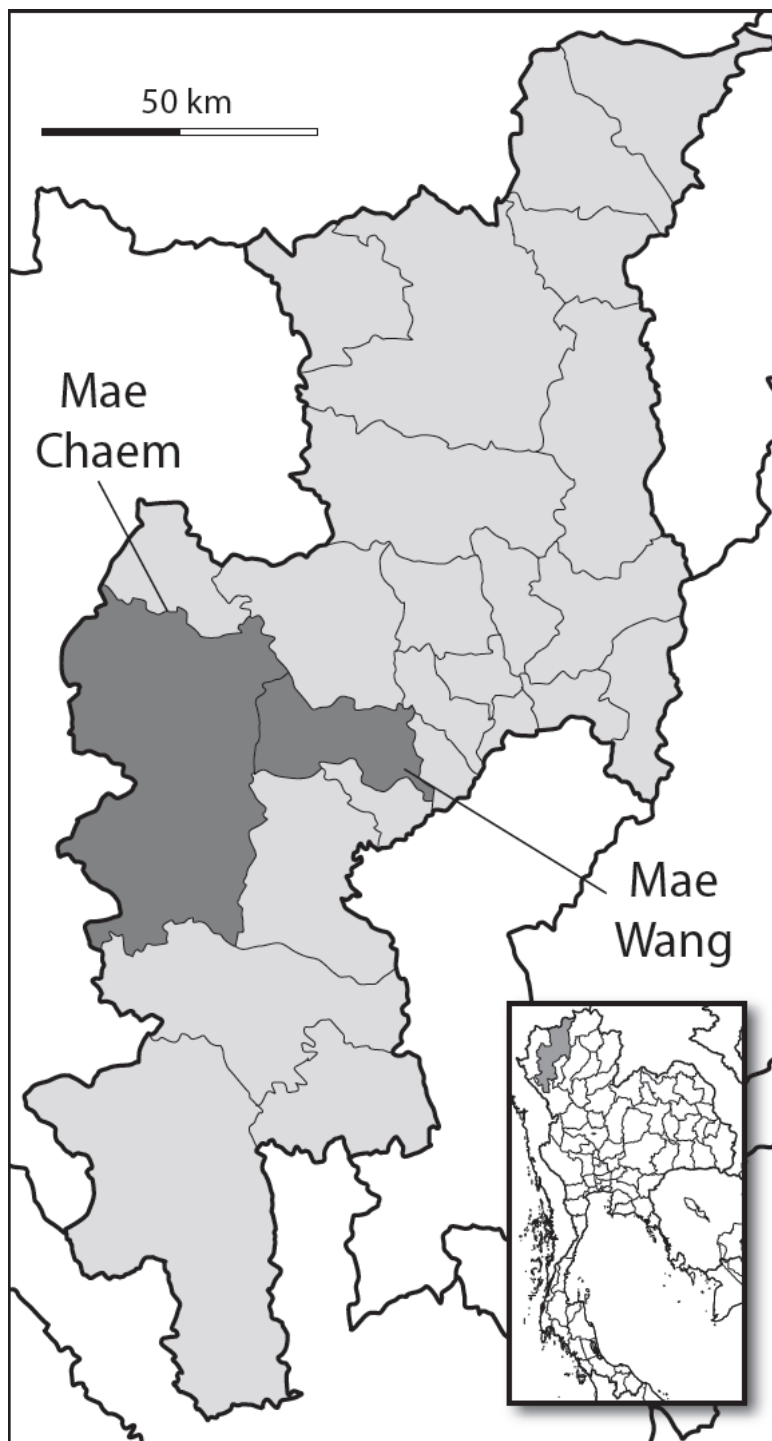
*Map 1. Regional map of Thailand showing Chiang Mai province<sup>1</sup>*



<sup>1</sup> Map adapted by Margaret Stewart from UN Cartographic Section, Map of Thailand, January 2004, No. 3853 Rev. 1, downloaded from UNHCR.org [http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/460a72dd2.html] on 03.08.10



Map 2. Chiang Mai Province showing Mae Wang and Mae Chaem districts<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Map adapted by Margaret Stewart from Amphoe\_Chiang\_mai.svg downloaded from Wikipedia.org [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Amphoe\_chiang\_mai.svg] on 27.06.2010

*Map 3. Mae Wang district with Mae Win and Ban Kad provinces<sup>3</sup>*



<sup>3</sup> Map adapted by Margaret Stewart from Amphoe.svg, downloaded from [<http://www.amphoe.com/3picture/13/map1151303810>] on 03.08.10

## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of the political economy of childhood transitions among ethnic minorities within the context of an expanding cash economy, formal education and modern institutions. Through the lens of changing modes and sites of production and learning, the study examines the effects of globalisation on childhood among ethnic minority people in the highlands of northern Thailand.

The thesis explores the hypothesis that children's transition to adulthood is neither a linear, natural or universally experienced development, nor a single event that takes place at a 'turning point'. Rather, it is a political economic and socio-culturally embedded process which needs to be understood in global and local contexts of social dissonances related to changing modes and sites of production and learning, modern institutions and the social construction of identities. My research is guided by the following question: How are changing modes and sites of production and learning affecting childhood transitions in northern Thailand?

The political economy of northern Thailand is marked by ethnicised socio-economic and political inequalities. These unequal social relations are legacies of historical processes, including colonialism, nation state building, the Cold War and globalisation, which mirror power configurations at different geographic and institutional locations. Within this context, the Karen people are categorised as an 'ethnic minority group'. This ethnic minority status, in turn, speaks of their political and socio-economic marginality within the modern Thai nation state and the market economy. Especially since the 1960s, political economic changes have had a significant impact on the organisation of work and learning among highland populations in northern Thailand. The introduction of commercialised agriculture and

Thai state schools provided a basis for state interventions aiming for national integration of 'ethnic minorities'. Today, Karen children aspire towards an adult life in which paid work is central. Formal education is highly valued as a means to reach this goal. In order to access state schools, girls and boys migrate to other villages and towns. Karen children's increasing mobility for work and education in Thai mainstream society is an issue of contestation. On the one hand, migration for education is regulated and supported by local, national and international (non-) governmental institutions. On the other hand, some NGOs and Thai academics say that the political economic transformations of the highlands are a source of moral decay for 'ethnic minorities' in general, and 'ethnic minority children' in particular.

The impact of wider political economic changes on ethnic minority childhood transitions remains largely unexplored by social scientists inside and outside Thailand. Indeed, to my knowledge, there are no studies on how the political economic transformations of the last decades have impacted on life-course transitions from childhood to adulthood in northern Thailand. What literature exists tends to portray young Karen as being lured into urban spaces where they become part of the urban poor, concealing their ethnic identity and breaking contact with their villages. Oftentimes, these claims are brought forward without much research evidence. On the other hand, ethnographic studies among the Karen have explored life course transitions largely using conventional anthropological ideas about 'rites of passage', thus primarily focusing on events such as weddings and funerals (e.g. Fink 2003; Hayami 2004; Kwanchewan 2003; Marshall 1997; Mischung 1984). Little attention has been paid to other forms of transitions, such as socio-cultural learning processes, and their relation to broader political economic developments. As an ethnographic account of the impact of global and national developments on local rural lives, my

own study is mindful of historical material power relations *and* the cultural constructions of identities.

### **Background and motivation**

My introduction to the Karen people in northern Thailand was gradual. I first encountered the Karen people through previous work and research at the Thai-Burma border for my master's thesis at the University of Geneva (Vogler 2006) as well as during an internship and consultancy work for NGOs and the UNHCR. These experiences motivated my application for doctoral research on forced migrant youth at the Oxford Department of International Development.

During my first year at Oxford, my work as a research assistant with the Young Lives Project and as a consultant with the Bernard van Leer Foundation allowed me to engage with the existing conceptual literature on children's time use and transition experiences (Vogler, Crivello, and Woodhead 2008; Vogler, Morrow, and Woodhead 2009). Through these processes, I identified existing research gaps, such as a scarcity of ethnographic studies on childhood transitions in the global South, or little studies that explored the role of work and studies in children's growth processes. Moreover, I saw that, in general, qualitative social research tended to explore childhood as psychological and/or socio-cultural construct. Yet, the political economic dimensions of children's lives seemed severely under researched. I wanted to respond to these research gaps with my thesis. I thought to extend my master's research and opted for field work on refugee youth transitions in Thailand. Thus, in October 2007, I embarked on my fieldwork in northern Thailand, mostly Chiang Mai and the Thai-Burma border. However, shortly after my arrival in northern Thailand it transpired that this was no longer easily feasible. Camp regulations at my previous

fieldwork site during my master's had become stricter. NGOs were also unwilling to accept researchers as volunteers and wanted a declaration that no publications would follow their internships. After email consultation with my supervisor in Oxford, I decided I needed to find another research setting.

In Chiang Mai, staff at the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD), Chiang Mai University, were particularly helpful in exploring potential fieldwork sites with me. The Catholic Jesuit community at the Seven Fountains retreat centre also provided me with support in coordinating my research. Eventually, I decided to start fieldwork in Huay Tong village in December 2007. It became clear that fieldwork in the Karen village confronted me with different challenges than that among the migrant settlements along the Thai-Burma border. Village life was never straightforward and brought along many cultural and practical challenges. In order to learn about Karen young people's contemporary and past life-course transitions, I had to participate in their daily and seasonal activities. Literally following the research participants, I moved daily between the Karen village and Thai school cultures and seasonally between the highlands and the lowland towns. Often I felt I learned much more from the Karen and Thai people than I could ever contribute to their lives. I am grateful I was able to conduct my fieldwork in Huay Tong, and it remains my modest hope that this research may in one way or another be useful and informative for the Thai and Karen people who live, work and study there.

### **Structure of the thesis**

The thesis comprises eight chapters, and a separate conclusion. Chapter 1 outlines the conceptual framework of this study. I present my conceptual assumptions underlying my research question and hypothesis, and explain how these assumptions derive from

my reading of the existing social science literature on the cultural and political economic dimensions of childhood transitions, the political economic dimensions of ‘ethnicity’ and ‘childhood’, the social morality and values of children’s time use, as well as social identities, localities, and mobility. In reviewing the literature, I explain how my study relates and contributes to existing bodies of research.

Chapter 2 outlines the research methods, ethical considerations and issues about reflexivity informing this study. I explain how I accessed my fieldwork site, introduce my research sample and discuss my choice of research methods. The chapter concludes with ethical considerations on the whole research process. My research highlights the importance of methodological diversity in exploring young peoples’ negotiations of political economic inequalities during their transition experiences. My data was generated from participant observation, formal and informal interviews and participatory research exercises. Ethical issues are treated thoughtfully throughout the whole research process of data gathering, analysis and the representation of research findings. During the process of data gathering, particular attention was paid to power dynamics, informed consent and the security of the research participants.

Building on the literature review of Chapter 1 and my methodological and ethnic discussions in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 situates Karen childhood transitions within the macro context of northern Thailand. I explain how specific relations of economic and political power have been related to ‘ethnicity’ during the processes of modern Thai nation building. I outline how the introduction of modern education and an expanding cash economy impact on the social mobility of highland minority people. Also explained is the role of seniority and patron-client relations in structuring social relations within Thai society.

In Chapter 4 I largely draw on ethnographic data to illustrate how broader socio-historical developments and changes outlined in Chapter 3 are played out in the micro context of my research locale, Huay Tong village in Mae Wang district.

Having outlined the conceptual framework, the methodology as well as the historical and local context of my thesis, Chapters 5 to 8 present my empirical analysis of how processes of changing modes of production and learning shape the political economy of Karen childhood transitions in Huay Tong village, Mae Wang district.

In Chapter 5, I argue that Karen people's gradual integration into the national economy has led to economic diversification among Karen children. Within this changing economy, children's paid and unpaid working activities are principally organised by children's socio-economic and political status and, to a lesser degree, by gender, age or birth order. Karen and Thai adults generally value children's working activities because these are interdependent with wider economic processes at home and at school. Based on the value placed on their working activities, Karen children aspire towards adult lives in which paid work is central. In order to fulfil their responsibilities in their interdependent households, they need to find paid employment in an insecure Thai labour market. In the eyes of the children, education at Thai government schools seems a necessary means to securing future employment. But this aspiration is not uncomplicated, because of socio-cultural value dissonances in Karen villages and Thai state schools.

I argue throughout Chapter 6 that modern Thai state school education emphasises children's political economic roles as future citizens and as economic producers and consumers within the modern Thai nation state and global economy. I explain how formal learning differs from informal learning processes in a subsistence



economy. While traditional learning focuses on gendered and generational skills, Thai government education lays emphasis on children's economic and political status. As such, formal education at the school actually emphasises Karen people's rural poverty and political marginality within the Thai nation and social inequality among Karen highlanders is accentuated by their unequal access to the Thai education system. My data also draws attention to socio-economic inequalities within Karen highland society. Due to the processes of uneven economic development outlined in Chapter 3, Karen villages have unequal access to Thai government schools and employment opportunities. Migration for education and future employment has thus become a necessary means for Karen children and young people to negotiate their political and socio-economic marginality.

While Chapter 6 lays out the reasons why children today migrate, Chapter 7 turns to the actual processes of migration. The chapter analyses the institutional regulations of Karen children's migration for education. I argue that traditional patterns of political patronage shape relations between Karen households and modern national and international institutions. Among the Karen, patron-client relations between households are conventional ways to negotiate political economic inequalities. But in an expanding cash economy and formal education system, the expenses of a high school education cannot be covered by conventional household interdependencies and fosterage. So in order to access Thai high schools, children and their households must first gain access to national and international institutions which become important points of negotiation for them. They do this through local cultural intermediaries, such as school teachers. My data thus highlights the mutual shaping of international institutions and local institutions, such as households and state schools. In this process, conventional patron-client relations are imposed on local peoples'

interactions with international institutions. These institutional relations, in turn, shape migrating children's transitions and emergent identities.

Having established that Karen children need to migrate for formal education in order to access employment at the Thai labour market, and showing how local, national and international institutions regulate migration for education, Chapter 8 turns to how migration between geographic and institutional locations affects children's social status and identities. I argue that during the processes of moving between locations children develop flexible social identities. Within an institutional landscape shaped by political patronage, changing places and institutional affiliations means changing their political patrons. Young Karen people adapt and modify their individual and collective status once they migrate out of the highland context into mainstream Thai society. As an ethnicised minority group, they hold less political economic power than their lowland Thai peers, where their political marginality coincides with their rural poverty. My data suggests that young Karen people find subtle strategies to negotiate the political economic inequalities and socio-cultural dissonances between the highlands and the lowlands. They also instrumentalise their 'ethnicity' in order to access political and economic resources otherwise denied to them.

In a separate Conclusion, I discuss how my findings contribute to academic knowledge and a deeper understanding of young people's transitions in settings of political economic inequality and social dissonance. I revisit my research question, synthesise my main arguments and reiterate my three core contributions to the field. Firstly, I argue that Karen children develop 'translocal identities' during their migration processes between geographic and institutional sites for education and work. Secondly, I explain how childhood transitions are learning processes towards

mastery of ‘translocal identities’ as culturally valued skill to adapt to different places.

Thirdly, I suggest that ‘translocal identities’ reveal children’s constrained agency in the reshaping of the political economy of northern Thailand.

## **CHAPTER 1. Conceptualising a political economy of childhood transitions**

### **Introduction**

This study provides an account of the political economy of childhood transitions in a context of expanding cash economy and modern education in the highlands of northern Thailand. Attentive to socio-cultural *and* political economic dimensions of childhood transitions, my study adds to existing social research on childhood transitions in settings of social dissonance. There are two general shortcomings in existing research on childhood transitions. First, socio-cultural theories on childhood transitions and identities are not examining wider political economic dimensions, and largely focus on ‘gender’ and ‘generation’ (e.g. Mayall and Zeiher 2003, Rogoff 1990). Second, sociological theories on wider transformations, look at ‘transitions’ in terms of risk. According to these theories social dissonances associated with modernity are a source of decline and disruption in children’s process of growing up (e.g. Beck 1992, Giddens 1991).

Therefore, there exists a research gap on ethnographic research that is mindful of political economic dimensions of transitions and how, through their transition experiences, in turn children contribute to the political economic transformation of their immediate and wider environments. My own research fills this research gap. My study explores the hypothesis that childhood transitions are neither a linear, natural or universally experienced development, nor a single event that takes places at a particular ‘turning point’. Instead, childhood transitions are a political economic and socio-culturally embedded process that needs to be understood in the global and local contexts of changing modes and sites of production and learning, of modern

institutions as well as of the social construction of identities. My research is guided by the following question: How are changing modes and sites of production and learning affecting childhood transitions in a setting of social dissonance? Guided by this research question and hypothesis, I hope to contribute to existing knowledge on cultural and political economic dimensions of childhood transitions in settings of social dissonance.

This chapter outlines the four broad conceptual assumptions underlying my research question and hypothesis. First, I outline how my analysis of cultural and political economic dimensions of childhood transitions builds on and challenges existing theories of transitions as socio-cultural learning processes (e.g. Rogoff 1990, Corsaro and Molinari 2005) as well as on conceptual works on childhood transitions in settings of social dissonance (e.g. Boyden 1994, Hart 2004). Having established these bodies of literature as my basis, I explain how my own study explores Karen children as creative agents whose strategies are reshaping the cultural and material dimensions of their environment. I suggest working with a concept of ‘agency’ that recognizes how children’s lives are constrained by socio-cultural norms and political economic forces (e.g. Apparadurai 1996; Mahmood 2005). Second, my study is about ethnic minority children’s transitions. So, I locate ‘social dissonance’ in relation to social inequalities associated with ‘ethnicity’ and ‘childhood’. I explore social theories that explain how global political economic changes impact on social inequalities related to ‘ethnicity’ and ‘childhood’. I presume that social inequalities are expressed through ‘ethnicity’ in modern nation states (Fenton 1999), and that these distinctions also shape the political economic dimensions of the social institution of ‘childhood’ (e.g. Cunningham 1991, Hart 2008a) as well as the role of state schools as institutional sites of political economic inequality in childhood and

youth transitions (e.g. Levinson, Foley and Holland 1996, Jeffrey 2008). Third, I assume that childhood transitions are largely about children's learning and working activities. I presume that political economic power configurations at different times and geographic places shape the value and social moralities surrounding children's activities. Changing values of children's economic and learning activities, in turn, indicate young peoples' shifting political economic roles during their transitions (e.g. Zelizer 1985, Woodhead 2001). Fourth, children in my study move between geographic and institutional sites of work and learning. I assume that locality and space, as well as social mobility shape their social identities. Based on ethnographies on local lives in global market economies (e.g. Aranya 2008, Ong 2006, Walker 1999), I assume that in global political economies, people migrate increasingly for studies and work. Movements between geographic and institutional locations, in turn, shape peoples' social identities. I introduce the concept 'translocality' (Apparadurai 1995) and explain how it informs my analysis of the impact of migration on children's identities during their transition experiences.

### **Transitions: Cultural and political economic dimensions**

To date few studies have explored the role of colonialism, state governance, modern institutions and the market economy in childhood transitions (e.g. Katz 2004; Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1992). Social research has focused largely on the immediate contexts and practices that shape children's lives, notably in home and school settings. In contrast, studies on institutional transitions<sup>4</sup> often single out school as *the* institution shaping children's pathways. But this research has predominantly been conducted with young people in the global North. Studies on childhood transitions in

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<sup>4</sup> Institutional transitions refer to transitions within formal institutions such as schools, hospitals, and households. Institutional transitions are usually less flexible than socio-cultural transitions. They are often characterised by an age-grade system and age-linked curricula.

the global South mostly explore the role of work and ignore combinations of working, learning and playing activities (Morrow 2003; Punch 2003: 281).

#### *Socio-cultural transition research*

Conventional transitions research has been informed by Piagetian developmental psychology as well as Vygotskyian socio-cultural psychology. Work inspired by Vygotskyian socio-cultural psychology emphasises the necessity of a broader view of childhood development as a universal maturational process which differs in content according to local ethno-theories.<sup>5</sup> With its sensitivity to local practices of child-rearing activities, these studies provide more holistic accounts of children's cognitive development than the Piagetian model (e.g. Briggs 1970, 1991; Feldman and Fowler 1997: 199; Lave 1986, 1988; Rogoff 1990, Rogoff et al. 2007; Vygotsky 1978; Woodhead 1999). Post-Vygotskian researchers developed the idea of 'scaffolding' to capture the assistance children receive from more experienced instructors in reaching new developmental goals (e.g. Wood, Bruner and Ross 1976). For example, Barbara Rogoff's (1990) concept of 'guided participation' emphasises both the active engagement of children in their social world as well as the role of adults and peers in guiding children towards full participation in culturally valued activities. Although the process of guided participation is universal, it differs according to the degree of communication between children and their caregivers, as well as in the skills expected from mature community members in a given cultural and historical context (*ibid.*: 190). Children's activities are thus linked to developmental goals defined by their

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<sup>5</sup> Ethno-theories are emic, or socio-culturally specific, views on childhood. They refer to beliefs about what activities are reasonable for children and how these fit into the wider set of social practices. Despite the breath of cultural differences in age settings and perceptions of 'youth' and 'old age', ethno-theories suggest cross-cultural regularities in major transitions during youth. In most societies it is assumed that major advances in physical as well as mental abilities occur during the first six months of infancy, the second year of life, around the age of six or seven, as well as during puberty (Boyden, Ling and Myers 1998: 32–5; Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead 2008: 10; Woodhead 1999:22).

socio-cultural environments. Through interaction with their surroundings, children contribute as active agents in the process of development even when they seem passive:

Instead of viewing children as separate entities that become capable of social involvement, we may consider children as being inherently engaged in the social world from before birth, advancing throughout development in their skill in independently carrying out and organizing activities of their culture (*ibid.*: 22).

Inspired by Rogoff, Corsaro and Molinari (2005) use ethnography as the key method for understanding the interaction between peer groups, children's caregivers, and their teachers (*ibid.*: 19–22). Based on long-term ethnographic research with primary school children in northern Italy, they explain agency and structure in children's collective school transition experiences. They show how children collectively appropriate information from the adult world and reproduce independent peer relations (Corsaro 1992, 1993; Corsaro and Molinari 2005).

Despite its innovations in viewing children in interaction with their immediate context and exploring the role of peer relations, socio-cultural transition research remains overtly concerned with 'local', immediate contexts of children's lives (Hart 2008c: 412–13; Yoshikawa and Hsueh, 2001: 1890). Moreover, socio-cultural transition research mostly narrows 'child identities' down to gender and generation. Socio-economic and political status differences among children remain largely unexplored. Furthermore, the role of institutions, such as governments, NGOs and religious networks and their linkage to local people and schools, receive little attention: 'we should be attentive to the relationship between the education and training that children experience and the economic possibilities that this opens up (or forecloses) within an economic landscape in diverse ways by the workings of global capitalism' (Hart 2008a: 23).



### *Childhood transitions, 'ethnicity', and social dissonance*

In conventional Western sociology's modernisation and globalisation theories, children's cognitive development is often seen as harmonious. Social dissonance and diversity are seen as ruptures to normative paces of development. Social scholars commonly posit that the global economy is permeated by 'institutionally structured risk environments', such as insecure labour markets. These institutionalised risk environments link individual and collective risks with global forces (Giddens 1991: 117–18). In these views, detraditionalising social guiding principles and the emergence of individualised, fluid identities impact on children's coping abilities (Beck 1992: 92; Cieslik and Pollock 2002: 2–3).

'Childhood transitions' in contexts of restructuring and globalisation are often conceptualised as destabilising processes. For example, discussing the impact of risk on children's development of 'a self identity', Giddens (1991) draws on the work of psychologists Erikson and Winnicott in order to highlight the importance of stability and harmony in children's moral development. 'Self identity' depends largely on the development of 'basic trust' through 'the loving attention of early caretakers' (*ibid.*: 38). In contrast, instability, risk and social dissonance are said to hamper children's moral development: 'without ordered ritual and collective involvement, individuals are left without structured ways of coping with the tensions and anxieties involved' (*ibid.*: 204).

Ethnic minority children are considered particularly affected by social contexts marked by a plurality of values and norms (Kinket and Verkuyten 1997). Dissonance arises, for instance, in settings of conflicting social values between ethnic communities and mainstream society. Dissonance is said to impact negatively on identity formation causing low self-esteem, shame and other unpleasant feelings among children and youth (Beale-Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990: 301). This is

particularly relevant for education in multiethnic class room settings. For example, research suggests that the group size of minority groups influences ethnic self-description and self-evaluation. According to a UK-based study, South Asian students were more likely to reveal their ethnic origin when they formed the numerical majority at school (Hutnik 1991). In my fieldwork setting, movements between institutional and geographic locations impact on 'ethnicity'. Karen children refer to their 'Karen'-ethnicity differently depending on the geographic and/or institutional location. They are proud to wear their ethnic clothes in their highland villages, but try to conceal their ethnicity when studying or working among mainstream Thai people in the lowlands.

Social dissonance and inability to keep 'fixed identities' does not necessarily affect children negatively. 'Dissonance' must not be negative. Indeed, modern emphasis on consonance often denies disagreement and minority opinions. As a consequence non-mainstream voices are frequently marginalized or silenced (Stone 1994: 51). In practice this means, for example, that for the sake of 'harmony', nation states foster idealized notions of cultural homogeneity in denying minority groups their rights to education in their mother tongue (Gupta 2001). Such is the case in my Thai research setting where bilingual education does not exist and ethnic minority children often remain marginalized through formal education at Thai government schools.

Social studies show that children are resourceful in dealing with rupture and dissonance, even in extreme adversities such as war and natural disaster (e.g. Boyden 1994, 2003; Boyden and de Berry 2004; Chatty and Crivello 2005). Acknowledged is children's social agency, their ability to engage creatively with political economic forces that structure their everyday lives (e.g. Boyden and Levison 2000; Evans 2009;

Hart 2004; Mayall 1994; Philo and Swanson 2008; Qvortrup et al. 1994). At the same time, the literature cautions us to remain mindful of how political economic forces shape young peoples' agency. For example, in the global South, modern school education often raises expectations concerning the value of formal degrees for successful career lives within a consumer culture. Yet, formal degrees often do not lead to stable and well paid work and young peoples' life course aspirations are frustrated. The thus created dissonance between local realities and globally promoted consumer cultures may lead to frustration and social dissonance (Katz 2004; Hart 2008a: 20; Jefferey, Jeffrey and Jeffrey 2008).

My own research adds to this body of literature. My fieldwork setting is a particularly distinct example of social dissonance because of its focus on Karen ethnic minority childhood transitions in a context of expansion of the cash economy, formal education and modern institutions. As outlined in Chapters 3 and 4, these political economic forces shape the institution of 'childhood' as well as boys' and girls' daily lives and life course transitions. Karen children growing up in the context of northern Thai political economy experience dissonance of socio-cultural values as they move between their home, school, and work places in Karen villages and Thai mainstream towns. Although their lives are clearly shaped by plurality of socio-cultural values and norms as well as political economic forces, my research demonstrates that boys and girls act as creative agents whose strategies reshape everyday politics of modern institutions in northern Thailand. The next section suggests ways to account for children's agency without losing sight of the socio-cultural and political-economic shaping of their environments.

*Children as agents: socio-cultural and political economic dimensions*

Karen children in this study negotiate socio cultural values and political economic forces mediated by modern institutions, such as schools and markets. My research explores children's negotiations through their working and learning activities at different institutional and geographic locations in northern Thailand. Within this particular historical and geographic context – outlined in Chapters 3 and 4 - 'childhood' experiences are constrained by socio-cultural values (e.g. obedience in senior-junior relations) and political-economic forces (e.g. commercialization of agricultural production). This section reflects on how 'children's agency' might be understood in relation to children's compliance with socio-cultural norms and political economic constraints.

Agency does not always indicate resistance; it can also mean complying with social expectations and adapting to socio-cultural norms. Research on children's agency reveals subtle and discreet forms of children's critiques and everyday resistance. Growing up in settings of social dissonance for children is about resistance and compliance to global and local dimensions of political economic power configurations, including the politics of 'the everyday' (Bargetz 2009). In the global South, children and adults often resist and critique established structures of dominance by discreet means, such as gossip: 'As a form of resistance...gossip is a kind of democratic "voice" in conditions where power and possible repression make open acts of disrespect dangerous' (Scott 1985: 282). Other studies evidence how gossip serves as a means to police and control others and to convey indirect warnings where transgression of norms and/or the maintenance of group unity is feared (Gluckman 1963: 308; Heissler 2009: 298).

So, compliance with dominant views and structures does not necessarily oppose agency. Saba Mahmood's (2005) research shows that not everyone aspires

freedom from subordination. The meaning of hierarchical social structures is subject to cultural contexts and does not always bear negative connotations (Lammers 2005). For example, in Thailand, the separability between children and adult activities is less pronounced than in most places of the global North. As outlined in Chapter 3, senior-junior relations structure all social interactions and ideally produce mutual benefits for both parties. Especially in rural Thailand, economic activities of children and adults are largely interdependent. Accordingly, filial obedience rather than rebellion manifests agency in everyday life and in planning the life course for Thai and Karen children. At the same time, generational hierarchies are relational and depend on time and location. For example, children's subordination towards adults lasts only temporarily. On their way towards social adulthood they increasingly reproduce dominant socio-cultural values of senior domination over juniors.

Political economic forces constrain children's agency. Within structural limitations, children and adults exercise some degree of agency through 'local appropriations' of dominant forces. The concept 'local appropriations' describes how material and cultural aspects of globalisation are played out locally in everyday politics. The notion 'local appropriation' has been developed by 'alternative modernities' studies (e.g. Gaonkar 1999). These studies are often situated in the global South. They highlight that local institutions and people are not merely embracing hegemonic versions of 'Western modernity'. Instead, they develop skills to appropriate and give new meaning to global ideas on local grounds (e.g. Aranya 2008, Ong 2006). In these views, negotiation of unequal political economic relations never means just freedom or liberation from dominant global structures, but also compliance and/or appropriation of dominant styles into local cultures and power configurations.

For example, local appropriations of the global education system have been debated within the social sciences since the 1980s in relation to sociological dependency theories (e.g. Watson 1985) or world culture theories in comparative education (e.g. Anderson-Levitt 2003). Anthropological studies give abundant documentation of local appropriations of government schooling (e.g. Demerath 1999; Jeffery, Jeffery and Jeffery 2008; Jungck with Boonreang 2003; Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1992; Rival 1996; Rockwell 1996; Willis 2009). Children play an active role in accessing modern institutions for their educational pathways. For instance, in his classical ethnography *Learning to Labour*, Paul Willis (2009, <sup>1</sup>1978) evidences how male working class youth adapt to and critique dominant structures conveyed by the education system. He argues that in settings marked by social dissonance and structural constraints people exercise individual and collective agency through ‘cultural production’ by means of material and symbolic resources: ‘Cultural production indicates a degree of agency. It frames experiences and life transitions as in some way broadening and liberating’ (Willis 1983:128). Importantly, agency remains constrained by structural forces such as social status and historical context. The following section locates social dissonance in this study. I do this through the concepts ‘ethnicity’ and ‘childhood’, two key notions in my ethnographic research on the political economy of ethnic minority childhood transitions.

### **Locating social dissonance: globalisation, ‘ethnicity’ and ‘childhoods’**

Globalisation is about the expansion of neo-liberal markets and modern institutions throughout the world. In modern institutions, global, national and local power configurations are interwoven. Especially since the 1970s, the flow of capital has increasingly disengaged from governmental restrictions. In the following years,

circulation of capital and ideas across borders created new interdependencies and inequalities between northern and southern world regions. The local lives of citizens of the global South have increasingly been linked to international markets, institutions and political developments (Hart 2008a: 6; Harvey 2007).

Moreover, global political economic forces are not external to everyday meanings and actions. Yet, Western theories of social change strongly focus on nation states, markets and modern institutions in a secularised world. They view social transformations as being about the institutionalisation of bureaucratically administered nation states, market driven economies, the rule of law, urbanisation, etc. The role of 'politics of the everyday' (Bargetz 2009), of culture and locality, remains largely ignored. Often, Western ideas of modernity become problematic when engaging with the complexities of postcolonial settings and how global forces and culture are played out locally (e.g. Gaonkar 1999: 2; Ong 2006: 36). Yet the formation of modern institutions outside Western Europe has not followed a similar dynamic, nor are modern institutions operating in a standard way around the world. In many parts of the global South, modern institutions are not the only instances of political power (Chakrabarty 2000: 14). Instead, everyday politics on local levels are often shaped by local power configurations, such as patron-client relations in Thailand.

The impacts of global changes thus vary depending on geographic location. In some places, new study and employment opportunities increase welfare benefits and equality among local people. In other places, existing inequalities are exacerbated and new forms of dissonance produced. Ethnicised groups often hold particular economic positions at a particular geographic location within national and global divisions of labour (e.g. Anderson 2000; Muttarak 2004). Moreover, globalisation does not

automatically mean that political borders lose their importance in reference to the neo-liberal market economy. Indeed, nationalism has not disappeared and new localisms are flourishing. This has particular implications for minority groups within nation states (Gupta 2001; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Kymlicka 2005).

Recent changes in global history affect the institution of childhood. In a changing political economy, social diversity among children in the global North as well as in the global South is increasing. In recent years, an increasing body of social research draws attention to the effect of global changes on local childhood and youth experiences (e.g. Jeffrey and Dyson 2008). For example, Katz (2004) shows how the modern market economy and global politics are impacting on childhood transitions in a Sudanese village and a New York neighbourhood. Leineaweaver (2008a) explains how child circulation in the Peruvian Andes is structured by different institutions, such as the government, the Catholic Church as well as NGOs.

My own study explores how changing modes of production and learning affect childhood transitions among an ethnic minority group in northern Thailand. Political economic inequality in relation to ‘ethnicity’ and ‘childhood’ is therefore an important theme throughout the study. The following two parts of this section outline conceptual work on social dissonance in relation to ‘ethnicity’ and ‘childhood’.

#### *Political economic inequality and ‘ethnicity’*

This section explores social dissonance through the cultural and material dimensions of ‘ethnicity’ and political economic inequality within different locations in modern nation states and global market economies. Ethnicity has cultural, political economic and spatial dimensions. Ethnicity speaks about cultural boundaries (Barth 1969) as well as social dissonance along political and socio-economic lines (Fenton 2003:



134), while geographic space often indicates linkages and ruptures between culture, political economic status and ethnicity.

According to Fredrik Barth's (1969) classical anthropological definition, ethnic groups define themselves not by some innate, essential characteristics, but always in dynamic relation to other social groups. Ethnic boundaries are created and negotiated through group interaction (Barth 1969: 12; Poveda and Marcos 2005: 328; Rizvi 2004: 84–85). However, ethnicity is not only about sustaining cultural boundaries between groups, but also about politico-economic inequalities between them. Sociologically, ethnicity is grounded in institutions like households, schools, and bureaucracies as well as in the socio-economic structure of a society (Fenton 1999: 115). Throughout the world, ethnic identities have developed within major trajectories of modern history such as slavery, colonialism, nationalism and market economies (*ibid.*: 11). Therefore, 'ethnicity' is a concept that always relates to historical changes, institutions and geographic locations.

Within modern state systems, political and economic power are interdependent. Political power promotes economic power, and often this is the economic power of a distinct ethnic group who inhabits a particular location in national space. Political power is about the exercise of formal state power through parties, associations, and institutions. It is also about the politicisation of cultural symbols and mobilisation of groups. Hence, political economic processes acquire ethnic significance (*ibid.*: 171).

In addition, state formation is an ongoing process. It does not reach a point of completion. Group formation and mobilisation through instrumental use of 'ethnicity' is an important part of nation state formation. Ethnic categories are shaped during these ongoing processes (Brubaker 2004: 53–4).

State formation requires a cultural definition of an ethnic majority. 'Others' are then defined in relation to this majority group. In a narrow and ancestral idea of nation, minority groups are often defined as less than full members. As a consequence they may be denied citizenship status and thus access to the welfare system, political participation, etc. In Thailand, 'ethnic minorities' are to this day divided into subgroups with different access to political rights and economic resources (Toyota 2005: 122–3). Processes of uneven economic development often also marginalise 'minority groups', where dominant groups may undermine traditional economies and encroach upon geographic space through modernising development projects (Fenton and Bradley 2002: 19; Hettne 1996: 19). State development may also be used as a tool, however, to integrate marginalised and ethnicised groups into the national economy. These processes are often accompanied by contestations over land ownership and community rights, sometimes resulting in ethnicised violence and wars (Dwyer 1996:3; Turton 1997).

Nationalism can be viewed as cultural homogeneity constructed through the politicisation of symbols and instrumentalisation of language and histories. Histories and symbols need to be evoked on a continuous base, for example, at school or during national holidays, at football games or during beauty contests. At the same time, dominant narratives are constantly challenged. Nationalism, however, is not always about exclusion but also about the inclusion of 'minorities'. Ironically, inclusive policies can cement marginality. National narratives may acknowledge local differences in order to highlight the cultural homogeneity of the dominant group, thus emphasising the marginality of the 'others':

The recognition that different ethnic groups, different locales, and different communities and religions have each their own role to play in the national project underlines their difference at the same time that it homogenizes and

incorporates them.... Such an incorporation of difference hierarchically organizes subject positions for diverse groups of citizens (Gupta 2001: 191).

Therefore, the boundary between 'exclusion' and 'inclusion' is contextual and shifting. For instance, undocumented migrants may be included in the labour market but excluded from political citizenship status (Anthias 2002a: 67). Also, government policies that aim at inclusion can have ethnicising effects, for example, in affirmative action or equal opportunity programmes (Arora 2005: 23). In focusing on 'ethnicity' alone, such policies homogenise ethnic groups and remain insensitive to status differences within these groups. For example, the internationalisation of ethnic minority issues through Western-dominated intergovernmental organisations (e.g. the World Bank) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) promotes, and often financially sustains, the work of local minority rights groups. International organisations work with instrumentalised concepts of 'ethnicity', and international law categorises minority people as 'indigenous peoples', 'national minorities' and 'immigrant groups' (He and Kymlicka 2005: 6–11). Therefore, in order to access economic resources from international organisations and NGOs, minority groups often feel the need to mobilise 'ethnicity' (Ilewallen [sic!] 2008).

As markets change, so do ethnicities. Global economic, political and geographic changes impact on ethnic positions within national and international labour markets: 'As economics develop and class relations change, so too does the class/ethnicity relationship evolve and change. Nor do individuals passively accept or conform to the structural contexts in which they fringe themselves' (Fenton and Bradley 2002: 26). Ethnic identities are turned into vehicles of collective and individual goals (Fenton 1999: 174).

In these processes, ethnicised symbols may be used to indicate local or national belonging. Shared group symbols, such as traditional clothes, turn into

sources of solidarity and means for promoting unity. 'Ethnic' groups may feel the need to essentialise 'ethnicity' and deny socio-economic and political status differences among themselves. This does not exclude that symbols are not grounded on real feelings of the people. For example, local clothes and food may be associated with subjective feelings of attachment to geographic locations and people. However, items are extended from mere functionality to becoming politicised symbols that indicate locations of socio-economic and political belonging.

Similar to 'ethnicity', 'childhood' can be treated as an essential, natural and universally experienced period of the life course. The next section turns political economic and cultural constructions that underlie essentialisations of 'childhood'.

#### *Historical change and 'childhood'*

The idea of childhood as a period of happiness and freedom under adult protection has, since the nineteenth century, been promoted around the globe and received powerful endorsement through the Declaration on the Rights of the Child (1959) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990). Historical research demonstrates that this conception of childhood is intrinsically related to a modern discourse on children and their proper role in society. Cunningham (1991) stresses that although discussions about the proper role of youth and children pervaded British history since the late seventeenth century, it was only at the end of the nineteenth century that 'the child' became a general category (*ibid.*: 90–1). Against the backdrop of colonisation, sentimental discourses increasingly emphasised the sacredness of childhood and associated children with the 'savages' encountered in the colonies. The 'noble savage' and 'the child' were considered to be very close to 'Nature' (as opposed to 'Culture'). Moreover, both were perceived to be dwelling at initial stages of development processes with favourable outcomes under proper guidance (*ibid.*: 128; Fabian 2002:

63; Said 2003: 119–20). Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1958) treaty on education *Emile, ou l'éducation* epitomises the scholarly linkage between nature and childhood. This idea was expanded outside academia. For example, one of the first British missionaries visiting the territory of the Burmese Karen reported in 1820:

The Karens are the *simplest children of nature* I have ever seen. Of all the people in the world, the Karens, I believe, are the most *timid* and *irresolute*. These artless people seem contented and *not unhappy in their native forests*, treading the little paths their fathers tread before them (George Dana Boardman, quoted in Lee Lewis 1924: 42, italics PMV).

The constructed analogy between the 'natural way of life' of indigenous people and children suggests that childhood is a 'natural' and universally experienced period (Cunningham 1991: 90–1). Social status differences among children are largely ignored. Once the idea of a naturalised 'child' had been evoked, the notion became filled with sentimental meaning (Zelizer 1985). These depoliticised conceptualisations of children are reflected in contemporary developmental psychology. Indeed, during the 1930s, Piaget's application of stage theory gave modern conceptions of 'the child' academic legitimacy. Importantly, Piaget was also a social constructivist who believed in children's agency (e.g. Piaget 1969). Yet, scholars largely ignored this aspect of his work and focused instead on stage theory. Currently, this popularised and simplified version of Piagetian thought constitutes the predominant frame for welfare and education programmes as well as child legislation (Boyden 1997: 197; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence 1999: 36). Children's ontogenetic development is seen as a natural, invariant and universal process of progressive transformations (or stages) in children's physical, mental, cognitive, socio-emotional and moral competencies. Learning takes place when children reconcile their expectations with their actual experiences of their surroundings as they gradually acquire more sophisticated capacities for thinking and reasoning. The world itself is conceived as objective

givenness rather than a socio-cultural context shaped by historical processes (Boyden 2006: 11; Lourenco and Machado 1996: 149).

Throughout the twentieth century, popularised versions of Piagetian thought have been globalised. The intellectual legacy of popularised versions of Piagetian psychology is at least fivefold. Firstly, there is the belief that childhood constitutes a period that is universally experienced and explainable by biological and physiological qualities rather than cultural, socio-economic and historical factors. Secondly, the view that children develop in a linear way facilitates judgements of appropriate and deviant behaviour. Thirdly, the presupposition of a pre-set developmental pathway denies children's potential to contribute to the directions of their development and transition experiences. Fourthly, developmental psychology has the tendency to conceptualise children as dependents of adults and childhood as a period of absorbing knowledge and practices. Children are not perceived as active producers of meaning and value. Finally, developmental psychology's focus on the causal relationship between early experiences and adult behaviour does not fully recognise the extent to which children can adapt to earlier circumstances (Boyden, Ling and Myers 1998: 28). Thus, simplified versions of Piagetian thought influence considerably childhood research and policy. Today, the socio-cultural and political-economic contexts of children's lives are increasingly recognised. Now I turn to these broader dimensions of 'childhood'.

In the 1970s, social constructionism started focusing on children as agents. Although early anthropologists (e.g. Mead 1954) had already developed this view, it was only through this philosophical trend that the cultural and historical aspects of 'childhood' received increasing attention within the social sciences. Children started to be seen as social agents who make sense of their own worlds. Diversity of

childhood experiences was highlighted, as well as the value of capturing the textures of childhood through children's subjective experiences and views (James, Jenks and Prout 1998: 6; Neale and Flowerdew 2003: 196). Within the UK, this new perspective continues to stimulate a breadth of scholarly explorations of children's life worlds (e.g. Christensen and James 2000; Christensen, James and Jenks 2000; James and Prout 1997; James 2005; Punch 2001a; Solberg 1997). Social studies outlined above focus overtly on socio-cultural constructions of childhood, but the impact of wider political economic forces on childhood remains largely unexplained.

#### *Political economic dimensions of 'childhood'*

Research on the socio-cultural institution of childhood, outlined above, focuses largely on cultural diversity and subjective experience without relating these to wider political economic forces in children's lives (e.g. Mayall and Zeiher 2003). Yet, socio-cultural constructions of childhood are always related to wider political economic processes of the uneven development of global capitalism (Bledsoe 1990: 85; Hart 2008a: 8; Nieuwenhuys 2005: 174, Powell, Taylor and Smith 2008: 14; Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998: 5). This section reflects first on political economic dimensions of the social institution of 'childhood'. Second, I point on the interplay between cultural and material dimensions of 'childhood'. I illustrate my argument with the example of integrating 'gender' with political economic considerations of childhood. Third, this section suggests how global political economic forces may shape the specific lives of children at particular historical moments and geographic locations.

The social institution of childhood has not only cultural, but also political economic dimensions. There exists a political economy of 'childhood' as distinct phase in the life course. Generational categories and related life course transitions are

contextual. For example, in 1963 Mannheim insisted on the social/historical embeddedness of ‘age categories’: ‘the social phenomenon “generation” represents nothing more than a particular kind of identity of location, embracing related “age groups” embedded in a historical-social process’ (Mannheim 1963: 382). As outlined above, historical processes shape cultural understandings of ‘childhood’. Today, in many parts of the global South, ‘youth’ is a relatively new concept that emerged through expansion of the market economy and state education. Moreover, youth transitions to adulthood are increasingly prolonged. For example, the generational category ‘youth’ becomes ambiguous when transitions to social adulthood are protracted, for instance, when a person does not find employment and continues living at home (Hall, Coffey and Williamson 1999: 501–2). Young people themselves may contribute to redefinitions of ‘youth’ and ‘adulthood’, both on the micro household level and on wider social scales (Arnett 2003; Dyson 2008: 167). The length and sometimes even the very existence of a period of ‘youth’ is interdependent with other categories such as gender and social status (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983; Arnett 2003: 64; Hart 2008b: 6; Jeffrey and Dyson 2008; Morrow and Richards 1996; Närvänen and Näsman 2004; Nieuwenhuys 2005: 170).

Global political economic forces interact with socio-cultural factors in moulding different ‘childhoods’ at various times and at different locations: ‘(T)he institution of childhood is inevitably the product of an interplay between factors that are both ideological/cultural and material’ (Hart 2008a: 11). Findings in my thesis suggest how global political economic processes may inform socio-cultural values that shape local childhood experiences. For example, Thai work ethics of ‘diligence’ and ‘helpfulness’ are taught locally at Buddhist temples and in Thai government schools. At the same time, these socio-cultural values relate to a sense of the necessity



of ‘economic efficiency’ and thrift globalized during industrialization processes (e.g. Thompson 1993).

Another example are gendered patterns of child employment. Feminist research on the mutual shaping of ‘gendered labour markets’ and technology reveals the link between modes of production and socio-cultural gender ideologies (Cockburn and Ormrod 1993; Wajcman 1991). In Japan, for instance, industrial mass production started in the 1960s recruiting women on the basis of their ‘specific female attributes’, arguing, that ‘nimble fingers’ suited fine technological processes in factories. Yet, only a few years earlier, during the Pacific War, the Japanese weapon industry mobilized masses of women for heavy industrial work (Low, Nakayama and Yoshioka 1999: 149, Vogler 2002). These examples from Japan illustrate the interplay between culture and structure: political economic processes, like war and industrialization shape gendered employment patterns. Gendered employment patterns, in turn, are encouraged with recourse to socio-cultural gender stereotypes, such as a distinctive feminine physiology. Emergent global gendered labour ideologies, in turn, translate to local practices of child employment in my research setting. As explained in Chapter 5, local food processing centres employ Karen girls because their ‘nimble and agile fingers’ supposedly qualify them for packaging work. So, globalized gendered labour ideologies shape local Karen children’s working lives.

Political economic forces shape specific children’s lives and cause socio-cultural diversity among children at different historical moments and geographic places. Research highlights how political economic inequalities impact on power relations among children as well as between children and adults (Brooker 2006: 125–6; Dyson 2010; Oldman 1994; Poveda and Marcos 2005). Intergenerational as well as gender relations are shaped by socio-economic and political forces, such as everyday

politics within household institutions. Therefore, they need to be integrated within a wider political economic context.

Today, social research recognises that children are capable to discern political economic power relations from an early age on (e.g. Connolly 1998). For example, Liz Brooker (2006) discusses how peers reinforce cultural ideas about gender and ethnicity received at home. Based on observations in two early childhood centres in the UK, she draws attention to children's choice of playmates she argues that intra-child group formation often complicates educators' efforts in mitigating social inequalities among class mates (Brooker 2006: 125-126). Jane Dyson (2010) explains how teenage girls in the Himalayas reproduce and contest gender and generational roles through their economic activities, during leaf collections in forests outside the parameters of their village. On the one hand, girls carefully observed local morals and values around gendered work and ensured that they complied with senior villagers' expectations of certain amounts of collected and neatly packaged leaves. On the other hand, the girls used the forest space to experiment with identities and indulge in mischievous behaviour that questions and mocks stereotypical roles of adult women and young girls (Dyson 2010: 491-493). The political economic dimensions of social institution of childhood are particularly revealed through children's attachment to modern institutions, such as state schools. The next section explores the role of government schools and national education in relation to political economic inequalities.

#### *Schools as sites of political economic inequality*

Throughout modern history, state schools have played an important role in nation building processes around the world. In the global political economy, children around

the world spend increasing amounts of time in modern schools. This is also true for the Karen children in my study.

State schools play a major role in educating children into becoming national citizens (e.g. Keyes 1991a; Murphy 2004; Rival 1996). The education system promotes national language, symbols and narratives. It is ubiquitous that state schools promote standardised languages as national language. These often artificially constructed standard languages are usually imposed over regional dialects. The dialects, in turn, become signifiers of locality. Use of local language can then enhance or diminish socio-economic and political status and participation within the wider geographic space of the nation (Watson 1994: 328–34; Williams 1996: 64). For example, in Thailand, ‘standard Thai’ as a public language is only acquired through school:

When people use standard Thai, there is often implicit acceptance of the authority of the Thai state. This acceptance is evident in the precise use of particular pronouns and polite ending forms that situate the speakers within the status system validated by the state (Keyes 1991b: 112).

However, people are not simply complying with national education systems, but may contest and challenge state-developed curricula that convey hegemonic versions of language and history: ‘The education system thus becomes the battleground of contested national and ethnic identities’ (Fenton 1999: 176). Contestations become particularly relevant in unstable settings such as multi-ethnic post-conflict societies. For example, studies with Burmese refugee youth in Thailand and Bhutanese refugee children in Nepal highlight the complexities underlying the development of history curricula that recognise diversity of historical experiences within a single school textbook narrative (e.g. Metro 2006; Evans 2009).

Government schools mediate national and global forces in children’s local worlds. Schools are major sites of social reproduction, preparing children for their

future roles as national citizens and participants of global market economies. Yet, more often than not, schooling fails as a general remedy against poverty. Economic crises, deskilling in economy and unemployment lay bare the limits of the power of state education in relation to personal and societal development. While some people profit from education, others remain in marginalised roles after their transition to the labour market (Epstein 2009: 880). For example, parents' socio-economic position consistently explains second-generation migrant children's school outcomes in different European countries as well as in the USA (Heath and Brinbaum 2007: 294).

Research and policy makers recognise the limits of formal schooling in large parts of the world (Lieten 2009: 31), that academic degrees do not automatically lead to employment. However, the global cultural industry promotes images of successful lives based on prolonged schooling and subsequent entry into white collar work. Governments and international donor organisations increasingly collaborate in improving the infrastructure and delivery of scholarships for widespread participation to education. But economic restructuring impacts severely on youth's opportunities to actualise these promises. Added to this are politico-economic inequalities based on geographic locations. Especially in the global South, young people may experience severe discrepancies in rising opportunities for access to education on the one hand, as well as the decreasing availability of attractive, well-paid employment on the other hand. The result is 'one of the most unsettling paradoxes of contemporary globalization' (Jeffrey, Jefferey and Jefferey 2008: 9). Global markets are increasingly insecure, and children and youth are not unaware of these situations.

Schools are nonetheless important sites of power within childhood. Schools can turn into locations where political, socio-economic, gendered and religious stereotypes are reproduced, but also renegotiated (Anderson-Levitt 2003; Hart 2008a:

24; Jeffrey and McDowell 2004: 132; Levinson, Foley and Holland 1996, MacLeod 1987).

Education may become a status symbol and a sign of class distinction among children and their households. New social divisions, such as the distinction between ‘the educated and developed’ and the ‘uneducated and superstitious’, may be created (e.g. Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery 2008: 53; Skinner and Holland 1996: 282). Research highlights how schooling may serve as a means to integrate and/or assimilate minority groups into mainstream society (e.g. Leinaweaver 2008b: 64; Murphy 2004; Rival 1996, 1997). Indeed, through school attendance notions of citizenship and economic status are inculcated and ‘ethnic’ differences produced. However, educational research emphasises that ‘minority’ children have unequal status within classrooms and experience bullying by majority children. Negative attitudes and practices of teaching staff are major impediments in effectively addressing diversity issues in classrooms (MacNaughton 2006: 6). Comparative studies have highlighted the interweaving of socio-economic marginality and low educational attainment among ethnic minority groups. For example, research found that in different European countries as well as in the USA parents’ socio-economic position consistently explains second-generation migrant children’s school outcomes (Heath and Brinbaum 2007: 294). State schools are thus important institutional locations in shaping children’s economic and political position within wider society. Children often combine formal education with learning activities at different places, such as household economies and markets. The following is a review on the literature on changing social values and moralities with regards to children’s learning and working activities.

### **Social morality and values of children's time use**

Political-economic power, social categories and identities, as well as the timing and placing of activities, are all interlinked (Christensen and Prout 2003: 133; Massey 1995: 183). Time and space are central dimensions of power. Throughout history, and across cultures, contestations mark the prescription of temporal orders such as calendars. Contestations also affect the content and form of activities within these orders: how certain tasks are set, when they begin and end, and the tempo of their completion (Lefebvre 2006: 38–45; Zerubavel 1981:70–81). Thus, time itself is never detached from human practice and cultural values. It is not 'out there' as something we can use, save or budget. Instead, time is evoked and produced through social practice. Social values prescribe a 'proper' time to carry out activities perceived as adequate or even natural for individuals' roles in society.

Time use is, therefore, intimately linked to the social roles of individuals and generational categories: 'The movement from childhood to adulthood is a movement not just between developmental positions but between positions of power, authority and social worth' (Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 2006: 12). By performing the right activity<sup>6</sup> at the right time according to one's position in society, individuals reproduce and contest social orders. The arbitrariness of this naturalness only transpires during moments of crisis or radical change (Bourdieu 2003: 299, 2007: 163; Butler 1990; Weberberger 2006). As processes of historical change, economic transformation, development policies and modernisation processes impact on the use of time and space and on the social roles and identities of individuals. Local spaces have an interdependent relationship with global procedures. These processes, in turn, hugely

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<sup>6</sup> There are many examples that highlight the interrelation between social roles and the timing of activities. For example, social studies on children and youth cultures in industrialised societies emphasise the importance of the night as space, which is used by young people to negotiate personal autonomy (Ayukawa 2003; Ben Ari 2007; Chatterton and Hollands 2003; Jeffrey in press).

impact on childhood experiences and conceptualisations of 'childhood' all over the world (Boyden 1997; Bushin *et al.* 2007: 76; Katz 2004; Massey 1995: 183; Zeiher 2003).

Research on the changing values of young people's time use highlights how the moral distinction of childhood from adulthood emerged in nineteenth century Western Europe. At this time, social discourses started speaking of children's 'misuse' of time and expressed concern about the moral risks of 'idleness' (Vogler, Morrow and Woodhead 2009). These discourses illustrate how the values associated with children's activities relate to social understandings of children's roles. They also point to the emergence of a dominant narrative about children's time use within Western societies. The key features of this discourse are that childhood is a distinctive life phase and children have different needs and capacities than adults. Accordingly, children's time use is increasingly separated from adult activities, especially through formal schooling.

In *The Children of the Poor* Cunningham (1991) demonstrates how ongoing redefinitions of 'idleness' problematised the activities of socially marginalised children, thus creating a dominant idea of 'proper childhood'. During the seventeenth and most of the eighteenth century in Britain, childhood was perceived by the poor as 'a time for inurement into habits of labour' (*ibid.*: 3). Schooling existed, but it functioned to prepare children for their predestined futures. It was presumed that children had an economic value for their parents. Filial obedience formed a core value in British society and a foundation of political order (Bourdieu 2003: 320–1; Cunningham 1991: 95–7; Fabian 2002: 17). Unoccupied or 'idle' children were perceived as a threat to society and potentially capable of undermining state authority. It is noteworthy that 'idleness' here refers to children outside institutional structures

such as households or the labour market, who gained their livelihood either through begging in urban spaces or vagrancy in the countryside. Moreover, 'idleness' was believed to enhance the propensity to crime. Street children were portrayed as on the verge of mischief and described as 'savages', 'tribes of lawless freebooters' and even animals (Cunningham 1991: 128). Simultaneously, 'idleness' among the working classes started to become problematised as a moral vice likely to engender deviant social behaviour: 'In mature capitalist society all time must be consumed, marketed, put to use; it is offensive for the labour force merely to "pass the time"' (Thompson 1993: 395). Social reformers devised strategies to reform these children from delinquents into industrious and morally virtuous members of society, through apprenticeships and schooling (Cunningham 1991: 20–1; Cunningham and Viazzo 1996; Wagner 1982: 3).

Schools started playing a major role in inculcating time management as a moral value amongst the young. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it became widely accepted that children of all classes were an emotionally priceless expense rather than an economic asset to their families (Cunningham 1991: 13; Zelizer 1985). This new perception of the 'proper' role of children has been globalised throughout the twentieth century. The legacy of this discourse can be traced both in contemporary child policy and programmes, as well as to a certain extent in social research on children's activities (Boyden 1997: 202; Levison 2000: 129; Nieuwenhuys 1994: 13). The unease about children and young people 'wasting time' persists and adult concern or ignorance of children's time use may serve as justification for adult control over children's time, in the name of the socialisation process (Ennew 1994: 132). Since the post-war period, government education in Western societies has been intimately linked to individual development as well as to the economic welfare of societies (Ray



2009: 118; Willis 1983: 108). The assumed universal value of formal education is often put above other forms of socio-cultural learning. During the 1950s and 1960s, many modernisation theorists perceived state school education as the principal means for the social transformation of developing countries. Formal schooling continues to be promoted as the sole means to decrease children's working activities: 'Since the achievement of universal basic education is the accepted aim, targeted by the Millennium Development Goals, no child can be allowed to exchange the school for the factory or the farm' (Lieten 2009: 26).

Schooling, however, does not automatically abolish work. Often it adds new working responsibilities to existing ones (Punch 2000, 2001a; Qvortrup et al. 1994; Katz 2004; White 2009: 14). During the 1970s to 1990s, children's time use was explored within the context of child labour debates, often by economists using household surveys with adults rather than engaging directly with the young (e.g. Rodgers and Standing 1981). Yet, since most children's jobs are informal working arrangements, they are not measured in official statistics. In national census data, people are generally defined as workers only if they are in full-time, formal wage employment. If they are registered at school, children are defined as school pupils, even if they rarely attend; if they work informally or within the family children are defined as 'inactive'. Thus, large parts of children's work are rendered invisible – especially the work of girls, which tends to focus on the domestic, unpaid sphere (Ennew 1994: 132; Morrow 1995: 207; Wintersberger 1994: 241).

In the early 1990s, key ethnographic studies of children's economic activities drew attention to gender, generational and class differences in children's time use, and cultural values of their activities (Nieuwenhuys 1994; Reynolds 1991; Kielland and Tovo 2006; Punch 2002; Robson 2004). For example, in a later comparative study on

working children's valuation of their activities, Woodhead (2001) found that most children's attitudes towards work concur with their perception of their parents' attitudes. Many children said they do not mind working, provided their activities are valued by others:

Whether young people are affected positively or negatively by their work experiences depends on their personal vulnerability, which is in turn mediated by the economic, social and cultural context of their work, especially the value placed on their economic activity (*ibid.*: 93).

Conversely, children may arrive at describing their economic activities as 'nothing'. This typically occurs in a context where adults consider time out of school as idleness. Moreover, children may speak of 'doing nothing' if they find no interesting or amusing value in certain tasks (Mann 2008: 43). Karen children and youth in my study describe their activities as 'nothing' when they do not find them interesting and thus not worth mentioning.

Recent research provides evidence of children's awareness of how their working activities are linked to social moral ideals. Fulfilling social responsibilities, trying to be as unobtrusive as possible or 'being good' count among children's strategies in dealing with adults. Mann (2008) found Congolese children being 'good' in order to mitigate adult stress and thus avoid receiving criticism or attacks from their guardians. Children changed their behaviour once the adults were absent from the household (*ibid.*: 53). Also, Heissler's (2009) study illustrates the importance of being 'good' in Bangladeshi girls' successful migration for work. Dyson highlights how through the work of leaf collection, teenage girls in a highland village of the Indian state Uttarakhand comply with social values of 'not being lazy' but 'a good worker', while simultaneously negotiating through this work individual freedom from household (Dyson 2005: 226, 2008). Bledsoe found that in Sierra Leone, foster children have to 'earn' food and kind treatment from their foster parents through good

behaviour (Bledsoe 1990: 79).<sup>7</sup> Social mobility, furthermore, characterizes the lives of Karen children working and learning at different sites in rural Thailand. The next section turns to conceptualizations of social identities, space and mobility.

### **Translocality: migration and flexible social identities**

The global economy impacts on social productions of localities and spaces. The global and the local are always relational. Accordingly, there is a ‘simultaneous coexistence of social interrelations at all geographical scales, from the intimacy of the household to the wide space of transglobal connections’ (Massey 1994: 168). At the same time, cultural differences are increasingly deterritorialised because of increasing global flows and exchanges between people, capital, and ideas (Gupta and Ferguson 2001: 3). Therefore, global economic changes challenge the character of localities, as well as the identities and relationships of local people. In neo-liberal economies, individuals and institutions develop flexible notions of identity as strategies to appropriate economic resources and political power (Ong 2006: 5). In my thesis, I provide an in-depth analysis of Karen children’s negotiations of political economic dissonances during their migration to different institutional and geographic locations. I found the concept of ‘translocality’ (Apparadurai 1995: 216) useful for conceptualizing processes of Karen children’s migrations for education and emergent flexible social identities.

The concept of ‘translocality’ is useful to explore not only the effects of global forces but also the meanings of locality in social identities. ‘Translocality’ indicates

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<sup>7</sup> Exchanges between generations can be enabling. For example, Samantha Punch found that children’s time passing in rural Bolivia is largely structured according to the extent to which adults depend on them. Yet, within this set of responsibilities and obligations, children manage to bargain and negotiate their use of time and space through a variety of avoidance and coping strategies (Punch 2000, 2001ab). Thus, negotiation and bargaining emerge as key features of inter-generational power relations (Punch *et al.* 2007: 215).

local institutional regulations of peoples' movements between locations in a global economy (e.g. Aranya 2008; Peleikis 2003; Tan Eik Lye 2008). Similarly, 'translocal processes' are defined by social mobility between institutional and geographic settings. They indicate a shift in the relationship between territory, identity and political affiliation (Appadurai 1996: 178). Migration is an essential ingredient in translocal processes. Translocal spaces are created in a world where minorities and migrants move between nation-states, questioning powerful ideas of ethnic coherence, the rationality of bureaucracy, etc. To be sure, people do not move in 'unstructured flows'; instead, flows and connections of mobile people, goods and information are mediated and regulated by states as well as by local institutions and cultural practices (Walker 1999: 12–15). NGOs play an important role in these processes, of 'globalization from below' (Appadurai 2000: 15). Emergent networks of regulative mediating institutions are important spheres of the exercise of power. They reproduce old and generate new socio-economic and political inequalities. For example, there exist continuities between colonial administrations and international development practices when former colonial relations impact on the regulation of aid flows (Bebbington and Kothari 2006: 853).

However, people can adeptly navigate social dissonance between institutional and geographic locations: 'flexibility in geographical and social positioning is itself an effect of novel articulations between the regimes of the family, the state, and capital' (Ong 2006: 3). For instance, concepts like 'home' or 'belonging' are not static but are constantly reproduced and multi-layered. People may develop ideas of 'multi-belonging' and simultaneously experience assimilation and marginalisation or estrangement in relation to space (Bushin *et al.* 2007: 79–80; Gardner 2008; Ní Laoire 2008: 47). Ní Laoire's (2000) research shows how in rural Ireland women are

traditionally associated with 'home', yet it is precisely in home villages where women feel socially and economically marginalised. This dissonance causes contradictory feelings of belonging among young Irish women. On the one hand they feel attached to their native village, while on the other hand they desire to leave because of the social constraints present in those same native villages (*ibid.*: 240). Therefore, social categories like 'gender' and 'ethnicity' can have contradictory effects at different locations. While shifting between geographic locations, people may develop 'translocational positionalities' (Anthias 2002b). Translocal processes and social mobility, therefore, produce flexible identities:

...the multiple space grids through which identity is mapped need to be conceptualized in such a way as to de-essentialize and denaturalize nationalist discourses of authenticity. Process of migration, displacement, and deterritorialization are increasingly sundering the fixed association between identity, culture, and place' (Gupta 2001: 196).

The concept 'translocality' allows us to capture identity shifts between geographic and institutional locations (Gaonkar 1999: 13; Appadurai 1996).

Migration and translocal processes impact upon gendered childhood identities. Children and youth negotiate social identities at different times in different localities, and migration has been identified as a recurrent theme in rural youth's transition to adulthood (Robson, Bell and Klocker 2007: 140; Woodhead and Brooker 2008). Since the 1990s, geographers and anthropologists have begun exploring the role of space, migration and childhood transitions (e.g. Ansell and van Blerk 2007: 27; Heissler 2009: 35; Holloway and Valentine 2000a, 2000b; Monsutti 2005a: 9; Panelli, Punch and Robson 2007). According to this research, political economic and cultural dimensions of migration shape children's identities. When children shift between institutional and geographic localities, they engage in different working, learning and leisure activities and have different peer relations. These changes, in turn, can cause

status differences between and within peer groups (Jeffrey 2010: 475; Nyambedha and Aagaard-Hansen 2003: 175; Brooker and Woodhead 2008: 10). Furthermore, during transition processes, mobility can enable children to creative agency and social participation (Crivello 2003, 2009; Monsutti 2005b). Heissler's study (2009) suggests that in Bangladesh teenage girls and their families discretely manipulate the timing of female transition to adulthood through marriage, in order to extend girls' working lives in cities and thus secure their ongoing financial support to the household (*ibid.*: 229).

Gender dimensions impact on political participation, and political status structures young peoples' freedom to move. In many countries around the world, gendered mobility plays an important role in children's transition to adulthood (e.g. Crivello 2003; Heissler 2009: 81; Kehily 2005; Malhotra et al. 2005; Massey 1994: 186; Montgomery 2005; Schildkrout 1978: 129). Yet, it is not 'gendered' mobility as such but a gendered mobility according to socio-economic and political status. Lower class children may move more for work, while richer ones are more contained within the domestic space. Also, political and religious institutions shape 'gendered' experiences. For example, in many places, gender is still a major factor determining whether children attend school, as well as the type and length of education they receive. Likewise, gender impacts on children's engagement in unpaid and paid work (e.g. Punch 1998; Heissler 2009).

'Ethnicity' indicates political and economic marginality. As outlined above, political economic marginality is itself often linked to particular spaces and locations. Children's 'ethnicity', then, indicates changing social positions at different locations in political-economic landscapes. Yet, in childhood studies and policies, 'ethnicity' is often depoliticised. For instance, although some studies recognise that national

ideologies of ‘belonging’ shape childhood identities, this is presented using a rather depoliticised vocabulary and limit issues of ‘belonging’ to ‘culture’ or ‘subjective feelings’ (Kehily 2007: 6). Yet, anthropological studies highlight the salience of ‘ethnicities’ in young peoples’ lives, insisting how ‘young ethnicities are multiple positioned in changing relationships of domination and subordination, marked across lines of gender, class, sexuality and dis/ability’ (Nayak 2003: 174). My own research adds to these bodies of literature on social identities, location and mobility. I explore how Karen children develop flexible identities as they move between institutional and geographic locations. In summary, shifting localities during childhood transitions is a multi-layered process and reveals subtle as well as overt negotiations of changing power configurations.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I outlined the four conceptual assumptions underlying my hypothesis and research question. My study is about childhood transitions among ethnic minority people within a political economic context of expanding cash economy and modern institutions and formal education. Therefore, the assumptions informing my hypothesis are all related to changing modes of production and learning and their impact on political economic dimensions of changing childhood identities during migration processes to different institutional and geographic locations.

First, I explained how my thesis adds to social research on childhood transitions. In particular I drew attention to studies that conceptualize transitions as socio-cultural learning processes as well as sociological research on children’s role in negotiating social dissonance and change. I explained how social change is often interpreted as impacting negatively on childhood transitions and ethnic minorities’

social identities. My own research challenges these assumptions. Based on literature on modern national and international institutions in local lives, I assume that local people, including ethnic minority children, have the ability to negotiate social dissonance of globalisation through 'local appropriations' of modern institutions and market structures. Second, I drew attention to conceptual work on 'social dissonance' in relation to 'ethnicity' and 'childhood'. I highlighted how 'ethnicity' stands for cultural and political economic difference and then turned to historical conceptualizations of childhood as cultural and political economic institution. I explained how childhood is no exception to political economic structuring of society and that all aspects of childhood are shaped by unequal socio-economic and political relations, including transitions. Modern institutions such as state schools play a significant role in shaping unequal socio-economic and political relations during childhood, especially in ethnic minority settings. Third, I explained how time use and social activities are interlinked with political economic inequalities and social categories. Based on literature on the moral value and use of children's working activities, I assume that children's working and learning activities have been associated with different meanings and importance throughout history and across cultures. Forth, I assume that processes of migration impact on 'identities' during children's transitions. I build my research on literature that understands 'identities' as socially constructed within context-bound political economic power configurations. Based on this literature, I presume that if people change context, they also change social status.

Having established my conceptual frame of this study, the next chapter turns to a reflexive discussion of the research methods I used in my study on ethnic



minority children's transitions in settings of changing modes of production and learning at different institutional and geographic locations in northern Thailand.

## **CHAPTER 2. Research methods and ethics**

### **Introduction**

After providing an overview of the theoretical concepts and literature in Chapter 1, this chapter offers a reflexive account of the methodological and ethical aspects of my study. I introduce the research setting and outline my use of research methods as well as the rationale underlying these choices. This is followed by a discussion of the ethical issues that emerged throughout the research process. My discussion on research ethics is important in relation to childhood studies: according to the University of Oxford's Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC), research involving participants under the age of 18 years encounters particular challenges concerning informed consent, confidentiality, and generational power relations. My discussion in this chapter attends to all these points and relates them to my research methodology.

### **Research setting**

The empirical findings of this dissertation are based on 12 months of fieldwork in Chiang Mai province, northern Thailand. My first fieldwork trip covered a period of nine months between November 2007 and July 2008. During this time, I spent two months largely in Chiang Mai improving my Thai language skills and exploring potential research sites. In late December 2007, I moved to Huay Tong village, Mae Wang district, Chiang Mai Province for seven months of village-based fieldwork. Other fieldwork sites included Mae Ta La village (Mae Chaem district), Ban Kad (Mae Wang district), Chiang Mai city, as well as a range of other highland villages mostly in Mae Wang district but also in the surrounding areas.

A second field trip comprised a period of three months between July and September 2009. During this time, I revisited fieldwork sites and research participants in Chiang Mai province. This second visit allowed me to follow up key issues that emerged from my initial round of data analysis, such as different ‘feelings’ of children towards their working and learning activities. Also, seeing research participants one year after the first round of fieldwork, I learned about important changes in their lives. This added a temporal dynamic to my research focus on childhood transitions. In addition to revisiting Karen and Thai research participants, I presented preliminary research findings at my academic host institution, the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD) at Chiang Mai University, as well as the Catholic Christian Seven Fountains retreat centre. Feedback from the Thai academic community, as well as others engaged in faith-based humanitarian work with the Karen, was valuable and constructive in adding sensitivity to the local particularities of this piece of research.

### *Fieldwork site selection*

In this section I explain the processes of identifying and accessing my principal research site, Huay Tong. After my arrival at the RCSD at Chiang Mai University in late October 2007, Thai academic colleagues spent considerable time travelling with me on exploratory excursions to identify fieldwork sites. They also introduced me to an anthropology graduate at RCSD and a Catholic priest who visited Huay Tong village with me. After thorough consideration of research logistics and consultation with others, I decided on this village as my principal research site.

In traditional ethnography, fieldwork sites are selected according to the following factors: accessibility, unobtrusiveness to research participants,

permissibility, frequently recurring activities, and the possibility for participation (Spradley 1980: 46–51). Huay Tong seemed favourable in all these aspects. Other favourable criteria for Huay Tong included fieldwork safety, the possibility for me to stay for several months with a host family and to help at the Thai government school with English classes, the availability of transport and communication and, as outlined below, the possibility to communicate in European and local languages. All this made a good site for my study because it allowed me becoming part of the community.

In terms of infrastructure, Huay Tong differs from other villages in Mae Wang district because of the presence of three powerful institutions: a government school, a state-run agricultural development project, and an active Catholic Christian parish life. These three institutions encourage the migration of Karen people from other villages for formal education, work, and religious practice. Firstly, a Thai government school for primary and secondary education distinguishes Huay Tong from the other villages. Most surrounding villages only have nursery and primary schools, while some places have no Thai educational institution at all. Huay Tong is therefore an important migration destination for those seeking additional education. Children from neighbouring villages and from more distant places commute daily, weekly and seasonally to Huay Tong. They stay either at the state-run dormitories on the school compound and/or in foster arrangements.

Secondly, Huay Tong hosts a Royal Project for commercialised agriculture and an associated food processing centre. The village thus belongs to one of the few places in Mae Wang where cash income generation is readily available, and people from surrounding villages commute daily for wage labour to Huay Tong. Thirdly, since its foundation in 1956, Huay Tong has been a Catholic Christian village. Surrounding villages are largely Buddhist and/or of mixed religious households, and

the Catholic priests who serve these villagers are based in Huay Tong. Huay Tong is thus the only village with a permanent presence of Catholic religious, daily Mass services and morning prayers. Catholics from around the region also commute to Huay Tong for Sunday Mass. As explained above, my initial idea was to conduct fieldwork around a refugee camp in northern Thailand. I did not search on purpose for a Catholic village. Yet, being myself a Catholic Christian, the presence of the Church was decidedly encouraging my selection for Huay Tong as research site, because it allowed me regular access to the Sacraments and shared religious practice. These opportunities, in turn, arguably contributed to my general wellbeing throughout fieldwork.

### *Languages in the field*

The highlands of northern Thailand are multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious settings. People in ethnic minority villages speak their own languages, such as Karen, Hmong, etc. In northern Thailand, people also speak a northern Thai dialect called *khon muang*, which differs slightly yet sometimes significantly from the standard Thai used in Central Thailand. Throughout the country, teachers and students are required to speak standard Thai at school.

The Karen in Mae Wang province, and in my study village Huay Tong, speak Skaw Karen as their mother tongue and the Thai language as their second language. For reasons outlined below, I opted in the field for initial linguistic vulnerability rather than security. I studied the Thai language before entering Huay Tong village, but was not fluent in Thai. Given the focus of my research, one might assume I had learned Karen first, and not Thai. Yet, I did not learn Karen because of time constraints and also because I felt I needed to speak and understand Thai, the

language of my host country. Speaking Thai not only allowed me to converse with minority highland people, but also with their school teachers, with civil servants and people in the lowlands. Given this situation, it would have made sense for me to employ a research assistant;<sup>8</sup> however, I decided not to for two reasons. Firstly, as a self-funded student it was not within my financial means to hire a research assistant. And secondly, I felt that I would work and immerse myself better in the local culture without the permanent mediation of a local researcher.

My linguistic choice was also possible in Huay Tong, where several villagers and Thai teachers were able to help me get started because they spoke English and French. Throughout my fieldwork, I continued to improve my spoken Thai and Skaw Karen in everyday life and developed broad conversational skills in Thai. Although never as good as my spoken Thai, my Skaw Karen turned out to be good enough for me to get through the day in the village, greet people and exchange a few words.

My initial language challenges put me in a position of vulnerability and enhanced the relative power status of Karen and Thai research participants vis-à-vis me as the researcher. I had less control over what was said, I did not understand every word around me immediately, and I relied on the patience and goodwill of others. Yet, on the whole, villagers and teachers valued my efforts to learn their languages. Importantly, children approached me to teach me Thai or Karen, which I felt was helpful in reducing the power relations between us as members of different generations.

Because of my relative linguistic vulnerability, I became even more alert to non-verbal language and gestures. Non-verbal communication can often be more important and revealing than verbal discourse (e.g. Punch 1998: 68). In Thailand,

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<sup>8</sup> While my daily work and personal relations worked well without a translator, I needed support for more focused research exercises. So research assistants fluent in Karen, Thai or English were employed for my participatory research exercises.

non-verbal language is codified and used to express social and political hierarchies. Therefore, enhanced understanding of non-verbal communication was essential for my research on the dynamics of economic and political power in children's lives.

### *Researcher positionality and roles*

Ethnographic writing requires reflexive research attitudes, including a certain degree of transparency concerning the researcher's identity, that is, her social status among her host community. In this section, I discuss the factors and cultural traits that might have shaped how Karen and Thai people perceived and categorised me. At the same time, however, I acknowledge the impossibility of fully grasping how others made sense of my person among them. People, including ethnographers, are not reducible to universally intelligible 'ready to wear' identities (e.g. Robertson 2002: 788–9). Moreover, human beings are circumscribed by limits of self-understanding, and I take responsibility for and acknowledge the potential limits of my own self-understanding. In line with Judith Butler, I trust that such acknowledgement may allow for humility and generosity of heart in entering into research: 'I will need to be forgiven for what I cannot have fully known, and I will be under a similar obligation to offer forgiveness to others, who are also constituted in partial opacity to themselves' (Butler 2005: 67).

My social status in the village community was largely determined by my personal characteristics, such as my gender and socio-economic and political status. In addition, my relative position depended on my links to local institutions such as my Karen host household, the Thai government school as well as the Catholic village church.

My age, gender and socio-economic and political status all shaped my interactions with others in the field. As a European, unmarried female student with

short hair and a preference for trousers, I differed significantly from Karen women my age. Adults and children were not shy to comment on this, asking me all kinds of questions concerning my gender and marital status. As fieldwork proceeded, the frequency of enquiries abated, although some details like my short haircut continued to be an issue of curiosity.

A researcher's gender and age often has both advantageous and limiting effects on her ability to access research participants (Dyson 2005; Heissler 2009; Punch 1998; Razavi 1992). As an unmarried female researcher, building rapport with young women and girls was relatively easy once they decided not to be shy with me. For example, unmarried girlfriends staying overnight at each other's house is an integral part of friendship, as it allows for extensive and often private chats after a day's work. Also, Karen children largely distribute their chores according to gender. So the girls rather than the boys invited me to join them on tasks, especially when these were located outside the village, like collecting firewood. Conversely, it was more difficult to spend an equal amount of qualitative time with male children and youth. I met them mostly during group working, study and leisure activities, such as playing sports games on the school compound or around the church building.

In terms of the unmarried male youth, it proved unfeasible for me to accompany them on their chores or leisure activities. I thus learned that among the Karen a woman working alongside a man implies a marriage relationship and/or is subject to gossip that one is considering marriage. For example, as fieldwork advanced, I befriended a few young unmarried Karen men of my age. These peers invited me to join them to swim or to grill fishes during the day, in full view of others. However, they were adamant in not allowing me to join them for hunting activities or their daily agricultural work in their gardens. When I visit them at their households, I



was welcomed in the general living area but it was impossible for me as a single young woman to have a look at the individual young men's rooms in the upper part of the building.

My living arrangement in a host household proved useful for my research purposes. The family had a historically strong position in the village due to their resources and social connections. This enabled them to accommodate me as a visiting researcher for several months. I was allocated a wooden hut – usually reserved for visitors – in the host family's living compound. My hut was located in the interior yard, next to another hut where a group of five foster girls were lodging and opposite the main building which was the biological family's residence. This living arrangement allowed me to observe and have informal exchanges with everyone in the household, especially with the foster children. Before my move into the household, everyone was informed ahead of time that I was going to do fieldwork among them. In addition, I verified children's informed consent/dissent on a continuous basis throughout the study.

Institutional attachment to a household ensured my quick immersion into village life and affairs. Moreover, my research stay gained local political legitimacy because of my attachment to a household of high political economic status. Also, my hosts' high social status provided me with social protection to a degree that is difficult for me to assess. Moreover, my DPhil student status and institutional affiliation with Chiang Mai University and Oxford University endorsed my status, as did my familiarity with Karen Catholic priests in Chiang Mai. This fact was highlighted during new encounters I had with Karen villagers or Thai teachers, where oftentimes conversations started with the question, 'With whom did you arrive here?' In this way, people checked out my personal and institutional relationships (even before

asking for my age and marital status). Having established my local and wider attachments to personal and institutional ‘patrons/seniors’, it became easy for people to situate me within the complexities of patron-client/senior-junior relations that structure the political landscapes of Thai and Karen societies.

The Thai government school in Huay Tong also became an important institutional research location. During initial visits to the village in December 2007, I introduced myself to the director of Huay Tong school and the English teacher, explaining my research interest and my desire to help in the school. It was then agreed that I would assist the English teacher in his classes. So until the end of the academic year in March 2008, I helped the secondary school children one hour per day to improve their conversational skills.

My regular presence in the school compound served to help me build trust with the children and to negotiate rapport with the Thai teachers. In the school compound, I met children who commuted daily from the surrounding villages to Huay Tong. I also chatted with others who commuted weekly and stayed throughout the school week in state-run dormitories in Huay Tong school. Spending time at the school thus expanded my understanding of what it means to grow up as a Karen boy or girl in the context of such modern institutions in Mae Wang district. It also gave the children the opportunity to regularly observe me in a familiar context and to make sense of my presence.

The Thai teachers were very helpful and supportive of my research, allowing me to visit their classes and to approach them with all kinds of questions. Some teachers became important research participants and/or trustworthy friends. My activities at the school also provided a justification for my ongoing presence in Huay Tong and an easy explanation to the daily questions/greetings of ‘What are you

doing?’ and ‘Where are you going?’ In Thailand and among the Karen, one is expected to respond to these questions, indicating the destination of one’s movements, usually a work place, a friend’s house, etc. It was helpful to be able to name the school building as part of my daily routine. Indeed, it would have been awkward for me to admit that I was merely strolling around – an activity considered very unusual for unmarried women.

Yet, because of my presence at the school, children assumed that I was a teacher, especially at the start of my fieldwork. Although I explained to them repeatedly that I was not a teacher, some Thai teachers continued to introduce me as ‘teacher’ and encouraged students to address me as ‘*kru* Pia’ (teacher Pia). Similar situations have been reported from other participant-observers in school settings all over the world (Fine and Sandstrom 1988: 30). Gradually, this changed as children saw that I differed from the Thai teachers as I participated in their daily lives outside school as well as throughout weekends and holidays. Indeed, during the long summer vacations between March and May, my relations with the children and young people in Huay Tong improved significantly. Because of my changing relationship with the young and so as not to create an ambiguous situation, I decided to stop accompanying the English teacher in the classroom. When I explained my decision to the Thai teachers, they not only understood but kindly allowed me to continue visiting the school compound.

The church building in Huay Tong and the Buddhist hermit temple outside the village were important institutional sites in my daily routine. In Thailand, religious practice is generally interwoven into everyday life. Although peoples’ Buddhist, Christian or Muslim practices have changed in modernising locations, a general sense for the sacred permeates everyday practices in Thailand. As a Catholic Christian, I felt

well-situated in a Catholic village, and sharing a common faith helped the villagers and I relate with one another. For example, sharing the daily routines of religious practice gave villagers the opportunity to integrate me on a non-verbal level into their lives. It also connected me to people other than those I met through the host household and the Thai government school. The Buddhist forest temple, located on a hill outside the village, was another important place in my daily fieldwork routine. On daily walks, I passed alone through the forest temple and rested there a while. Sitting there gave me much peace and rest from the intensive thinking required during fieldwork. On major Buddhist holidays, I also visited the temple with young Karen Buddhists, especially the foster children from Mae Ta La who lived in my host household. Similarly, when I accompanied these children to their homes in Mae Ta La, I also went with them and their families to the local *wat*. Local household, educational, and religious institutions thus shaped my positionality and research roles. My personal attachment to local institutions, in turn, helped me to deepen my understanding of the symbolic power of institutions in shaping local peoples political economic status.

### *Research sample*

My ethnographic sample at my major fieldwork site Huay Tong includes 24 boys and 21 girls of between 11 to 17 years of age, as well as 46 household members, teachers and fellow villagers. These numbers only include persons with whom I had regular exchange and not those children and adults I interacted with casually. Most research participants lived and worked in Huay Tong. However, I also interacted with Karen and Thai people from other highland villages as well as in the lowlands, such as the 58 high school students at Ban Kad school who filled out individual worksheets that I

provided during the exercises. It is important to note that all research participants' names have been replaced by pseudonyms. In line with northern Thai naming practices,<sup>9</sup> I chose pseudonyms in the language (Karen or Thai) and style (nickname or full name) that people used for their own self-introduction. As for pseudonyms of geographical places, there exist no formal requirements at the University of Oxford. Instead, the use of geographical pseudonyms depends on individual studies. I thoroughly considered whether this is the case in my research. In this process I consulted with my academic supervisor, the Director for Doctoral Research at QEH, CUREC staff, as well as Thai academics<sup>10</sup>. Eventually I decided against pseudonyms for geogr<sup>11</sup>aphical places since research participants and Thai academics familiar with local political sensibilities did not perceive this as dangerous for anyone participating to the study. Moreover, a Thai academic colleague in Oxford suggested that putting the original names of places may help future researchers to establish links with my thesis. Indeed, I also benefited from the geographical precision in existing research on the Karen in northern Thailand. Therefore, because I did not see harm for participants involved and benefits for future research I decided to keep geographical names.

During my stay in the village, I relied largely on 'convenience sampling' (Bryman 2001: 24). Most qualitative researchers rely at some stage on 'convenience sampling' for reasons including the availability of certain individuals who are otherwise difficult to contact, the aim of generating an in-depth analysis where representativeness is less important, or because researchers are restricted in their ability to contact people (*ibid.*: 322–3). Through convenience sampling, I often met people who assisted me in 'snowball sampling' (*ibid.*: 324). 'Snowball sampling'

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<sup>9</sup> In northern Thailand most people have a variety of names, which are used to reflect their shifting status relations vis-à-vis others.

<sup>10</sup> See email correspondence with Jo Boyden, Dawn Chatty, Chris Ballinger, and Mary Day, 29.07.10

<sup>11</sup> Thorn Pitidol, personal conversation, 08.08.10

indicates an unfolding dynamic in accessing research participants. In these processes, trusted key informants typically introduce researchers to people who might equally be interested in participating to the research. The advantage of ‘snowball sampling’ is that it operates according to a principle of mutual trust. Researchers need to be careful, however, to ensure that key informants are not pressurizing others to participation because they hope to gain social status through their mediation. For example, children in Huay assisted me by contacting their friends and households; and once I started visiting certain households regularly, those households’ neighbours and/or work colleagues also started approaching me. However, I never insisted on children introducing me to their households or them continuing to participate. Some, indeed, had no interest in the research or my person, and this was completely fine. So my research sample chose me as much as I chose them.

### **Data collection methods and ethnographic research with children**

For this study, I opted for a combination of ethnographic research methods to enable maximum children’s participation. Throughout the research process, my engagement with children has been guided by the underlying premise that girls and boys are valid research participants, capable of accounting for their lives in relation to others such as peers, family members and teachers.

Throughout the twentieth century, various social science disciplines analysed childhood from different angles. Since the 1920s, prominent ethnographers like Margaret Mead (1954) and Arnold van Gennep (1960) have explored childhood as part of their wider studies on human behaviour and life courses transitions. Ethnographic interest in children’s social participation and relationships has grown since the 1960s (LeVine 2007: 255). Enid Schildkrout (1978) was one of the first

anthropologists who used observation methods for researching children's time use. Social research thus promoted studies mindful of children's perspectives and supportive of their active involvement in the research process. Childhood has since become a popular research theme. Since the 1990s, more ethnographic studies on childhood have been published in book format than in any previous decade (LeVine 2007: 247). The suitability of qualitative research methods has been explored with children of different ages, gender and political economic status. In other words, ethnographers are also more sensitive to social diversity among children (e.g. Blanchet 1996; Christensen and James 2000). Inspired by participatory research approaches from the field of development studies (Chambers 1994), childhood researchers are increasingly interested in employing methods that enhance children's participation in the research process (e.g. James, Jenks and Prout 1998; Vogler, Morrow and Woodhead 2009: 20; Woodhead and Faulkner 2008).

This growing body of social research on children's participation resonates with child rights-based research, policy and practice. The widely ratified Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) acknowledges children as socio-economic and cultural agents and emphasises their role as fully fledged participants in all spheres of social life: 'Respect for the young child's agency – as a participant in family, community and society – is frequently overlooked, or rejected on the grounds of age and immaturity' (UNCRC, UNICEF and Bernard van Leer Foundation 2006: 40).

These developments in ethnographic research with children inform my own methodology. Examining through participant observation and ethnographic interviews village relationships as well as their children's working and learning activities helped me understanding children's daily routines of their transition experiences within the political economy of northern Thailand. In addition, I engaged children in collective

and individual participatory research exercises. This section provides a reflexive discussion of my use of these methods.

### *Participant observation*

Participant observation is a necessary methodological tool in ethnographic research in daily life, time use and transitions (e.g. Ben- Arie and Ofir 2002: 235; Fine and Sandstorm 1988; Gross 1984: 540; Punch 1998; Reynolds 1991; Robson 2004). According to Reynolds, observation ‘provided the most reliable and comprehensive record of children’s work. It was the only way to capture context’ (Reynolds 1991: 76). Participant observation was crucial in my study as it allowed me to discern children’s activity patterns and areas of interest. These, in turn, were further explored through interviews, focused observation, as well as participatory research exercises.

In my study, I gathered broad information on children’s and adults’ relationships and time use. Especially during the initial phase of fieldwork, I recorded children’s time spent at work and in studying at home and at school and I asked them about the value they put on their activities and observed how others valued them. I thus generated important background data for assessing further aspects of children’s life-course transitions. It also enabled me to narrow down my interests and make strategic choices for the research design of my participatory research exercises.

Ongoing observations are vital as they show what people actually do, in contrast to what they say they do. Oftentimes, their practices differ from what they tell the researcher they did, for instance in recalling their past day or week. Observations elucidate young persons’ strategies in negotiating their time use through combinations of chores and leisure activities (Punch 2000). Through observation, it is possible to understand the relationships between those who give and receive orders,



as well as to record the multiple-task performances that are often not captured when research participants recount their time use retrospectively.

Moreover, observation is particularly useful where people, such as rural children, have the tendency to be less articulate (Punch 1998: 69). Among the Karen in Huay Tong, children are often shy with seniors they do not know from the village or school. According to my research assistants, rural Karen children also have the tendency to express themselves in even shorter sentences and less elaborate expressions than their peers in Thai towns.<sup>12</sup> As such, ethnographic observation allowed me to learn about young people's time use without making them describe their activities in exact detail. For example, collecting firewood in the dry forest myself helped me understand how tedious this work can be and also how the young find ways to alleviate their workload and manage to do what adults expect them to achieve without overstressing themselves. Importantly, I also felt that my silent presence allowed research participants to observe and integrate me into their own daily lives.

However, my participant observation was limited because I was the only researcher without team support. As single researcher, one spends considerable time in socializing with research participants. For example, household visits could take a few minutes, but also last hours. For instance, during the hot season, I visited a befriended household 'hanging out' in the coolness of their inner living space where I would lie around and sometimes doze off just like my Karen companions. Another limitation of participant observation is that because of the quality and length of time involved, this research method is only able to capture the lives of a limited number of research participants and – because of the growing understanding of their

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<sup>12</sup> Yok, 10.09.09

individuality – it becomes ever more difficult to compare ‘cases’ neatly. Furthermore, full participant observation by adult researchers of the worlds of children and young people is unfeasible because of the obvious differences in physical stature due to age (Dyson 2005: 81; Punch 1998: 69). For example, when transplanting rice alongside 12–14 year-old girls, my position as an adult and foreigner highlighted my exceptional status during the activity so it was impossible to ‘just’ mingle unnoticed among my youthful co-workers. The methodological challenge of staying attentive to the research surrounding over an extended period of time should also be noted. While it is easy and ‘natural’ to be very alert at the beginning of the research, the challenge is to keep the ethnographic ‘gaze’ fresh and not ‘turn native’ by becoming too used to the increasing familiarity of people’s routines and activities.

#### *Ethnographic interviews*

I conducted ethnographic interviews with Karen children, youth and adults, as well as with Thai people. I followed the practice suggested in the literature I had been studying during fieldwork preparations (Bryman 2001: 312; Kvale 1996; Spradley 1979). Ethnographic interviews as a methodology allow for interview opportunities to develop spontaneously; for example, while I was fetching water at the village well with the children after school. Although similar to everyday conversations, ethnographic interviews differ from informal talk. The research aim of the conversation is transparent and the exchange is guided by ethnographic questions. These are descriptive questions that permit analysis of how interviewees organise their knowledge about a certain topic, like occupational aspirations (Flick 1998:112).

Ethnographic interviews proved useful to me in approaching adults and children with whom trust had been established. However, as in other rural settings (Punch 1998: 68), people, including children, are not encouraged to give accounts of

their individual selves. They clearly want to please the more the dominant adult with their answers, rather than elaborate on private aspirations. It took time and patience until individual Karen children and youth opened up to me. Only after establishing trusting relationships with them was it possible for me to have longer and more profound conversations with some youthful research participants. It is interesting to note that the quality of the ethnographic interviews was often limited by the context-bound answers of Karen adults and children. In everyday conversation, I often found that what villagers said they were doing differed from what they actually did. Moreover, research participants were generally not very outspoken or articulate about describing their activities in detail. I gradually learned that in the village (and in Thailand) it is often more important to give 'an answer' to 'a question' than to not say anything. The answer does not need to reflect one's state of mind, nor is it considered socially binding. Therefore, ongoing participant observation was truly indispensable to understanding what people actually did and the duration and quality of their involvement in a certain activity. My participatory research exercises also proved helpful in following up the details of children's daily, seasonal and life-course transitions.

#### *Participatory research exercises*

Throughout my research, but especially at the beginning, ethnographic observation and interviews helped me form a deep understanding of the general patterns and issues in young Karen people's daily, seasonal and life-course transitions. In addition, important themes emerged relating to the power configurations shaping children's personal relations, their daily use of space and time, as well as the socio-cultural values in their lives. After discerning these important themes, I decided to explore them in-depth through three sets of participatory research exercises: mobility maps,

seasonal calendars and life-course time lines. As explained thoroughly in my research protocol (see Appendix C), I chose these specific tools because they proved in previous research particularly useful for examining children's time use, wellbeing and transition experiences (e.g. Christensen and James 2000; Crivello, Camfield and Woodhead 2009; Johnston 2008; Punch 2001a, 2001b). Participatory research tools were originally developed to study rural communities where people possess limited or no literacy skills. These techniques usually require few resources (e.g. drawing paper or sticks) and ideally allow research participants to express their individual views through common means. Ideally, involvement of research participants does not cease with data collection but extends to the process of data analysis and dissemination. For example, after the data analysis, researchers often return to the field to triangulate their own interpretations with the views of research participants. Participatory research techniques are therefore considered methodological tools capable of empowering research participants to some extent (Beazley and Ennew 2006: 193).

Participatory methods are roughly divided into collective and individual methods. Both have their advantages and challenges, and experienced researchers recommend working with a combination of individual and collective tools (Boyden and Ennew 1997; Camfield 2009; Camfield, Crivello and Woodhead 2009; Johnston 2008; Laws, Harper and Marcus 2003). Collective methods can shed light on dominant viewpoints and opinions, as well as cultural ways of discussion and presentation. The objective is to learn about the creation and contestation of consensus among a certain group concerning a given topic. Therefore, they are not tailored to elicit subjective ideas, but rather targeted at learning inter-group agreed opinions. In my study, I used collective and individual methods to learn about the views of a wider range of children than my case studies and own observations allowed. Participatory

methods helped balance the gender composition of children in my sample and allowed me to explore the friendships and status differences among the young. Because of my limited access to boys and young men, it was necessary to find ways to learn more about their thoughts on time use and social values. Participatory research methods proved very helpful in this. My two male research assistants were extraordinarily talented in motivating the boys to express their views either in speech or in illustrations, as well as in interpreting the ‘boys’ worlds’ during subsequent data analysis.

In addition, I explored teenagers’ subjective feelings and attitudes using individual worksheet exercises. The simple format of the worksheet allowed me to include as many young people as possible in generating relevant data in a limited amount of time. The following section focuses on the processes of preparing and conducting these research exercises. Detailed research protocols of each participatory research tool are documented in Appendix C.

#### *Participatory research processes*

During my 2008 fieldwork in Huay Tong, I conducted three sets of collective exercises with eight girls and eight boys between the ages of 11 and 15 years: Mobility maps, seasonal calendars, and life course lines. Moreover, in August 2009, I conducted individual worksheet exercises with 58 students between the ages of 15 and 17 years at a Thai high school in Ban Kad<sup>13</sup>. Research assistants helped with the processes of collective and individual exercises, translation and data analysis.

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<sup>13</sup> The drawings prepared during collective exercises are reproduced in Appendix E. Throughout the thesis I refer to them with the acronym PRE (Participatory Research Exercises) together with the number under which they are listed in Appendix E. The individual worksheet questions used at Ban Kad high school is reprinted in Appendix B. Throughout the dissertation I refer to data stemming from these exercises with the abbreviation BK (Ban Kad) together with a date.

In opting for participatory research, I entered into an exciting and rewarding though also time- and energy-consuming process. As I had no internet access in Huay Tong, it was important to plan the exercises well in advance and to allow my academic supervisor and others to comment on the draft of my research protocol. Thai academic friends later helped me translate the CUREC-informed consent form from English into formal Thai. This version was very helpful in introducing my research to Thai adults, especially in bureaucratic settings. However, following the advice of a local Thai teacher, a separate version was produced for Karen parents. This version contained more information about the exercises in less bureaucratic Thai language (see Appendix D).

I recruited two male and two female research assistants, all of whom were 20 years old. Their relative youth was an advantage in my research with children. They embodied less authority than older persons and were free to interact with children in a playful and relaxed way required by the research exercises. Such a senior-junior interaction would have been difficult for Thai teachers or other adults whom children treat with referential behaviour. Three research assistants were Karen and one Lahu, all originally from Buddhist villages in Mae Chaem district. They were friends and lived, studied and worked together in Chiang Mai. From the time of my arrival in Chiang Mai, we had often met at the library of the Seven Fountains retreat centre so I was informally familiar with their command of English, outgoing character and interest in my research.

In order to prepare us for the participatory exercises, I facilitated a training workshop at the Seven Fountains retreat centre in Chiang Mai (1-3 May 2008). The four research participants attended the workshop. The training covered a theoretical introduction to participatory research methods with children, including ethical

considerations such as power relations, informed consent and confidentiality. I also prepared a research manual that included the protocol of research tools. The largest part of the workshop was spent on practicing the drawing of our own mobility maps, seasonal calendars and life-course time lines. We reflected on the emergent conceptual and practical issues, and the research assistants gave constructive input into improving the research protocol to ensure they were suitable and enjoyable for the Karen children.

The research assistants also joined me for a few days in Huay Tong village, where one of them had relatives. They spent several days familiarising themselves with the surroundings, exploring the village, recording their observations and building initial, casual rapport with the children through games and chatting. During this visit, we also started the recruitment process. We approached Karen children and adults, Thai school teachers, as well as the French village priest, informing them about the exercises. It was very important for my study to include different community members from the onset of the preparation process, so that no one would feel ignored because they had not been consulted. Through careful checking and double-checking I made all efforts to ensure that children and adults were well informed about and comfortable with the procedure of the exercises. I thus ensured consent from children, their Karen guardians as well as Thai teachers.

The children themselves contributed to the planning and participant recruitment. Aware of Karen children's preference for activities done in the company of peers, I felt it necessary and appropriate to ask children for their suggestions of research participants. For example, 14-year-old Nauj Cooz<sup>14</sup> mediated between me and other children by introducing the research and establishing interest for potential

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<sup>14</sup> All names have been changed to pseudonyms to protect research participants' anonymity.

participation among them. This resulted in a provisional list of 16 potential participants, including five girls and three boys between the ages of 13 and 14 as well as a group of three girls and five boys between the ages of 11 and 12. Asking children for their help in sampling proved a fascinating process that taught me a lot about their peer relations. It was instructive who mobilised others and what words were chosen to encourage their peers and juniors. After I had established a certain number of potential research participants among the children, I approached their guardians for consent.

The children's guardians gave their consent, although some parents expressed concern about the timing of exercises. Indeed, since it was already the rainy season and the beginning of the school year, children needed to attend school during the week. After school and during weekends, the labour of many children was highly demanded in the rice fields. I thus needed to ensure that the participatory work would not interrupt children's seasonal working duties. Once I secured children's interest in research participation and their guardian's consent, I approached the school teachers to establish whether potential child research participants could be excused from class room instructions for the duration of research exercises.

At Huay Tong school, I made every effort to introduce the research in a culturally sensitive way that fully respected the social hierarchies within the institutional context of the Thai state school. I ensured the headmaster's research permission through the mediation of a befriended Thai teacher. In addition, I met with individual teachers handing out the Thai translation of informed consent, the plan of activities, as well as the names of potential child research participants. I thus explained the purpose of my research to them and asked them to excuse potential child research participants from class room instructions for the duration of the



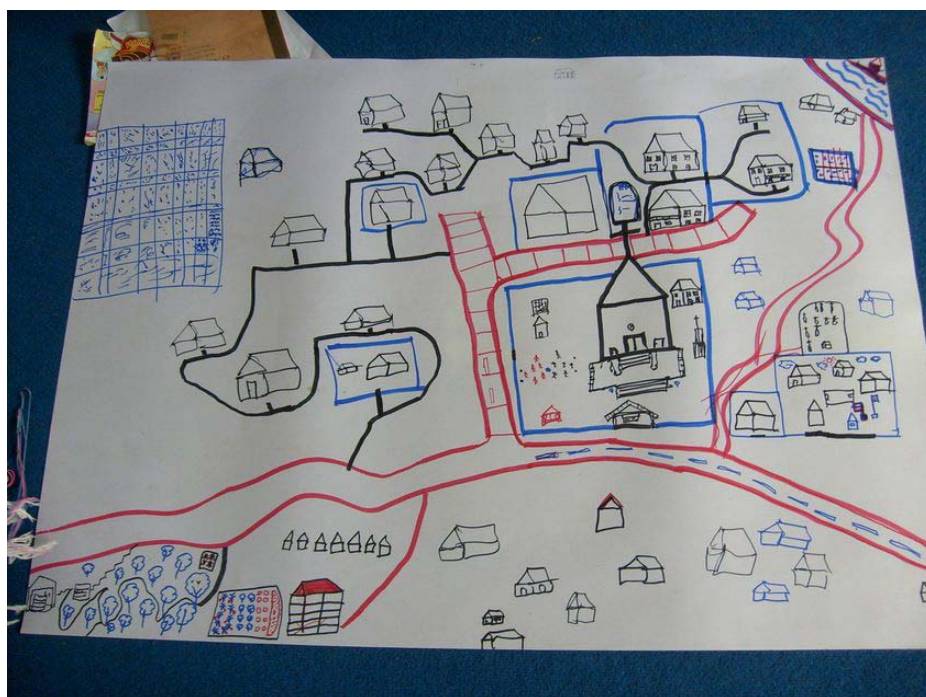
exercises. I was able to successfully negotiate teachers' permission for each student on my list to exceptionally miss class for research participation. Negotiating with the teachers highlighted to me how different stakeholders have divergent ideas of 'a good sample'. Had I solely relied on adults to identify my research participants, the teachers would have chosen the most representative students, that is, those who have the highest grades in tests and are known to be articulate.<sup>15</sup> Shy and academically less applied students would have been excluded. In contrast, consulting first with the children and then with their teachers and adults encouraged young people's interest in the project and endorsed their agency in the preparation process.

Interestingly, during the actual exercises, intra-group power relations impeded an equal degree of participation. Yet, this limitation became an excellent way in which to learn about the power dynamics among the children. The collective dimension of the exercises highlighted the working of intra-group power relations during group work where some children gave – and others received – orders. I found that children's working arrangements during the participatory exercises mirrored their organisation of collective household tasks, such as cabbage harvesting, rice transplantation, etc. A single task was thus split into different parts by the children and assigned to individuals. Depending on their abilities, each one contributed to the whole, in the sense of 'assisting each other'. For instance, those with confidence in writing took responsibility for the writing tasks while others worked on the illustrations. Drawing tasks, in turn, were distributed so that leading children first made sketches with pens, then the sketches were coloured by others while the leading child proceeded to another drawing.

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<sup>15</sup> Ahsan (2009: 394) encountered this problem, as adults only recommend to her the children whom they considered 'good speakers'.

The political economic household status differences among 12 and 11-year-old village boys emerged during the drawing of the mobility maps (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1** Mobility map drawn by 12 and 11-year-old boys (30.05.08)

The mobility map exercise asked children to first draw their village geography and then mark their daily itineraries in the illustration. During the drawing process of Fig. 1, above, I observed the boy of the highest social status occupying most of space on the paper, drawing the village as centred on his household next to the church. He left little space for others to add their own neighbourhoods and play areas. Only when he stopped his own drawing did a less powerful peer take up the pen to make his illustration in the lower left paper corner. He thus added his family's abode and the surrounding banana fields where he liked to go hunting in the mornings before school. Importantly, the richer peer never went hunting but stayed close to home, playing football with other boys after school in front of the church and sometimes going around the village on a bicycle. Participatory research exercises thus proved an excellent tool for elucidating status differences among Karen children in Huay Tong.

### **Data recording, management, and storage**

For data recording, I kept an ongoing research diary in physical and electronic form throughout the whole fieldwork process. I carried the physical field journal with me, noting down my observations as well as the ethnographic interviews. My fieldnotes consist of condensed and expanded accounts and were recorded depending on the situation. For instance, condensed accounts were often produced during the period of fieldwork (e.g. whilst observing the morning assembly at Huay Tong school) or immediately afterwards (e.g. after a morning's work collecting fire wood with young people). In these notes I recorded major events and phrases used by research participants. When I felt my note-taking would interrupt a situation, I withdrew to write somewhere else, e.g. the toilet or teachers' room. My expanded accounts often followed several hours later after writing the condensed accounts, usually in a calmer setting.

Data management was an integral part of each research day. Except for the rainy season, electricity was (almost) regularly available so I was able to transfer the field notes from my physical journal into my laptop almost every day. This also allowed me to reflect daily on the direction of the research. This data transfer process usually took me no more than an hour and helped me reflect and make regular self-introspections in relation to others and to identify research issues for following up.

All data was stored securely. As mentioned above, I kept the physical journal with me at all times while my laptop was securely stored in my locked room. In addition, I kept copies of the electronic diary on a USB stick. During monthly visits to Chiang Mai city, I sent electronic copies of my journal as attachments to my personal email account. More 'bulky' data, such as children's drawings, were stored securely

in an office of a trusted friend in Chiang Mai. Once I had interpreted and analysed this data with the research assistants, I mailed it all to a trusted friend in Oxford. Data was thus securely stored until my return to Oxford for data analysis in October 2008.

### **Data analysis**

Data analysis is never entirely detached from the process of fieldwork and data collection (Bryman and Burgess 1994: 217). Throughout my fieldwork, I continuously discussed my observations with research participants, academic colleagues and others. Every month, I returned for a few days to Chiang Mai to access the internet, interact with Thai and foreign researchers at Chiang Mai University and write a fieldwork report to my academic supervisor. Report drafting and engagement with my supervisor's feedback helped in narrowing down my research focus while not losing sight of wider developments. A second fieldwork trip in 2009 allowed me to triangulate my preliminary research findings and data analysis with local Thai and Karen experts. In addition, I was able to follow up key research themes that only emerged during the initial phase of data analysis in Oxford.

A separate phase of intensive data analysis in Oxford followed my first fieldwork trip. The temporal and geographic distance from 'the field' allowed me to have a fresh look at the wealth of data collected and to start the process of careful data coding (Kirby and McKenna 1989: 135–8). I divided the data into manageable portions, for example, according to months or sometimes diary days. I then singled out any common properties within these portions of data and grouped those with similar properties into thematic categories. New categories were added on a continuous base. This step was completed only when I felt that a category was saturated, i.e. when addition of new data portions would not have altered the overall

descriptive richness of the category. Once a category was saturated, it became possible to compare categories through cross-referencing them. Based on this process of ‘hurricane thinking’ (*ibid.*: 146–7), I started seeing links between the data which, in turn, allowed for the emergence of robust thematic statements. I shared draft chapters with colleagues and with the help of their feedback reworked my analysis and data presentation. By thus ‘dwelling with’ the data, I worked towards a first draft of the thesis. Presenting the first draft to my supervisor was important to allow me to step back from the text. After receiving her constructive feedback, I resumed my analysis with a fresh outlook and continued working towards a draft for final submission.

### **Research ethics**

Ethical issues have been treated thoughtfully throughout the whole research process of fieldwork preparation, data gathering, analysis and representation of research findings. At all stages of my research, careful attention was paid to informed consent and confidentiality, power relations between me and others, as well as data handling.

My methodology is based on sound preparatory course work and literature reviews (e.g. Devereux and Hoddinott 1992). As a probationary research student at Oxford, I participated in a course in research methodology and ethics in Forced Migration Studies. This course sharpened my existing awareness of ethical issues and research methodology. In my fieldwork preparation, I reviewed relevant literature on research methods and ethics on ethnographic work with children and young people. Before travelling to Thailand, my research project received ethical clearance from CUREC.

### *Informed consent and confidentiality*

Throughout the research, I negotiated and renegotiated informed consent and made every effort to ensure confidentiality. Informed consent forms approved by CUREC were translated into formal and informal Thai (see Appendix D). Throughout the fieldwork, I kept copies of the English and Thai versions with me. Before actively engaging individuals in the research process, their consent was always established and I clarified the purpose of the research and the data use. The persistence of informed consent was verified on a continuous base. This meant I accepted ‘informed rejection’ (Fine and Sandstrom 1988: 31) or ‘informed dissent’ (Ahsan 2009: 395) as they arose. Indeed, children’s readiness to participate changed on a daily or moment-to-moment basis, according to their mood, chores, etc. Moreover, ethnographic fieldwork and especially participant observation create situations in which research participants are not always aware of being observed. For example, people’s ability to provide informed consent in my fieldwork was compromised when research took place in settings of collective gatherings, such as classrooms, rice fields and temple grounds.

Confidentiality and data control was carefully observed at all times. During the process of data generation, I took care to protect research participants’ identities and the information they revealed. For example, during the participatory exercises, a Thai teacher entered the research setting with a camera, wanting to take pictures for the school archive. Explaining about research confidentiality, I had to politely ask the teacher to refrain from taking any pictures. I promised research participants I would safeguard their anonymity through the use of pseudonyms. Like this, research participants’ informed consent and confidentiality were to the best of my knowledge and ability maintained throughout the research process.

### *Power relations and ethnographic research*

At all stages, research is permeated by personal and institutional power relations along socio-economic, political, gender and generational lines. In this section, I discuss three aspects of power that were particularly relevant during my fieldwork with Karen children and adults. They pertain to the flexibility of power relations and empathic involvement, patron-client relations in Thai society, and intergenerational power relations in research with children.

### *Shifting power configurations and empathic/compassionate detachment*

Research practices are often discussed in terms of monolithic notions of power.<sup>16</sup> It is often taken for granted that researchers are more powerful than the researched. However, feminist anthropology challenges and expands fixed ideas of power relations experienced during fieldwork (Caplan 1988; Frühstück 2007; Lammers 2005; Love 2007; Robertson 2007; Scheper-Hughes 1995; Yamaguchi 2007). In contrast to an idealised notion of a stable researcher-host relationship, feminist scholars insist that power configurations shift as fieldwork evolves. Furthermore, emphasis is given to the mutual shaping of the researcher and her fieldwork setting: ‘We can no longer assume that the relationship between “anthropologists” and “natives” is necessarily defined by an unequal power configuration that places the anthropologist at the top. Rather, the power relations that the anthropologist engages mirror the fluidity and flexibility of power relations among her research subjects’ (Frühstück 2007: 615–16).

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<sup>16</sup> For example, based on her extensive working experience with ethical boards, anthropologist Jennifer Robertson insists that ethical codes developed by official board, such as the American Anthropological Association, rarely consider the vulnerability of ethnographers as well as the sometimes unethical deportment of some informants (Robertson 2007: 507).

Empathic involvement with research participants relates to shifting power configurations in the field. In qualitative research, empathy is critical in gaining access to research participants' life worlds, value systems and patterns of reasoning: 'Knowledge is blind, empty, and restless, always pointing back to some kind of experienced, seen act. And the experience back to which knowledge of foreign experience points is called empathy' (Stein 1989: 19). Yet, researchers' empathic attitude may engender expectations that are not always possible to fulfil, such as demands for political solidarity, economic or emotional support (Gledhill 1994: 217–22; Harstrup and Elsass 1990; Kirsch 2002: 69–70; Lammers 2005; Robben 2007: 166). Therefore, researchers need to keep their empathic attitude reflexive by remaining in an attitude of 'empathic/compassionate detachment' vis-à-vis research participants.

My own research activities have been shaped by a myriad of power relations throughout the whole research process. At different places and at different times, my study has been structured to various degrees by others. For example, in Oxford, I negotiated my research project with my academic supervisor, my research community at the Oxford Department of International Development, as well as the University and its rules and regulations. From Vienna, my family provided emotional and economic support for carrying out this study. At the same time, my research activities have impacted on the lives of other people. During fieldwork in Chiang Mai, exploring the lives of migrating Karen children in interdependence with their households, communities and modern institutions required my own negotiation with a range of personal as well as institutional power relations. Navigating these shifting power configurations demanded a great deal of empathy but also detachment from my side.



Despite my genuine attempts to maintain an attitude of compassionate detachment, there have been many situations when I was made aware I had yet to master this skill.

In Thailand, people are praised for their ‘cool heart’ (*jai yen*) when they master their emotions so as not to burden people around them. Conversely, those who deliberately express emotions such as anger, passion or enthusiasm are said to have a ‘hot heart’ (*jai ron*). Many were the occasions when I lost face vis-à-vis my Thai and Karen companions for exposing my ‘hot heart’ through expressing a strong emotion. The more my fieldwork proceeded, the more Karen and Thai people alerted me to my clumsiness, although always quickly returning to their general sense of humour, cheerfulness or irony. Indeed, I learned how important it was to laugh at myself and let go of social stiffness. I remain humbled by these experiences and grateful for all I learned through these times and for people’s patience with me. These interactions illustrate the feminist viewpoint about fluid power relations in the field.

#### *Household interdependencies and research within an economy of reciprocity*

As will be explained in subsequent chapters, Thailand is a society largely structured by patron-client relationships and most social interactions occur within an explicit or implicit economy of reciprocity. As the local context always impacts on a researcher’s activities, foreign researchers in Thailand do not hold a neutral position but move in and out of local patron-client relations. This is regardless of whether they are aware of this or not and independent of some researchers’ personal ideas of equality based on Western democratic values.

During my fieldwork in the Karen village, I needed to carefully discern when it was good to show gratitude through gift-giving and when it was better to remain in moral and/or financial debt to others. Following the advice of Thai academic friends, I

regularly brought my host mother and other close friends in the village little gifts of food from town, which was generally well appreciated. At the same time, however, I had to take care not to bring too many gifts to my hosts because this would have created an undue power imbalance between me and them. People would have thought that I was building up my patron status with them.

My host mother did not accept any formal rent for my room and food. However, I contributed a modest monthly stipend to her increased expenses for hosting me. I did this at the request of and in interdependence with my own household in Austria as my mother and grandmother found it unacceptable that I should stay with ‘another family’ for several months without contributing to the household costs. On the one hand, my family’s demand revealed a concern for their own honour as providers for a not-yet-fully-independent (grand-)daughter, while on the other hand, my decision to follow their directive speaks of my interdependence with the women in my own household. So a modest amount of money was given to the host mother for having me with her. I explained to her that in accepting this she would assist my own relatives in preserving their honour. I felt that this was understood by my host mother, and a short visit by my own mother to the village confirmed this impression. Not only my host household, but also the other villagers, wanted to meet my mother and to encounter me in relation to her as her daughter. Because the villagers saw me in my own family context, this helped building further trust between them and me.

Staying with a prestigious household meant I became a temporal member of this institution. In such circumstances, hosts may expect their guest to behave in a way that does not impact on the honour of the household (Gmelch 1995). Having grown up in urban and democratic contexts, however, I was unfamiliar with the subtleties of how personal and institutional power relations work in rural village

cultures. For example, in a rural Thai context of patron-client relations, lodging with a family of a certain social status entails socialising with the household's friends and associates. In addition, at the beginning of fieldwork in Huay Tong, my hosts introduced me to their relatives, friends and political allies. However, establishing my own relations to other households was at times problematic because I was ignorant of potentially difficult relations between my hosts and other villagers. Since I only became aware of such intra-village tensions gradually, I unwittingly upset my hosts by associating with people who were not their associates. Learning to manage these interpersonal issues and finding culturally acceptable ways of reconciliation was an important learning process and taught me a great deal about interpersonal relations in systems of political patronage in northern Thailand.

#### *Research with children and the principal of seniority*

Within childhood research there exists consensus about the unequal power relations between adult researchers and child research participants (e.g. Boyden and Ennew 1997; Fine and Sandstrom 1988; Punch 1998). On the one hand, this inherent power imbalance restricts researchers' ability to fully participate in children's activities. On the other hand, it may even be ethically inadvisable to attempt a complete immersion into children's experiences (Fine and Sandstrom 1988: 26; Punch 2001b: 165).

As an adult researcher, my presence reinforced existing power relations between me and my youthful research participants. However, this unequal relation abated during my enduring presence in Huay Tong, where my participation in different domains of the children's lives allowed for the gradual building up of their trust and confidence in me. Also, my positionality as an outsider and temporary member of the village community worked in my favour, especially with teenage

children who appeared more willing to share things they would not easily tell adults with whom they were deeply embedded socially. For example, teenage girls included me in their conversations about Thai school teachers or critiqued their household relations. Yet, it would be naïve to think that power relations between me and the children in this study entirely disappeared. In ethnographic research with children, adults are advised to adopt different research roles such as ‘supervisor’, ‘leader’, ‘observer’ and ‘friend’. Among these, the role of friend is recommended as an ‘explicit expression of positive affect combined with both a relative lack of authority and a lack of sanctioning of the behaviour of those being studied’ (Fine and Sandstrom 1988: 17). In my own research, I could not be a ‘friend’ in the Western sense of the term. Instead, children referred to me as ‘older sister Pia’ (*pi Pia*) and/or ‘teacher Pia’ (*kru Pia*). The Thai and Karen concepts for ‘friend’ imply status equality and not primarily mutual affinity. In other words, people who are neither senior nor junior to each other in age and social status can consider each other ‘friends’, i.e. social equals.

Thai children are socialised into demonstrating obedience and respect towards their seniors. It is rare that they are encouraged to ‘speak up’ individually and/or assume a strong position vis-à-vis adults. Instead, juniors must strive not to disappoint the expectations of their seniors, for instance, in giving situational-correct responses instead of expressing their own opinion (see also Ahsan 2009: 399). This was highlighted to me when asking research participants about their occupational aspirations. When asked by their Thai teacher in class at a lowland high school, Karen girls said they wanted to become Thai, English or Japanese teachers. But when I was alone with the same girls, they said they fancied a future as a policewoman or soldier, or most of the time told me that they just ‘do not know’.

However, intergenerational power relations are not static. It cannot be assumed that adults automatically always have more power over younger people. For example, power configurations shifted when I accompanied foster children to their home village. Although we lived in the same household, one 13-year-old girl was very shy with me in the foster household setting, but during my visit to her home village she not only became more talkative but also assumed a leading role in guiding me through the rivers, instructing me how to catch shells and little fishes while laughing at my clumsiness. Decidedly, being in her home village enhanced the girls' social status and thus confidence in engaging with me. The novel social situation created through participatory research exercises and/or adult researchers' role as a friendly companion can thus turn intergenerational hierarchies upside-down (*ibid.*: 399–400, Punch 2001b: 173).

#### *Representation and ownership of data*

Representation and ownership are two big methodological and ethical issues, including whether 'representation' is truly possible and whether such a thing as 'ownership' actually exists. At this point I wish to acknowledge these points without going into them in depth in this section. Representation of research data involves serious ethical considerations. In keeping an attitude of empathic detachment, researchers ideally develop an understanding of participants' life worlds. Yet, engaging with local reasoning, value systems and thinking processes may clash with a researcher's personal intellectual commitments. It is therefore necessary for researchers to develop a certain degree of intellectual detachment about our own convictions in order to better understand things we might find personally difficult or distasteful. This detachment is also part of being reflexive.

Selecting which data should be represented also deserves careful attention. This step in the research process could be described as an act of translating the worldviews of research participants into academic language and concepts. Such a selection process and the concomitant conceptual translations are necessary limitations to any form of representation. Yet they help researchers to narrow their focus on central themes and sharpens their research (Caplan 1988; Love 2007; Spiegelberg 1982: 694).

Representation of data may also raise ethical dilemmas. Staying in a host household allowed me to acquire in-depth understanding of the ‘politics of the everyday’ in Karen children’s lives. At the same time, inclusion of host householders in this research posed ethical concerns. As outlined above, I have always been transparent about the purpose of this research and ensured ongoing informed consent of research participants. Nevertheless, I worried how those people sheltering me and caring for me, especially the host mother, should be represented in this work. Careful reflection was also required to decide on the inclusion of critical comments from my host mother’s foster children. Ultimately, I decided to present people the way I did, relying on their ongoing confirmed informed consent to this research and safeguarding their confidentiality through pseudonyms.

Ownership of materials produced must also be treated thoughtfully (Punch 1998: 85). Throughout fieldwork, Karen child and adult villagers were keen on receiving copies of the photos I took of them with their consent. They usually chose pictures from my laptop so that I could develop them in the city for them. In addition, I made carefully selected parts of my research available to all those who were interested, including Thai academic staff and school teachers, NGO and religious humanitarian workers, and others. In a similar way, it remains my modest hope that

the final version of my thesis will be useful for different persons working with (Karen) children, within and outside academia.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter explicated the methodological and ethical issues that guided and shaped my research on childhood transitions of the Karen ethnic minority within the political economy of northern Thailand. My aim was to provide a transparent account of my activities which also acknowledges challenges and limits to my self-understanding. Keeping a reflexive attitude throughout the research process was essential, ethical challenges were considered thoughtfully at every stage, and every effort was made to secure research participants' confidentiality, informed consent and security. I was also committed to maintaining an 'empathic/ compassionate detachment' vis-à-vis research participants, while also acknowledging personal limitations due to my social characteristics and field roles. It was clear that my social status impacted on my research roles, as much as they shaped the power configurations at the sites of my research activities.

In line with recent developments in childhood studies and legislation, I share an ethical commitment to treat children as equal partners in research. Such a commitment motivated me to incorporate children's views into all stages of the research process. Nevertheless, there are limits to what individual child and adult research participants can account for through ethnographic research methods. It is important for my research that children's transition experiences are understood within a wider context of political economic and historical processes and structures. Yet, I was not always sure about the extent to which research participants were able to articulate these processes through qualitative methods.

Therefore, it was necessary to conceptualize the ‘political economic forces’ in a way that would be possible for young people to account for. Karen children were not discussing regional politics or colonial history with me. However, they expressed opinions on local ‘politics of the everyday’ (Bargetz 2009), i.e. the power relations within their classrooms, their households and their working places. By establishing the power dynamics of ‘the everyday’ through various aspects of social reproduction, it was possible to discern how these local issues are related to historical contexts and wider political economic forces, such as Thai government policies and Japanese or Catholic Christian scholarship programmes etc. My research echoes attempts at exploring political economic dimensions of childhood through various aspects of social reproduction operating from local to global levels (e.g. Hart 2008a: 23).

Practically, method combination was useful in this respect. Long term participant observation revealed general status differences among the Karen households. Once familiar with the social and economic diversification in the village, I was able to observe and/or interview children with special focus on status differences. Combining methods also allowed me to compare the responses and statements research participants gave in different situations. Solving conflicting information was not always possible, but it was instructive to learn about the contradictions which often hinted at deeper layers of political economic dissonance in children’s lives. Moreover, ongoing data triangulation with the expertise of local Thai anthropologists at Chiang Mai University helped me to relate and discuss my observations of the ‘politics of the everyday’ to wider historical and socio-economic processes. Lastly, familiarity with the literature on socio-economic and historical background in this setting was indispensable.



Chapter 3 locates contemporary childhood transitions among the Karen within the recent historical macro context of northern Thailand. I explain how throughout processes of modern nation building, highland people like the Karen became increasingly marginalized and how ‘ethnicity’ has emerged as social construct. I argue that ‘ethnicity’ indicates political economic inequalities at different geographic and institutional locations, and discuss ethnic minority peoples’ participation to formal education, the expanding cash economy, as well as different institutions. This is followed by Chapter 4 where I discuss contemporary political economic developments within the micro context of my research, Huay Tong village in Mae Wang district.

## **CHAPTER 3. The historical macro context of northern Thailand**

### **Introduction**

This chapter situates Karen childhood transitions within the macro context of northern Thailand. Throughout the chapter I argue that geographic and institutional locations in northern Thailand are marked by ethnicized political economic dissonances. Geographic and institutional locations, in turn, shape Karen children's social status and identities. Therefore, as to appreciate the political economic dimensions of 'ethnic minority' childhood transitions it is necessary to situate these within a historical macro context of changing modes of production and learning in northern Thailand, before turning in Chapter 4 to the micro context of my research locale, Huay Tong village.

Focusing on the macro context, this chapter charts the historical developments in the highlands of northern Thailand and shows how the Karen have occupied shifting marginal socio-economic and political positions throughout history. I examine the historical trajectories that underlie social inequalities in the current political economy of northern Thailand: colonialism in Southeast Asia, the geopolitics of the Cold War, as well as the current global economy. I trace historical contestations over space and resources and explain how these conflicts have been ethnicised. This is followed by an outline of the role of the development of modern Thai state education and its impact on ethnic minority children. I describe the processes of uneven economic development in the highlands and the social mobility related to these changes. Lastly, I draw attention to local Thai patterns of organising political power through patron-client relations based on the principal of seniority.

### **Political economic inequality and ethnicity**

Colonial relations, nationalism and globalising processes all impact on ‘ethnicity’ in relation to political economic power configurations at different geographic locations in northern Thailand. At different points in history, different Thai, foreign, but also Karen authorities constructed the Karen for different political purposes as a peripheral/marginal/excluded minority group. Therefore, labels like the term ‘Karen’<sup>17</sup> are highly problematic. Despite shared cultural traits, such as village structure, housing style, language and clothes, these traits always have to be related to the historical and politico-economic aspects of peoples’ lives and livelihoods and cannot be pinned down to constituting a clear ‘Karen identity’ (e.g. Hayami 2004; Hinton 1979, 1983; Keyes 1979; Mischung 1984; Renard 2003: 1). Instead, I argue that it is necessary to locate Karen ‘ethnicity’ in the broader frame of political economy of northern Thailand.

#### *Early Thai nation building: racialised geographic marginality*

Siam has never been colonialised like Burma or other Southeast Asian countries. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the territory now known as Thailand was composed of hundreds of principalities. Single political units were classified by local lords and places of residence, and not by territorial boundaries, nationality or ‘ethnicity’. Accordingly, no spatial frontiers were communicated to others through political mapping. Instead of enforcing territorial claims, local lords requested peoples’ labour

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<sup>17</sup> In Thai, Karen people are generally referred to as *kariang*, which is pronounced as *kayin* in Burmese. *Kayin*, in turn, is the source for the English word ‘Karen’ which keeps the ‘r’ from Early Burmese. Probably the term was introduced to the English by the Mon or Arakanese – two other ethnic groups in the region (Renard 2003: 2). In the nineteenth century, the English term ‘Karen’ started to be widely used by British colonial officers and Christian missionaries in Burma. Since then, the name has become a social reality accepted by most educated Karen in Thailand and Burma (Jorgensen 1997: vi).

as well as tribute in kind. In fact, there was also a Karen chiefdom in Sangaklaburi, situated on the trade route between Bangkok and Rangoon (Hayami 2004: 46).

Local lords were allied to supreme monarchs and elites in the ruling centres. Within this system, peripheral peoples were called *chao pa* ('wild forest people'). Although these peoples were considered of lower social status than those residing in the centres, they belonged as 'marginal subjects' to the realm of Siamese elites and northern princes and were closely interdependent with them. For example, local Karen chiefs paid tribute to the elites in Chiang Mai, who in return recognised the legitimacy of the Karen chiefs and granted them protection. Autonomy was an important characteristic of peripheral polities, such as the Karen chiefdom. For example, one chief could be loyal to different higher Thai authorities at the same time. This is in stark contrast to the centralised loyalty demanded by citizens in the modern Thai state (Pinkaew 2003: 23; Thongchai 1994: 8–82; Toyota 2005: 113).

During this time, the Karen participated in international trade networks. Before 1855, Chiang Mai was already linked with China and other regional neighbours as well as with the British Empire. Among the primary trade goods were manufactured cloth and thread (Bowie 1992: 815). Moreover, the Karen and other groups maintained trade relations with lowland Thais. Through the mediation of these lowlanders, in turn, the Karen's economic activities were linked to the international trade system, which was dominated by European colonial powers (Elliot 1978: 23). The Karen contributed to the wealth of Siamese rulers through taxation in kind, such as honey, hides and long peppers, and bartered these forest produce with Thais for cheap textiles. In the second half of the nineteenth century, these products were an important part of Siam's export goods on the global market (Buergin 2000: 6; Platz 2003: 474; Renard 1980: 105–7).

This active and fairly autonomous political economic role of the Karen gradually decreased during the process of Siam's early state formation. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Siam came into the involuntary position of acting as a 'buffer state' between Franco-British colonial powers in Burma, Indochina and Malaysia. Local rulers lost some of their lands and resources to British occupational forces, and it became increasingly obvious that non-territorial concepts of land boundaries were no longer useful. Between the mid-1880s and 1910, King Chulalongkorn implemented administrative centralisation policies. Local rulers lost their status as territorial chiefs and were relegated to the status of salaried provincial administrators. Moreover, they had to give up their pre-colonial rights to extract labour and taxes in kind from their subjects (Hayami 2004: 49).

The construction of a new Thai national identity endorsed the administrative centralisation processes. Bangkok elites adopted European pseudo-scientific notions of racial categorisations. In this process, Thai nationals became defined as persons who speak Thai and are loyal to the Thai nation. In order to prove the existence of this core or majority racial group, Siamese scholars started producing academic accounts of peoples at the national margins. They conceptualised these groups as (*kon pa*) 'wild forest men'. These *kon pa* were portrayed as 'wild', 'uncivilised' and 'strange'. They were contrasted with civilised Thais as the 'core' of the new nation state. A new racialised distinction between 'civilised Thai' and 'uncivilised non-Thai' was thus applied to the spatial difference between people living in central areas and peripheral regions, such as the highlands.

This racialised *and* spatialised distinction, in turn, provided a pseudo-scientific foundation to trace the historical evolution of Thai civilisation. Claims of such a racially homogenous and spatially bound 'Thai civilisation', in turn, served to engage

with the rationality of European colonialism and its political mapping techniques. At the same time, these new racial categories directed attention to peoples inhabiting the new national boundaries and whose lifestyles partially differed from those living in proximity to the central area and the new national capital, Bangkok (Pinkaew 2001: 40; Streckfuss 1993: 143; Toyota 2005: 115; Vandergeest 2003: 19; Vandergeest and Peluso 1995: 307–98).

Administrative centralisation and the introduction of new racialised classifications coincided with a centralisation of the Buddhist Sangha through the Sangha Administration Act of 1902 (Kwanchewan 2003: 234). Siamese officials were sent to the highlands to facilitate administrative centralisation. They apparently had little interest in the people dwelling at the margins: ‘Hill-dwellers were generally neglected during this period, remaining outside of Bangkok’s centralising scheme’ (Hayami 2004: 47). At the same time, Christian and Buddhist missionaries arrived in the highlands. Studies suggest that Karen conversion to Christianity and Buddhism occurred in dynamic and diverse processes based on individual household choices and strategies in fostering kin or patron-client relations. Religious conversion was often a means to accommodate new administrative structures and leadership. In animist villages, village leaders fulfilled the highest spiritual functions. However, the shift from traditional village leadership to head of villages within the Thai administrative system engendered a need for alternative protection against spirits. Christian priests and Buddhist monks thus replaced the traditional spiritual leadership. Moreover, religious conversions impacted on highlanders’ socio-economic activities. Transmission of spiritual authority from households to priests, however, alleviated some people’s lifestyles. This holds particularly true for women who were responsible for spirit propitiation, a duty often perceived as a time burden. Ceasing spirit

propitiation also granted individual household members more flexibility in terms of their occupation and education as their physical presence was not required in Christian and Buddhist intercessions. Abandonment of ritual constraints on livestock breeding also allowed the use of chicken and pigs as a source of cash (Hayami 2004: 263; Kwanchewan 2003: 230). So, the changes during early Thai nation building had different impacts on the marginal position of the *kon pa* (forest people).

#### *National security and the 'hill tribe' problem*

Thai state-wide scale interventions among highland residents started during the Cold War. During this time, Chiang Mai province turned increasingly into a politicised space of geopolitical strategic interest. In 1949 the Communist Party came to power in China, and throughout the 1950s the Communist movement gained increasing influence in Southeast Asia. In an attempt to create a buffer zone between Communist Burma and its own territory, Thailand countenanced the activities of anti-Communist ethnic insurgents alongside the border with Burma. This buffer policy was supported by the USA, whose strategic interests in Southeast Asia largely depended on the political orientation of Thailand. Advised by the US, the Thai government closely scrutinised ethnic minorities in the highlands and national borderlands.

In 1956, citizenship was formalised in legislation. For the first time in history, a legal distinction was established between Thai and non-Thai citizens. Importantly, this distinction was based less on racialised categories and more on the political and strategic interest of space. Citizenship was accorded depending on peoples' location of residence and the strategic interest this location had for the Thai government and its political allies. In order to apply for citizenship, people needed to prove that they are born in Thailand. However, significant numbers of highland minority villages had not been recognised as national administrative hamlets. Consequently, people living in

these areas were not eligible for citizenship. Thus, in the late 1950s, most highlanders were not registered as Thai citizens. Instead, they received ‘hill tribe’ (*chao khao*) identification cards that restricted the range of their mobility to their province of residence. The term ‘hill tribe’ was given official status in 1959, following the establishment of the Central Hill Tribe Committee to replace the Hill Tribe Welfare committee (Kwanchewan and Prasit 2009: 45–7; McKinnon 2005: 38; Pinkaew 2003: 29; Thongchai 1994: 170; Toyota 2005: 118).

The Thai term ‘*chao kao*’ means ‘hill’ or ‘mountain people’ in English. This concept, in turn, derives from British colonial terms used for upland people in Burma. The term is broadly used for nine groups of highlanders – the Karen, Hmong, Lisu, Akha, Lahu, Yao, Kamu, H’tin and Lua – regardless of their settlement histories and socio-cultural practices. For example, the Karen are included in the category although they do not dwell in as high locations as other groups like the Hmong. Throughout the 1960s, Communist activities among ethnic highlanders in Thailand and Laos increased. Supported by the Chinese Communist Party, the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) built up strongholds in the highlands and started fighting the government in 1965. During the early 1970s, a range of Communist insurgencies in Thailand’s borderlands caused serious security threats, which resulted in a popular stereotype of so-called ‘hill tribe problems’ (*bpanha chao khao*) and justified increasing state encroachment on minority groups in the highlands. ‘Hill tribes’ were associated with issues perceived as a threat to national security, such as opium growth, undocumented migration and the existence of armed non-state actors. National security concerns were thus effectively ethnicised (Pinkaew 2001: 48, 2003: 29). For example, the ‘hill tribe’ populations of the Golden Triangle became one of the first target areas for poppy eradication programmes sponsored by the USA,



Australia, Germany and the Netherlands (Chachavalpongpun 2005: 58–9; Lang 2002: 141–2; Kwanchewan and Prasit 2009: 42; Smith 1999: 157).

The institutionalisation of hill tribe categories is also connected to academic anthropological research. The Tribal Research Centre/Institute in Chiang Mai was established in 1965. Situated within the Welfare Department (Ministry of Interior), the purpose of the institute was to provide an ‘advisory and training’ centre to engage with ‘hill tribe problems’, that is, issues commonly associated with ‘hill tribes’ such as insurgency operations, narcotic trade and forest destruction. The Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEAT) provided the funds for the centre’s foundation and British and Australian governments contributed largely to operational funding. International and Thai anthropologists were in charge of fieldwork-based data collection on ‘hill tribes’. The centre thus held an advisory role for the Royal Thai Government (RTG) in monitoring and evaluating highland development projects, including the establishment of commercialised agricultural projects. Although the hill tribe centre was against political involvement in US security and economic interests, research results produced and published by the centre were effectively used to counter Communist subversion in the highlands (Hayami 2004: 60; Kwanchewan 2006: 377; Toyota 2005: 117).

Since the 1980s, administrative mapping has further institutionalised the ethnicised upland-lowland constructs of the Cold War period. Administrative mapping of politicised highland geographies reinforces ethnic divisions according to location. Political maps categorized reserve forests and protected areas as uplands, and propertied space as lowlands. This spatial distinction was once more related to ethnic distinctions and the ‘hill tribe’ category. The state also marked differences between ethnicities by ascribing them certain behavioural stereotypes. For example,

popular media constructed the Karen as ‘benign’, ‘docile’ and ‘idle’, whereas the Hmong were ‘malign’ and ‘aggressive: ‘To be a good hill tribe, one must be inferior to and docile in interaction with the Thai, open to “development” and willing to become “civilised” Thai citizens’ (Pinkaew 2001: 54). Class conceit adds to ethnic stereotypes and reveals the socioeconomic dimensions of ‘ethnicity’ in this setting. For example, Thai bureaucrats are said to look down on rural highland dwellers: ‘Standing in opposition to the image of zealous conservation foresters is the image of the villagers represented as the ignorant other’ (*ibid.*: 106). These images, in turn, were used to assert hill tribes’ unreliability and unaccountability in managing natural resources and to justify governmental interventions for the sake of environmental protection. Land conflicts between the Thai government and local villagers emerged and coincided with growing international awareness of ‘ethnic’ minority rights.

*Instrumentalising ‘ethnicity’ for political economic rights*

Since the late 1980s, the environmental<sup>18</sup> movement in northern Thailand has revolved around minority rights and land conflicts. Local discourses are shaped by the general northern Thai environmentalist movements as well as by ethnic minority/indigenous peoples’ movements. In these discourses, ‘ethnicity’ is often instrumentalised in order to claim access to economic resources and/or political inclusion.

Northern Thai environmentalism is about populist rejections of social changes associated with the neo-liberal development processes. Modern agriculture is contrasted with past subsistence farming and self-reliance and community values are emphasised. Production for national and international markets, Western agricultural

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<sup>18</sup> Throughout the 1980s, environmentalism the world over became a discourse involving struggles over natural resources and the symbolic power of how to frame solutions to environmental problems. In Thailand, there exist different forms of environmentalism depending on ideological stances (Hirsch 1998: 32; Tomforde 2003: 347).

technologies and the introduction of cash crops are held responsible for indebtedness and food shortage among rural populations (Quinn 1996: 90, Hewison 2000: 286). This is linked to increasing global recognition of the importance of 'ethnicity' and the global networks of 'indigenous' peoples as well as humanitarian organisations and funding institutions that support these networks. Especially since 1994, ethnic minority groups in northern Thailand have formed networks to posit demands on economic resources and political rights (Anan 1998: 203).

In their discourses, northern Thai environmentalists largely replaced negative ethnic stereotypes with instrumentalised constructions of 'indigenous' identities. Thai and Karen activists created the image of the Karen as 'children of the forest' and 'forest guardians' who since 'time immemorial' guard and keep forests (e.g. Anan 1998; Pinkaew 2001; Prasert 2008; Yos 2004: 113). Ethnic labels are re-appropriated and re-naturalised. Environmentalists often dismiss agricultural transformation and modern education in simplistic ways. Modern education is contrasted with traditional, indigenous knowledge; whilst the former is associated with modernisation and educational institutions, the latter is said to rely on knowledge transmission from village elders to juniors (IKAP 2006:16). This dichotomy fosters romanticised ideas of traditional learning and demonises modern education and social change.

Karen NGO leaders also instrumentalise ethnicity. For example, portrayals of the Karen as 'forest guardians' support nostalgic yearnings for 'traditional' agriculture. With reference to an imagined perennial past, historical processes are largely denied: 'the transmission of local knowledge from *time immemorial* has resulted in an embedded mode of thought' or 'the sustainable systems of rotational agriculture have worked in harmony with forests *for millennia*' (Yos 2008: 161–2, italics PMV). Today, constructs like the Karen as 'indigenous forest managers' (Yos

2004: 119) serve as resource for political action and strategic alliance with other ‘minorities’ both at the national and international level. These alliances, in turn, provide symbolic and financial support for minority groups’ political economic demands (Yos 2008: 86).

However, most highlanders remain largely uninvolved in social movements, NGOs or grassroots politics (Walker 2008a). Karen social activists are harsh on communities who decide not to participate in protests. They portray uninvolved communities as overtly focused on money – ‘*cei klav maix cei klav sav*’ (money placed on the eyes and on the heart) (Prasert 2007: 141) – or as not sharing the essence of Karen-ness: ‘these people perhaps cannot follow the real meaning of Pgaz K’Nyau [i.e. Karen, PMV] culture’ (Cauf Nif, cited in Prasert 2007: 139). Thus, claims of socio-cultural otherness with reference to ‘ethnicity’ were originally a means to marginalize local highland groups. Thus constructed ‘ethnic’ groups employ today the same strategy to negotiate economic benefits and increasing political participation within a national Thai society which is increasingly linked to global markets and institutional networks. Highlanders’ access to Thai state schools arguably equipped increasing numbers of ‘ethnic’ people with the formal education necessary to participate in NGO discourses and activism.

### **Modern education, national identity and ‘ethnic minorities’**

Since Thailand’s transition from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy in 1932, modern education has been regarded as an instrument for socio-economic development and nation building (Kwanchewan and Prasit 2009; Witte 2000: 233).

#### *Thai state schools and citizenship*

In Thailand, a modern education system was established alongside other modern institutions during the period of early state formation at the end of the nineteenth century. Prior to that, there existed two types of schooling: a royal school reserved for members of the aristocracy and religious education for monks. The interweaving of formal education and religion has a long tradition in Thailand and sending children to religious institutions for learning is a familiar practice all over the country (Kwanchewan 2003: 206; Kwanchewan and Prasit 2009: 38). For centuries, Buddhist temples provided boys with the opportunity to study and work as novices. Also, during the reign of Ayutthaya King Phra Narai Maharaj, at the end of the seventeenth century, French Catholic missionaries were granted permission to open schools. Apart from religious teaching, the curriculum included modern subjects and the king sent his own kin to study there. However, when the missionaries lost political patronage upon the death of King Narai in 1688, they closed the schools and left the country (Wyatt 1969).

A secular Western education system was only introduced in the second half of the nineteenth century. The expanding activities of British and French colonisers urged Siamese authorities to engage with these foreign powers. In order to participate in the legal system of treaties and bureaucratic language, Siamese authorities felt the need for learning similar to the West's. Moreover, Siam was working on its own process of nation building through modern institutions and required people with modern education to work as bureaucrats. So King Rama IV started sending royal family members to study abroad. In 1887 the Department of Education – responsible for education and religious affairs – was established. Royal Thai donors and Christian missionaries opened private elite schools for girls, such as Saowapha Girl School, established in 1901.

Gradual replacement of Buddhist teaching by secular education started in 1898, when the government ordered by law an organisation of nationwide education based on modern curricula. Schools were graded into primary, secondary, occupational and higher education categories. In 1909, the running of schools was taken away from the Buddhist Sangha. However, in the absence of well-trained secular teachers, monks continued teaching in government schools until the mid-1930s. Throughout the 1920s many monks actively participated in promoting the new school system, for example, through sponsoring fundraising activities on local temple grounds. The nationalism promoted by King Rama VI declared the Buddhist religion, the Thai Royalty and the Thai nation as three pillars of national identity. Sangha authorities remained supportive of state schools, not least because Buddhist moral instruction was included in curriculum (Keyes 1991b: 96–100).

The proclamation of the Compulsory Education Act in 1921 obliged all children between the ages of seven and 14 to attend schools with centralised curricula and Central Thai as the language of instruction. For the first time in Thai history, education was made available on a wide scale for boys and girls. Following the transition from an absolute monarchy to a parliamentary system in 1932, even more emphasis was laid on the development of a centralised education system. State-sponsored education became a tool to foster ideas of national unity and to boost the growth of the national market (Keyes 1991b: 89, Kwanchewan and Prasit 2009: 40–1). Modern curricula centred on the teaching of literacy and numeracy and the instilment of new forms of discipline, such as punctuality and respect for politicised national symbols.

In the wake of the Pacific War (1941-1945), education was once more linked to nationalism. Throughout the post war period, certain traditions were reinvented and

integrated into modern state institutions such as schools. For example, in 1956, the introduction of the annual Teacher's Day (*wan waai kru*) was an attempt to revitalise the old Buddhist custom of paying respect to teachers (Kwanchewan 2003: 208; FM 1960: 13). During the Cold War period, American advisors strongly influenced the further shaping of Thai state schools and the rapid expansion of formal education at all levels, especially secondary, vocational and tertiary levels. In 1977 the current 6-3-3 pattern was introduced (Watson 1985: 88).

Since the 1997 crisis of the neo-liberal regime, there has been a general mistrust in Thailand of global forces and international standards. The education reforms of 1997 are said to be a direct reaction to the 1997 financial crisis. Modern education and 'global' knowledge are held responsible for the demise of social values and of deskilling. In response, local Thai (non-) governmental organisations suggest a return to 'Thai values' (Baron-Gutty 2009: 26) and 'Thai wisdom' (Jungck with Boonreang 2003). 'Local' refers to regional 'Thai' values, such as northern Thai Lanna and northeastern Isan cultures. Romanticisation of these regional 'ethnicities' is thus part of Thai populist localism critique of global market economies (Hewison 2000: 289). In addition, 'minorities' in the highlands are folklorised. At Thai schools, minority cultural practices are decontextualised and taught as pertaining to the past. For example, the practice of wearing local traditional clothes on Fridays at government schools is part of governmental efforts to support 'local values'. However, these practices effectively instrumentalise the 'ethnic otherness' of the students. The exceptional dress code on Fridays is opposed to the ordinary Thai uniforms on weekdays and thus underlines the marginal situation of regional cultures within the modern Thai nation state. Unfortunately, despite the talk about 'local

wisdom', Thai education policy remains largely blind vis-à-vis ethnic minority cultures and local languages (Baron-Gutty 2009: 35; Witte 2000: 237).

### *Formal education and ethnic minorities*

The Border Patrol Police (BPP) first set up basic schools to teach the Thai language to ethnic minorities. In the wake of the emergent Cold War, in 1955, the BPP was sent as a counterinsurgency force to the highlands. In 1956, the first BPP school was opened for minority Akha students in Chiang Rai province. Several state agencies participated in the administration of these schools, and BPP staff acted as teachers using study material issued by the Ministry of Education. Students also received uniforms sponsored by the Public Welfare Department (Kwanchewan and Prasit 2009: 41).

Notwithstanding the establishment of BPP schools, Thai government schooling in the highlands remained scarce until the 1970s when highland development projects were largely established and infrastructure improved. Until the late 1970s, highland children mostly accessed formal education through the structure of religious networks. They relied on Christian and Buddhist missionaries for information and transportation.<sup>19</sup> Priests and monks acted as cultural intermediaries between the highlands and lowlands. Through their mediation, Karen students started attending formal schooling at city temples and at Thai governmental as well as private Christian learning institutions. Out of concern over the expansion of Communist ideas in the highlands, the Thai Royalty and government were initially supportive of Christian missionaries' activities among ethnic minorities (Kwanchewan 2003: 214; Hayami 2004: 47).

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<sup>19</sup> Rabiap, 03.03.08



In Chiang Mai province, the Catholic Mae Pon school and Buddhist Wat Srisoda were the first free schools accessible to Karen children.<sup>20</sup> In 1955, priests of the French Bétharram Congregation founded Mae Pon School. Throughout the 1950s, the school was an innovation in the hills of northern Thailand. Karen boys and girls increasingly enrolled and each year rising numbers of graduates made the transition to high schools in Chiang Mai (*Bangkok World* 1968). Girls benefited hugely from Mae Pon school. The school opened formal learning opportunities to female children who were not allowed studying in Buddhist temples. The school was and still is the only institution in Thailand where Karen is the official language of instruction. In contrast to government schools, Mae Pon never required children to wear uniforms nor do they have to follow a prescribed hairstyle. Nevertheless, Mae Pon students pay the usual respects to the Thai nation and Royalty through the flag-raising ceremony and the singing of the national anthem at morning assemblies.

In 1965 the Phra Dhammacharik ('Wandering Dharma') Programme, a Buddhist missionary project, was initiated in the mountains. The explicit purpose of the project was religious education and the development of future monks. Similar to priests, missionary monks helped to link Karen boys with temple schools in the lowland plains where they were ordained as novices and received an education. Boys increasingly took up this education opportunity and became ordained as novices in large city monasteries, such as Wat Srisoda in Chiang Mai city. After finishing secondary school in the city *wat*, some boys were selected to become missionary monks and sent on missions to highland villages. Today, Wat Srisoda in Chiang Mai continues to attract hundreds of boys from poor regions (Hayami 2004: 205; Kwanchewan 2003: 251).

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<sup>20</sup> Laa, 11.02.08

The formation of a religious leadership among the Karen is to this day a reason for the extensive educational activities of Christian and Buddhist missionaries. For example, boys who in the 1950s and early 1960s attended Mae Pon school and benefited from further Catholic educational connections became leading Karen intellectuals and professionals in NGOs, universities and also within the Catholic Church (Prasert 2007: 82).<sup>21</sup> Priests, monks, Karen teachers and Thai teachers are aware that most children are not candidates for religious life but are following aspirations for formal education.<sup>22</sup> For example, according to a responsible monk at Wat Srisoda: 'Many boys have told me that they prefer to stay at the temple simply because they can eat better than at home' (Phra Sunthorn, in Aphaluck 1994).

With the expansion of state development projects, increasing numbers of government schools were opened in the highlands from the 1970s onwards. National development projects aimed at wide-scale transformations in the highlands. Integration of highlanders into national society was a major objective in this process. Since the 1960s, Buddhist missionary teaching activities in the highlands have heralded education as a tool for nationalism. Now, state schools also started playing an important role in these efforts (Beaupré 1995: 68). Since their inception in rural Thailand, state schools have prepared children for future citizenship and a subordinate position in the centralised bureaucratic Thai nation-state:

When Thai children go to school, they enter a spatial culture that itself serves as a model of the state. The interactions that students have with teachers, as well as those teachers have with villagers more generally, also anticipate in form and significance the relationships that villagers have with representatives of the state (Keyes 1991b: 90).

Government schools use centralised curricula, and only standard Thai is permitted for communication on school grounds. Students are not called by their given names in

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<sup>21</sup> Providing a Christian leadership for the Karen through extensive educational activities has also been the main impact of Protestant Christian missionaries in Burma (Jorgenssen 1997: viii).

<sup>22</sup> Rak, 12.02.08, Bonpasteur, 25.02.08

their mother tongue. Instead, teachers call them by Thai names registered upon their birth: 'school activities have been geared towards nationalism' (Kwanchewan and Prasit 2009: 49). The teaching of literacy and numeracy prepares them for the expanding market economy, while the spatial organisation of school compounds itself has been described as reflecting general architectonic power structures of administrative buildings in Thailand (Keyes 1991b).

Karen adults value education now more so than 20 years ago. Indeed, throughout the last 15 years there has been a large shift in ethnic Karen's attitudes towards the value of formal education. In an interview, sociologist Kwanchewan Buadaeng identifies two major reasons that caused Karen peoples' increasing awareness of the value of schooling. Firstly, 15 years ago, the Thai government started to seriously question the agricultural practices of the Karen people, particularly their forest use and cash crops. In their clashes with better-educated bureaucrats, villagers realised the necessity of being able to interact with Thai people. Formal education became a means to negotiating with northern Thai officials and thus as a means to ensure their own livelihoods. Secondly, Kwanchewan points to the increasing availability of scholarships for Karen students. Such scholarships have traditionally been provided by Buddhist and Christian religious authorities, but there is now also the possibility to ask for study support at the provincial level. Furthermore, the recent King's sister Princess Phraterp has been very active in establishing welfare schools for ethnic minority children, such as Santisuk School in Ban Kad. According to Kwanchewan: '20 years ago, teachers complained about students, but now it is villagers who complain about Thai teachers. They complain that they are not coming punctually and regularly and that they are not teaching the children sufficient Thai'.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Kwanchewan, 06.03 2008

Indeed, in spite of the changes, government assistance to highlanders continues to be limited and unequal access to education and labour markets persists.

The 1997 Thai constitution mandates that ‘education must be provided by the state in large area coverage and [be] free of charge’, for a minimum period of 12 years. Although this objective had not yet turned into a national reality by July 2008, the Abhisit administration expanded the scope of free education to 15 years in early 2009. The RTG made efforts to cover tuition fees, to establish more public schools in the mountains, and to build more dormitories within school compounds in order to facilitate children’s inter-mountain migration. The government also increased loans and scholarships to poor students.

Nevertheless, challenges to equal access to education, including the geographical isolation of highland villages and communication barriers, remain. The national school curriculum continues to be taught in Thai, often by teachers from the lowlands who do not understand the mother tongue of the ethnic students. Transitions into high schools also incur a whole range of costs, such as the need for scholarships, uniforms and dormitory places. Through the mass media and increasing mobility, rural highland communities are increasingly familiar with the values of the urban Thai middle class who place a high value on education and the attendance of prestigious learning institutions that enhance social status (Montgomery 2006: 65). Formal education itself has become a status symbol among highland minority groups (Aranya 2006; Yos 2008). They are increasingly ready to invest in their children’s education, hoping that an educational diploma will pave their way to obtaining attractive employment. Yet, compared to lowlanders, highlanders still hold a lower socio-economic status. In order to finance children’s migration for secondary education in the lowlands, households need to secure funding from governmental, non-

governmental and private donors (Baron-Gutty 2009: 17–19; Fujioka 2002: vii; Kwanchewan and Prasit 2009: 51; Ministry of Education 2008: 3; Mounier and Tangchuang 2010).

Since the late 1990s, highland youth have increasingly migrated for education from the highlands to the lowlands (Hayami 2003: 124; Kwanchewan 2005). The availability of Thai Government schooling enhanced Karen children's propensity to migrate over the last 30 years. Nowadays, many highland children aspire for education beyond primary school and are ready to migrate to other villages and towns to complete higher secondary Thai government school (UNESCO 2000: 4). The increasing availability of dormitories run by the government's Education Welfare School, Buddhist *wats* and different Christian denominations encouraged ethnic students and their parents to move temporarily to the city. For example, the Dhammacharik Buddhist missionary programme sponsored boys to study as ordained novices from primary school to university undergraduate level. Boys had started migrating for school in the 1980s, while Karen girls' movements to the city only increased in the 1990s, with the establishment of Christian girl student dormitories and the availability of more scholarships. The role of dormitories is important because migration for teenage Karen girls is still considered dangerous and, more often than not, even morally ambiguous. Migrating girls have to make arrangements to ensure that their reputation is not harmed because of their migratory experience. Entering foster arrangements or staying with relatives or in dormitories help to make their residence in the plains respectable (Hayami 2003: 124–9). Regulation of Karen children's migration for education is therefore fundamentally linked to economic change and modern institutions.

### **Economic change and social mobility**

Processes of uneven economic development mark different geographic locations in the highlands of northern Thailand. Since the 1960s, the expanding agricultural cash economy in the hills, on the one hand, and increasing industrialization in the lowlands, on the other hand, encourage growing numbers of highlanders' migration for work and education between highland villages and lowland towns.

#### *Uneven highland development and Royal Projects*

The cash economy entered the lives of Karen through the British teak companies. By the 1930s Karen men and youth were working largely for British logging companies, and from the early twentieth century until the late 1950s they worked for other national logging companies (Elliot 1978: 28).

Agricultural transition and expansion of the cash economy in the highlands of northern Thailand are intimately linked to state development projects. Against the backdrop of the Vietnam war and rising international concern for poppy production in the Mekong area, the Thai king established in 1969 the first 'Royal Projects' in the highlands of northern Thailand. Economic development was used as a tool to 'win the hearts of insurgents' alongside the border area (Leblond 2010: 2). During the 1970s and 1980s, governments and international organisations funded the expansion of Thai 'Highland Development Projects' (Buergin 2000: 8; Kwanchewan 2003: 248). Facilitated by infrastructure improvements, the cash economy expanded in the highlands. Subsistence agriculture gradually diminished, while cash crops expanded. Banks started to play a bigger role in money lending, an activity previously organised by kin and patron-client relations and by Sino-Thai traders. With economic diversification among rural populations, however, social inequalities increased (Bruneau 2009).

From the mid-1980s until 1996, a period of high economic growth, state development projects furthered agricultural mechanisation and intensification through dam and irrigation developments. In 1992, the Royal Project Foundation (RPF) was established as an amalgamation of existing royal development initiatives. The increasing presence of highly prestigious royal development centres all over the highlands strengthened residential claims for citizenship and/or bestowed previously vulnerable communities with royal protection. Because of its high prestige, government agencies are keen to cooperate with these Royal Project Foundations and eager to contribute funding to the infrastructure improvement of Royal Project-hosting communities. In 2008, the Royal Project Foundation operated 28 extension stations in 306 villages throughout northern Thailand. Arguably, state- and royalty-sponsored development has improved lifestyles in many highland locations. Many villages welcome the expansion of infrastructure and state schools and inclusion in national development processes: 'Rather than being swamped by commercialism, Karen communities appear to be exploring paths of market oriented diversification that support regularly under-producing paddy and upland rice systems' (Walker 2001: 154–5; Walker and Farrelly 2008: 389).

Nevertheless, the developmental pace remains uneven. There exist today political and economic inequalities among minority groups in terms of access to the labour market and schooling. For example, although 'hill tribe' problems largely lost their salience with the end of the Cold War, recognition of citizenship continues to be problematic in Thailand. Today's government policy towards ethnic minorities is based on the Cabinet decision of 6 July 1976. This document expresses the government's intention to integrate hill people into the nation state, whilst granting them full rights to practice their religions and cultures (Fujioka 2002: 5; Howard

2004; Pitiyanuwat and Siridej 2000). Yet, some villages in marginalised isolated areas are still unrecognised by the local administration and thus ineligible for citizenship application. Those without citizenship are unable to access Thai elementary education, primary health care systems and occupational training (Leblond 2010: 28; Wang 2008 43–7). Location has become a decisive factor in understanding the differences in experiences of socio-economic and political inequalities among highlanders in northern Thailand. At the same time, in a globalising economy, the distinction between ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ is getting increasingly blurred and rural people develop flexible identities as they move between different geographic locations.<sup>24</sup> Within a context of economic development and an expanding cash economy, commercialised agriculture, infrastructure improvements and Thai government schooling allow for growing exchanges between Karen and others.

#### *Thai labour market and ethnic minority youth*

Since the 1960s, highlanders have increasingly migrated to lowland towns for work. A first generation of labour migrants from the highlands arrived in Chiang Mai in 1964 to work at Chiang Mai Radio Station for special ‘hill tribe’ broadcasts. These migrants also found employment in putting on performance shows for tourists. Their relatives gradually joined them in developing a ‘hill tribe handicraft production’ trade in Chiang Mai’s night bazaars (Kwanchewan 2005).

Since the 1980s’ period of economic growth, mobility between rural and urban areas has increased on a wide scale. Highland boys’ migration for education and work has increased significantly with the rising demand for labour during the economic boom of the late 1980s and early 1990s in Thailand. The growth of tourism in Chiang Mai has led to an increasing demand of labour both in the manual and service sectors.

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<sup>24</sup> Yos, 11.08.09



For example, between 1990 and 1996 the number of tourists visiting Chiang Mai almost doubled from 584,087 to 944,729 (Kwanchewan 2005). Improvement of infrastructure brought along new gasoline stations, market places, tour companies, restaurants, entertainment venues, etc. Highlanders were attracted by the new labour demand, some staying the whole year in Chiang Mai, whilst others came to work in the city only during the dry season when there was no farming work. Moreover, the economic boom of the 1980s boosted tourism throughout Thailand. Since the mid-1990s, eco-tourism has been promoted, with trekking tours and home stays in villages bringing money to the highland villages (Hayami 2006: 397).

In the lowlands, migrants work in different sectors, such as in gasoline stations and restaurants or as childcare givers for affluent families. Some also open their own businesses, for example, as food vendors on streets. A return to their home village is often not possible because of structural labour market constraints during recession. Often, their need to generate income in cities instead of returning home speaks of their interdependence with their maternal households or sometimes even with the entire village communities who depend on their income (Kwanchewan and Prasit 2009: 54; Naiyana 2001: 104). They frequently support their kin in the hills with money earned in lowland towns, helping their families buy land and motorbikes for their brothers, and often finance their younger siblings' higher studies.<sup>25</sup>

Labour markets are also ethnicised, where highlanders occupy different positions in the urban labour market. In 2005, Kwanchewan noted differences in rural youth's occupation according to their locations of origin and thus 'ethnicities'. Whilst Akha people busied themselves in producing handicrafts and selling them on Night Bazaars, the Mien ran small businesses with selling soybean milk and the Hmong ran

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<sup>25</sup> Nok, 12.03.08, Kwanchewan, 10.07.09, Chelo 13.07.09

small factories producing souvenirs. The Karen are found less involved in trading. Instead, they seek employment at restaurants, gasoline stations and supermarkets, but also as tourist guides and security guards. Employment is found through personal networks. These networks may originate from a same native village, shared school experiences or attachment to a patron – who is usually a better-off person from the same ethnic group. Local systems of political patronage thus largely structure highland youth's migration for work and education to the lowlands (Kwanchewan 2005: 45)

### **Local everyday politics: seniority, patronage, and fosterage**

The principal of seniority largely structures social relations in Thailand, including relationships among children, between children and adults as well as between adults of different political economic status. In my research, Karen children migrate for education between geographic and institutional locations, such as foster households. These places and institutions are shaped by local everyday politics based on seniority and political patronage. This section first explains the relationship between seniority and political patronage, as well as their role in structuring everyday politics in rural Thailand, especially systems of child fosterage.

#### *The principal of seniority*

In Thailand, interpersonal relations are structured according to the principal of seniority, including interclass relations and patron-client relationships. It is important to know the age and profession of a person, to understand whether an encounter requires senior or junior treatment. The Thai terms *pîi* (senior) and *nóong* (junior) derive from kinship language. Although they originally signify genealogical relations, they are extended to structure the wider society among Thai and other ethnic groups

(Aranya 2008: 127–8; Ewers Andersen 1979/80; Kemp 1984: 56; Leo 2007: 1–2; Terwiel 1984: 19). If two persons are of the same generational and socio-economic status, they consider themselves '*pûan*'. '*Pûan*' is often loosely translated as 'friend', but can also mean comrade, company or companion. It does not bear the same connotations of the word 'friend' in English. Friendship in the English understanding can, and often does, transcend age and social status. By contrast, the Thai notion '*pûan*', as well as its Karen equivalent '*goz mauf s'kauf*', refer mostly to persons who are not in a *pîi-nóng* relationship.<sup>26</sup> This is also true for the Karen people: 'Karen frequently talk of their relations with others in terms of kinship, which may be a reference to the real facts of marriage or descent, may refer to a myth, or may refer to closeness of social relationships regardless of genealogical connections' (Kunstadter 1979: 137). For example, children (*dèk*) as a category are junior (*nóng*) vis-à-vis adults (*pûu yài*). By the mere fact of being children, young persons under 15 are at the bottom of Thai social hierarchy: 'There is, in rural Thailand, no concept of any golden age of childhood, nor are children seen as being in an enviable state. If anything, children are pitied because of their lack of power and the fact that they are everybody's *nong*' (Montgomery 2006: 59).

A senior is perceived as older, stronger and more experienced, which in turn implies a superior social status. A junior is seen to be younger, weaker, less experienced and of lower status. Typical examples of senior-junior relations are monks and laypersons, parents and children, teachers and students. Importantly, these relations are reciprocal and entail social obligations and benefits for both parties. The

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<sup>26</sup> That said, it is noteworthy that the terms *pîi* and *nóng* are used among friends and lovers in the English sense. Obviously, in these cases the words have an amicable or tender meaning while importing the moral dimensions of kinship into the friendship or partnership (Aranya Siripon, 16.06.08; Kemp 1984: 61; Sinnott 2004: 118).

junior pays respect and obedience to the senior, while the senior, in turn, returns these respectful signs through benevolent acts, thus supporting the welfare of juniors.

In everyday life, verbal and non-verbal behaviour express seniority and patron-client relations. It is a common verbal strategy to use kin terms as a means of manipulation: 'in kinship we have a field of social obligation where the individual actor is supposed to perform according to normative expectations of right and wrong irrespective of whether he or she actually likes the persons concerned, or whether fulfilment of these obligations serves perceptions of self-interest' (Kemp 1984: 60). For example, fictive kinship in domestic service relations does not automatically mean that domestic workers are treated like biological kin. Instead, labour can sometimes be exploited under the guise of family work (Muttarak 2004: 515–16). Also, non-verbal communication, such as deferential body language (bowing, nodding the head, etc.) expresses seniority. Spatial segregation of activities within schools and households is another strategy to express senior-junior and patron-client relations. All this has general implications for the social status of children in Thai society. Moreover wider social senior-junior relations also shape political economic status diversity among children in different households at different locations in Thailand.

### *Seniority and political patronage*

The principle of seniority further translates to patronage relations, i.e. unequal socio-economic and political relations. Patronage relations are exchanges between two parties of different socio-economic and political status, such as richer and poorer households. They are not legally codified and last as long as both sides benefit from the agreement. Political patronage indicates reciprocal obligations and this often encompasses mutual assurance and aid, as well as validation of social status.

Typically, the senior exchanges material favours for the juniors' expenditure of labour or effort. Moreover, patrons gain status through their ability to maintain clients. Clients, in turn, profit from their attachment to socio-economically and/or politically influential seniors (Muttarak 2004: 507; Terwiel 1984: 19).

Rural Thai village politics are typically organized according to patterns of political patronage (Walker 2008b). Political patrons are capable of mobilising external resources for locally valued initiatives. It is important for them to create the perception of using personal funds for public purposes, although this distinction is often blurred. In addition, they are expected to contribute to community development through 'personal sacrifice'. Personal sacrifice can have many forms such as participating in committees, being actively involved in village festivities, etc. (Walker 2008b: 90–2). Yet, these unofficial authorities are not acting out of mere altruism and corruption is a concern: 'it is broadly accepted that many of those who are active in the collective sphere will also gain some private benefit from public office. The key is to maintain this benefit at a level that is appropriate' (*ibid.*: 95).

Seniority and patronage are not only about social constraint and manipulation of interpersonal relations, but they also speak about trust relations. Indeed, in most situations individuals do not have direct control over the institutional practices and social conditions that shape their lives. Where welfare systems and social services are unreliable, individual independence can be risky and people rely on personal connections and networks:

In patronage politics, things work more by influence than by bureaucratic fiat. People do not seek a dangerous state of independence.... Rather they seek ever-more powerful mediators who can use personal influence to get them jobs and scholarships, and protect them from heavy-handed government bureaucrats or jealous neighbours who might trump up destructive court cases against them (Bledsoe 1990: 75).

For example, in rural Thailand, and among the Karen, asking (fictive) kin (*pîi-nóng*) for unpaid work assistance is a common practice: ‘We ask each other because we can trust each other. And also because we know we can ask’.<sup>27</sup> Relatives are considered more efficient and trustworthy, in contrast to unknown employees.<sup>28</sup> Also, within the context of modernisation and uneven development, fosterage associated with patron-client relations has become an important mechanism in regulating children’s migration for education (Walker 2008b: 95). Kin networks are mobilised to alleviate household expenditures and support household aspirations, for example, to send children to school. Child circulation and fosterage also speak about such socio-economic interdependence and patron-client relations between (fictive) kin.

*Fosterage: institutional interdependence and patronage politics*

Child circulation between kin is a traditional local means for mutual support between related households of unequal social status. In the absence of stable welfare systems in the highlands of northern Thailand, fosterage is linked to networks of kinship and political patronage. Leinaweaver’s definition of child circulation also fits the Thai context as ‘a way for receiving households to recruit labor, for sending households to negotiate the economic pressures of childrearing, and for young people to contribute to family goals and to mediate, forging dense and valued connections, between social groups’ (Leinaweaver 2008a: 19).

In literature on the Thai family, ‘fosterage’ is given little attention.<sup>29</sup> Yet, research suggests that fosterage for learning and work has a historical tradition in Siamese history. Anthropological studies evidence that Thai mothers send their

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<sup>27</sup> Aranya Siriphon, 16.06.08

<sup>28</sup> Rabiap, 16.06.08

<sup>29</sup> Compared to Western Africa (e.g. Bledsoe 1990; Alber 2004; Goody 1982) and the Americas (e.g. Fonseca 2004; Leifsen 2004; Leinaweaver 2007, 2008a) there exists little research on fosterage in Asia, in general.

children for care to relatives, especially on the matrilineal side (Rende Taylor 2005ab: 343–7; Richter 1996: 329; Richter and Podhisita 1992: 12; Terwiel 1984: 36). It is thus not unusual for Karen children to temporarily reside with another family member. Ethno-theories on child rearing, for instance, say that aunts may educate a child better than a biological mother.<sup>30</sup> Today, Karen and Thai children largely circulate and migrate for education, especially during the transition to secondary school. Away from home, they move into foster homes or school dormitories where they study and work. Traditionally, foster relations in Thailand are ‘free from formal debt’<sup>31</sup> and range from taking in a poor relative to help with chores, to exchanging children for child rearing and full adoption. Although free from ‘formal debt’, children may remain morally indebted throughout their lifetime. For example, before the existence of modern schools, boys who did not learn in temples relocated into the household of a teacher, with the senior promising dedication to teaching and the junior obedience and application to learning. The student thus became a household member and participated in the economic activities of the house. After the completion of their studies, students remained in lifelong contact with and visited their former teacher every year to pay homage through giving small presents (FM 1960: 13).

Foster relations are always embedded in wider institutional power configurations. They are never neutral, but mirror economic and gendered hierarchies between and within households as well as with other institutions such as NGOs and religious networks. Sending households are generally less wealthy than receiving ones

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<sup>30</sup> Rabiap 10.12.07; Ratana 27.02.08

<sup>31</sup> Bondage was another form of exchanges between children, their households and more powerful institutions. Until the mid-eighteenth century, the lower classes in Siam were bound to servitude to various degrees and children were the property of their parents’ master. Children were also ‘donated’ to monasteries for servitude. Until the late nineteenth century, it was socially acceptable for householders to sell themselves, their wives and their children. In 1874, King Chulalongkorn proposed a gradual abolition of slavery and 10 years later he ordered the release of servants’ children. Nevertheless, the practice of attaching parts of the family for money to a richer household continued, although not under the name of ‘servitude’. Importantly, these practices are not identical with foster relations (Terwiel 1984: 28–32).

and girls tend to enter foster care more frequently than boys. Transferring a child, then, to someone of higher socio-economic status not only allows the child to draw from benefits such as education and the learning of skills but also alleviates the economic burdens of households and communities. With all the experiences acquired in another location, children might return financial, social, and intellectual resources to their communities and thus become potential future patrons themselves (Bowie 2004: 3; Fonseca 2004: 168; Leinaweaver 2008b: 64–5).

Within foster households, foster children often have a lower social status than other household members. They rise earlier and work harder than biological children. Often they also eat different food at separated times and spaces from core household members. Biological parents of foster children may not be scandalised by this but rather accept the treatment of their children as part of the power relationship between their own household and the wealthier family.

Being a foster child often confers upon children ambiguous social status vis-à-vis other children. On a symbolic level, Karen children growing up outside their own household have a reputation for exercising agency through having high morals and wit. Karen mythology offers many stories of orphans who are deprived of their political-economic household support, yet thanks to their high moral character, they attract the attention of good supernatural beings who invest the orphan with a share of supernatural power. Thus equipped, children often become real political heroes capable of outdoing powerful figures such as kings, tigers and administrators (Hayami 2004: 27; Hinton E. 1999, Hinton P. 1979: 86). Such stories highlight orphans' integrity as well as their potentially subversive power. Today, this symbolism is mirrored in migrating Karen children's flexible social positioning between geographic and institutional locations.



## **Conclusion**

This chapter thoroughly outlined the historical macro context of my ethnographic study on childhood transitions in northern Thailand. In particular, I focused on ‘ethnicity’ as political economic construct, on Thai government education’s impact on national minorities, the expanding cash economy as well as the role of modern and conventional institutions. Weaving together the literature on these political economic developments strongly supports my conceptual argument, outlined in Chapter1, that ‘ethnicity’ is neither a natural essence nor merely a cultural trait of peoples’ identities, but always related to political-economic inequalities. I explained how since early nation building, political, socio-economic and geographic marginality in rural Thailand has been constructed and re-constructed by different administrative, academic and non-governmental institutions.

My discussion of the development of modern Thai state education and the gradual expansion of state schools among ethnic minority people supports the argument of the crucial role of formal education in promoting the idea of an ethnically homogenous Thai nation state. Attempts to integrate ethnic minorities through state education into wider national political economic developments prepare increasing numbers of ethnic minority children for participation to wider national political economic developments. At the same time, social inequalities in terms of access to education persist, often depending on peoples’ localities.

I drew attention to the expanding cash economy in the highlands of Thailand, arguing that the Karen people have for a long time been linked to wider colonial, national and international market systems. Karen peoples’ historical involvement in wider economic systems is thus evidenced as well as their growing participation to

Thai national economy, often through employment at Royal Thai Agricultural projects. Such recognition of Karen peoples' involvement in wider economic systems is important in order to distinguish my viewpoint from popular Thai and Karen NGO discourses. These discourses often instrumentalize 'ethnicity' to negotiate minority rights and access to economic resources on regional, national and international levels. I explained that they often do this in demonizing the economic state development and Thai education as 'negative influences'. My own reading of the historical and contemporary literature remains sensitive to processes of regional differences in the impacts of development on ethnic minority people.

This sensitivity to regional differences among Karen people due to uneven development, in turn, is important to contextualize my empirical findings on political economic inequalities between Karen children and in particular my discussion on children's shifting status during processes of migration. Having thus outlined the macro context, Chapter 4 turns to the micro context of my research, Huay Tong village, in Mae Wang district.

## **CHAPTER 4. Setting the micro context: Huay Tong village**

### **Introduction**

Having established in Chapter 3 the historical macro context of political economic dissonances in northern Thailand, this chapter turns to the micro level of this research: Huay Tong village in Mae Wang district. Huay Tong is my major fieldwork site, the location where I conducted nine months of ethnographic research. The majority of research participants come from this village.

I argue that since the 1950s, Huay Tong village increasingly gained district wide importance because of the installation of a Royal Agricultural Project as well as a Thai government school. Because of the presence of modern institutions and access to labour market, the village is today a destination for seasonal adult and child migration for work and education. It is therefore important to understand how changing modes of production and learning have shaped Huay Tong.

Based on my ethnographic data, this chapter draws attention to institutional power relations in this setting, the role of the expanding cash economy and formal education. I relate local institutions of patronage politics with the young Karen peoples' social mobility for work and education between different institutional and geographic locations.

### **Huay Tong village**

Huay Tong village (*muban* Huay Tong), or Hse Htaf in the Karen language, is situated in Mae Win sub-district (*tambon*), the upper Mae Wang district (*amphoe*), Chiang Mae province (*changwat*) (see Maps 2 and 3). Huay Tong is 20 kilometres from the nearest lowland town Ban Kad and 70 kilometres from Chiang Mai. Daily

bus services connect the village with the two cities. The village is located 1,010 metres above sea level and situated in a zone of tropical monsoon climate with three characteristic seasons: a warm rainy season from May to October, a cold dry season from the end of November until the beginning of February, and a hot dry season from the end of February to the beginning of May. Communities within Mae Wang district comprise three ethnicities: ethnic northern Thai (*kon muang*) in the lowlands, Karen in the uplands, and Hmong in the higher parts of the hills (Montri and Pornthip 2001: 1).

#### *Village history and settlement*

The Karen settled in northern Thailand around 1804. There are around 400,000 Karen in Thailand. Most Karen people live in the northern and western parts of the country, particularly in the provinces of Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Son and Tak. There are over 2,000 Karen villages in Thailand and village sizes may vary from two or three households to over 700 households, the average being 25–30 households (Chumpol 1999: 18–19). In Thailand, there exist two Karen groups: Sgaw (calling themselves Pgak'nyau) and Pwo (calling themselves Phlong). Sgaw Karen make up 80 percent of the Karen population in Thailand. Research participants in this study are Sgaw. The majority of Sgaw Karen in Thailand are Buddhists, 20–30 percent are Christians, mostly Baptists, followed by Roman Catholics and a few Protestant denominations. Despite religious conversions, many Karen continue practicing animist ancestor worship (Kwanchewan 2003: 247; Platz 2003: 474–5; Sanit 1988: 126). Most research participants in this study are Catholic Christians and Buddhists from Mae Wang and Mae Chaem districts.

According to local oral history, the ancestors of people in Huay Tong migrated towards the end of the nineteenth century from Mae Hong Son to Chiang Mai Province. They seemed to have worked for the British Borneo Company in teak

logging and encountered the village location during forest work in the Huay Tong river valley. The oldest available document testifying to the settlement of a village is a certificate issued in 1908 by the British Consulate in Chiang Mai (Chumpol 1999: 163). Early settlements were temporary and people relocated to nearby locations for economic, political, spiritual and/or medical reasons. For example, when small pox spread during the Second World War the then village head decided to relocate the village.

In 1957, the village relocated for the last time, for religious reasons. Catholic priests had arrived in Mae Wang in 1944 (followed by the Phra Dhamma Charik Project in 1965). The then village chief decided to convert to Christianity, causing friction with his fellow settlers (Chumpol 2008: 40, 1993: 48), and the present-day Huay Tong was founded in 1956 by converted Christian Karen households. Since then, Huay Tong has never relocated. In 2008, the village priest reported a number of 110 households and 450 registered residents.<sup>32</sup> Most parts of the year, the actual number of residents is lower due to seasonal out-migration for education and work. At the same time, daily and weekly child and adult commuters from surrounding villages come to study at Huay Tong school or to work for the Royal Project. In addition, there exists seasonal in-migration from foster children and Thai employees to the Royal Project. These processes are more fully described below.

#### *Village organisations and political institutions*

The spatial village structure mirrors settlement patterns. Households of the descendants of the original settlers are located around the church building, the village entrance, the well of drinking water and the major paved road leading through the village. Because of their early settlement, these households have better-than-average

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<sup>32</sup> Bonpasteur, 08.04.08

assets of cultivable land. This proximity to material and spiritual resources as well as to infrastructure bestows these households with a lot of symbolic and economic power. The Royal Thai Project, the graveyard and the Thai government school are situated at the opposite end of the village, alongside the major road. In contrast to most established households, the majority of houses have no direct access to the road and/or fields. They cultivate fields and gardens at a distance from the village and seek employment with the Royal Agricultural Project. Outside the village, there is also a Buddhist hermit temple.

In terms of political organisation, the Karen have never had centralised political institutions. Instead, their villages are autonomous units with a traditional leader. The power of traditional leaders was limited to the management of ritual relations with the Lord of the Land (*kau k'ca*) who protected the village. Today, the village is integrated into the Thai administrative system. Most residents above the age of 15 hold Thai citizenship. As Thai citizens, they are eligible to receive social services such as free basic government education and health care. There is no official traditional leadership; however, elderly male villagers continue to be held in high esteem. They managed the Christian religious services until 1996 when a priest settled permanently in the village. An official head of village (*pûu yài baan*) typically represents Thai administrative power in Huay Tong. As in other Karen villages, the role of the village head is not comparable to the function of traditional ritual leaders or respected elders. Usually, *pûu yài baan* are younger than the conventional leaders. They are elected because of their skills in the Thai language and for their formal education, and not because of the wisdom and maturity gained through a long life of experience. For a modest monthly income, the *pûu yài baan* represents the village at regular gatherings in Mae Win, communicates district policies to villagers, etc. In

addition to the villagers, Thai school teachers and Thai employees of the Royal Project represent the mainstream Thai population in Huay Tong. They sometimes play a mediating role between the village and wider state structures. Because of their financial ability to act as political patrons to others, wealthy households in rural northern Thailand often hold more power than appointed heads of village. Also in Huay Tong, everyday village politics are shaped by local patron-client relations.

The Catholic Church organises religious life and rites in Huay Tong. The first village church was established in 1966 and twice rebuilt in 1977 and 1990. From 1956 to 1996, no priest lived permanently in Huay Tong and four successive elderly religious leaders scheduled religious services. In 1997, two Betherram priests moved to Huay Tong. During the time of my fieldwork, the village accommodated two lay catechists (*kru kham son*), three religious Karen sisters (*moj dof*) and two priests (*paj dof*). Catechists are academically trained assistants to the clergy. They help with ceremonies and community work. For example, in Huay Tong they also teach local children the Karen language. Similarly, in neighbouring Buddhist villages, the local monk instructs children in the Karen language. Households do not organise rituals by themselves but invite the priest or sisters, for instance, to intercede for sick household members. In addition, villagers ask priests to bless with consecrated lustre water<sup>33</sup> their rice fields, their houses, and also their motorbikes. Individual households have a little container with consecrated water. Similar to other religious groups in Thailand, the Karen in Huay Tong mark the life course with sacred rites of passage. Like Catholic communities around the world (e.g. Ridgely-Bales 2005), the Seven

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<sup>33</sup> For Karen Catholics, the sprinkling of lustre water consecrated by a priest is important in daily use. Karen Catholics are called '*phei thi hpo*' (people who sprinkle water), in contrast to Protestants who are '*bler thi hpo*' (people who immerse themselves in water) (Kwanchewan 2003: 224).

Sacraments<sup>34</sup> of the Catholic Church mark the spiritual aspects of peoples' life course.<sup>35</sup> During seasonal transitions, villagers join in seasonal Thai Buddhist celebrations such as Songkran in April and Loy Krathong in November. The seasonal importance of sacred rites is mirrored in illustrations produced by children (Fig. 2).



**Figure 2 Seasonal calendar drawn by 14-year-old boys (06.06.08)**

In their depiction of the year (Fig. 2), 14-years-old boys lay emphasis on seasonal celebrations. The left side of their seasonal calendar shows Songkran, the Buddhist water festival which also marks the New Year in Thailand. During this three day holiday children and youth all over Thailand engage in public water games, pouring water over each other as well as over passing by adults. The right side of the calendar shows the cold season, characterized by the Buddhist Loy Krathong festival in November and the Christian Christmas celebrations in December.

<sup>34</sup> According to Christian belief, 'sacraments are signs established by Christ that cause what they signify' (Holden and Pinsent 2007: 48) The Seven Sacraments are Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Confession, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony.

<sup>35</sup> Reception of the Sacraments is not necessarily bound to a certain age. Yet, the Sacraments touch all important stages and moments of Christian life and it is believed that there exists 'a certain resemblance between the stages of natural life and the stages of the spiritual life' (Catholic Church 2000: #1210).



The expanding cash economy impacts on religious practices. For example, 30 years ago villagers regularly attended evening Mass, but nowadays most watch TV.<sup>36</sup> Although the priest attunes the timing of evening Mass to the working patterns of villagers, those working with the Royal Project especially need the time in the evenings for household chores and cooking. As Sundays are not public holidays in Thailand, those employed at the Royal Project may find it difficult to attend Mass because they cannot forsake the wage of a working day.

Karen households in Mae Wang are generally matrilocal and composed of a nuclear family. Women hold a relatively strong position within the family and men are conventionally associated with the sphere of ritual and public life (Mischung 1984: 75–9). Because of matrilocality, daughters are more likely than sons to remain in their home village after marriage. Yet, household compositions change with socio-economic transformations and rising demands for cash income. The timing of marriage is affected by Karen youth's increasing time at school, the growing dependency on cash economy and modern bureaucracy. Young people marry later so as to earn cash to cover increasing household expenses.<sup>37</sup> For the sake of employment, a newly wed couple may also forsake the tradition of matrilocal residence.<sup>38</sup> In Huay Tong, the timing of marriage depends on a young person's biological age, education and/or work experience beyond lower secondary school and in some cases also on birth order. Legal age is important for the timing of marriage in Thailand. According to the Thai Civil and Commercial Code (1976), Book V, Section 1435 'a betrothal can only take place when the man and the woman have completed their seventeenth year of age'. Furthermore, if one of the partners is a minor below the age of 20, he or she needs the consent of a legal guardian (Thailand Civil and Commercial Code 1976:

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<sup>36</sup> Laa, 11.02.08

<sup>37</sup> Bonpasteur, 23.08.09

<sup>38</sup> Chaa Moj, 24.08.09

Section 1435). Yet, there exists a real gap between legal prescriptions and cultural practices in rural Thailand where people tend to marry before the age of 17 (Montgomery 2006: 58). Catholic priests discourage marriages below the age of 17. Nevertheless, marriages in Mae Wang at around the age of 18 are not uncommon among the Karen and Thai teachers find this ‘very young’.<sup>39</sup> Different local, national, and international institutions are thus shaping transitions of children in Huay Tong.

### **Economic changes and agricultural production**

Market-oriented rice cultivation started in 1927 in the lower part of Mae Wang. This development was a consequence of logging activities and the increasing demand for rice by workers who lived in logging companies’ temporary camps. Young men from Huay Tong also sought paid employment as elephant mahouts for lumbering companies and returned the cash to their households. However, in upper Mae Wang, trade beyond Karen villages remained limited (Chumpol 1999: 153–4; Montri and Pornthip 2001: 3). During the late 1960s, Chinese traders from Ban Kad opened in Huay Tong a small money lending business. This furthered the monetisation of social relations in daily village life. The foreign merchants did not engage in agriculture but accumulated capital in the form of growing rice storage. Several villagers seem to have suffered financially from their engagement with this lending business and started perceiving the Chinese as ‘cold blooded’ and ‘bad for our society’. For example, for 10 borrowed Baht, villagers had to return 15 Baht. Eventually, ‘we kicked them out’.<sup>40</sup> Importantly, the problem was not the furthering of monetisation but villagers’ financial loss through the money lending business. Indeed, after the departure of the Chinese, some villagers complained that ‘they had nothing to buy’ and soon a local

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<sup>39</sup> Diary, 19 and 20.02.08; Belle, 10.08.09

<sup>40</sup> Laa, 11.02.08

person opened another shop offering items such as canned fish, fish paste, cookies and sugar cane. Resistance to the Chinese traders was possible because of the installation of an alternative bank system. As part of the Catholic Church development aid programme, priests introduced a rice bank system in Huay Tong in 1969. Because of the low interest rates,<sup>41</sup> villagers felt the bank contributed to improving their economic situation. During the five first years of its running, the rice bank came to hold 1,000 tanks of rice and expanded to other villages (Chumpol 2008: 36).

Prior to the installation of the Royal Agricultural Project in 1976, 75 percent of Huay Tong villagers engaged in seasonal subsistence wet rice farming. Wet rice was grown once a year during the rainy season. After the harvests, the paddy fields remained empty throughout the dry season. Wet rice farming tells of the interdependence of households and communities. A system of labour exchange ensured that the whole community managed their rice production in due time. In labour exchange, a person may request labour assistance from another under the tacit understanding that this will be reciprocated at a yet unknown moment. Where community labour exchange was insufficient or unavailable, additional labour was hired, either in one's own village or among poorer Karen households, e.g. in Mae Chaem district. Seasonal workers received rice or cash in payment. For instance, in 1972 a married couple with children at school hired seasonal labour to help with land cultivation. They used kinship connections to another village to ask for a male and female youth from a poor household to relocate temporarily to Huay Tong. The two young people stayed with the couple during the rainy season and were paid with paddy rice which they returned to their maternal household. The same couple hired daily labour for other tasks such as fence-building (Chumpol 1999: 153–4).

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<sup>41</sup> Tanks of rice were bought and lent to villagers during times of economic hardship, especially during rice scarcity in the rainy season. After the harvest, villagers returned rice to the bank at the rate of 12 tanks of rice for 10 borrowed tanks.

Infrastructure improvement started with road construction in 1975 in preparation for the constructions of the Royal Agricultural Project in 1976. For the first time, Huay Tong was connected by road with the lowland market town Ban Kad and with other villages in Mae Wang. However, it took around 10 years for the villagers to feel they really succeeded in the economy of cash crops and wage labour<sup>42</sup>. For example, the poor quality of the initial road slowed down the transport of goods, especially during the rainy season. In 1988, the first road was replaced by a paved road. Today, lorries drive continuously through Huay Tong, transporting cabbages, lettuce, flowers and other goods from the Royal Project to wholesale markets in the lowlands. There, highland produce are sold to individual market tenders for sale at local markets in cities and towns. In addition to widening the range of commerce, the road allows for regular migration for education and employment outside the village. In 1978 the Accelerated Rural Development Office built a dam, with a capacity of 400,000 cubic metres. The reservoir had a hydraulic power electricity generator which delivered electricity for the first time to households in Huay Tong. Importantly, this new irrigation system allowed crop cultivation during the dry season (Chumpol 1999: 191). Today, the dam causes ambiguous feelings among the villagers. In 1987, a village boy drowned there, and since then, at least two other persons have drowned there. Villagers consider the area to be haunted by ghosts and many adults forbid children to play close to the area.<sup>43</sup>

Local modes of production and labour organisation also changed with the introduction of the Royal Project. The Land Development Department provided government assistance for the conversion of swidden land into permanent gardens. Villagers use this land to grow cash crop and fruits. Thus, the importance of swidden

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<sup>42</sup> Laa, 23.03.08

<sup>43</sup> Rabiap, 05.03.08; Laa, 23.03.08

agriculture for the local economy declined steadily and disappeared completely by 1992 (Chumpol 1999: 117, 192–3). Today, most villagers continue growing wet rice during the rainy season and earn income with cash crops during the summer months.<sup>44</sup> Children participate to all economic activities and combine their work with formal education at the state school.

### **Modern state education in Huay Tong**

Until the late 1970s, children in Huay Tong had to migrate for education. Since 1957, Karen adults have sent their children to the Catholic school in Mae Pon, but ‘before nobody went to school’.<sup>45</sup> The distance to Mae Pon was significant and required children to travel on foot for two days through the jungle. An adult male research participant recalls walking to the Mae Pon school in a group of 10 children from Huay Tong and 10 from another village, in the company of two or three adults. Because of the distance, children only returned to their home village during school breaks to help with the agricultural labour on the rice fields.<sup>46</sup> In 1966, the first village school was established and Betharram missionaries sent a catechist, a teacher named Tip, to Huay Tong. Educated in Mae Pon, Tip taught children arithmetic, as well as the Thai and English languages. In 1973, Huay Tong children started attending a Thai government school in neighbouring Baan Naung Tau. Teaching and school attendance were irregular. The children commuted once or twice per week to school and often found the teacher absent.<sup>47</sup> Five years later, in 1978, Huay Tong received its first Thai government school built by the Buddhist Phra Dhammacharik Project. In 1979, the school received the official name Baan Huay Tong School and was put under the

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<sup>44</sup> Laa 11.02.08

<sup>45</sup> Laa, 11.02.08

<sup>46</sup> Laa, 10.02.08 and 15.07.08

<sup>47</sup> Sakeme, 21.03.08

directive of the Office of Secondary Schools, Amphur Sanpathong. In January 2008, Huay Tong school counted 301 students, 15 Thai teachers and two employees. Thai government education is available for kindergarten levels 1 and 2, primary school (*bprà-tǒm*) grades 1–6 as well as secondary school (*máttayom*) grades 1–3. A range of institutional networks provide personal connections between highland villages and lowland schools. Students and parents are generally now more familiar with the national education system and better equipped to navigate the world outside their living areas.<sup>48</sup>

Increasing numbers of minority students migrate for education in Mae Wang, as in other parts of northern Thailand. At Huay Tong school, teachers observed throughout the last years an increase in students who commute daily for lower secondary education at Huay Tong school.<sup>49</sup> Since 1999, the school has had a girl dormitory and since 2008 a boy dormitory for students whose villages are too distant for daily travel. Today, Huay Tong is the only Karen village in Mae Win offering schooling beyond primary school. Therefore, the village has become a local destination for children's migration for education. At the time of my fieldwork, almost half of the students at the post-primary level commuted from surrounding villages: namely, Huai Kiang (two kilometres away), Huay Khan (two kilometres away), Naung Tau (four kilometres), Huay Kao Lip (five kilometres), Tung Luang (eight kilometres), Huay Yen (c. 14 kilometres away), Naung Mun Tan (c. 20 kilometres away), and Mae Ta La (Mae Chaem district). Moreover, 15 toddlers commuted daily to Huay Tong kindergarten from neighbouring Huay I Khan village.<sup>50</sup> With the exception of Mae Ta La, the villages are situated in Mae Wang district. Those living in nearby villages commute daily on motorbikes or in collective

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<sup>48</sup> Sangwang, 15.07.08

<sup>49</sup> Giat, 21.08.09, Payrak, 03.08.09

<sup>50</sup> Oik, 04.02.08

car transports funded by the local administration. Those whose home villages are located further away stay in school dormitories or enter into seasonal foster arrangements. They only return to their home villages during weekends or school breaks. In 2009, 22 girls and 13 boys<sup>51</sup> from Tun Luang, Huay Giang, Naung Mun Tan and Huay Yen were staying in the dormitories. They were supervised by female teachers who stay on the compound during the week. According to their teacher, the students are responsible for school and personal maintenance: ‘All students should have work’.<sup>52</sup> This remark puts moral value on children’s work and indicates that formal education and children’s economic activities are not separated in rural Thailand.

After primary school, the Karen children move on to lower secondary school, which is also available in the village. In 2008, 27 out of 30 primary school graduates stayed in Huay Tong for secondary education.<sup>53</sup> The remaining three became ordained as novices for post-primary education in the Buddhist Wat Srisoda in Chiang Mai. Graduation from lower secondary school is again a major turning point. After nine years of basic education, most youth aspire to temporally leave their villages for higher secondary education or apprenticeships. Even if they are not sure where they will go and to which school, they want to ‘go continue studying somewhere else’.<sup>54</sup>

Most students make an educational transition to high school in the lowlands or seek paid employment with the Royal Agricultural Project. The majority of boys continue in Sanpathong Agricultural College or go to St Joseph minor seminary. Girls tend to go to Ban Kad high school, Santisuk school or Regina Coeli school in Chiang Mai. However, Ban Kad high school is a preferred option for many Karen, Hmong

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<sup>51</sup> Nattaya, 22.07.09, Giat, 20.12.07

<sup>52</sup> ‘All students *dtong mii tam ngaan*’ (Rak, 15.03.08)

<sup>53</sup> Rak, 10.6.08

<sup>54</sup> ‘*Bpai rian dtòò tîi ùun*’ (Diary, 06.06.08)

and northern Thai girls in Mae Wang district.<sup>55</sup> The school prepares students through a foreign language stream and a science stream. Teenage girls in Huay Tong prefer the language stream and they are especially proud to learn Japanese. Located in Mae Win, Ban Kad is also the closest high school to Huay Tong village. The close distance enables/obliges students to return on weekends to Huay Tong where they engage in paid work and/or household chores. High school teachers have noted an increase in highland students since the 1990s. Today, more than 50 percent of Ban Kad students are ethnic minorities, whilst 16 years ago it was perhaps only 25 percent.

Karen children's growing migration for education prompts increasing collaboration between households, Thai government schools and religious and non-governmental bodies. The support of religious networks is now different than in the past, reflecting the changing needs of increasing numbers of Karen students who aspire to higher formal education.

### **International institutions and scholarships**

In Mae Win, local, national and international institutions structure children's schooling transitions. As in the past, inter-household fosterage and patronage arrangements continue to be important regulating structures for Karen children's mobility. However, today, household patronage networks not only speak about local power configurations; they are also linked to modern national and international institutions. In my study, children and adults negotiate financial support with the Thai government, the Catholic Church and Japanese donors. In this section, I contextualise the institutional presence of Japanese and Catholic organisations.

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<sup>55</sup> Belle, 03.08.09



### *Japanese private donors*

Japanese funding to highland students is widespread in northern Thailand. Since the Pacific War, there have been ties between Japan and hill-dwelling peoples in Burma and Thailand (Smith 1999: 79–80; Wessel 2003: 75). Since 1994, the private Eito Zaidan Foundation, founded by a Japanese wartime general, has provided scholarships for Ban Kad high school students. Usually, ethnic minority students from the mountains have access to these funding possibilities.<sup>56</sup> Japanese families commit themselves to ‘adopt’ a student, providing educational funds for the duration of six years. The annual value of an individual scholarship is around 3,000 Baht. Depending on the decision of their ‘adoptive’ Japanese family, students may earn a scholarship for college studies in Japan.

In exchange for funding, the school maintains a Japanese sacred wartime memorial and graveyard for ‘sleeping heroes’ (*neru yuushi*). Ban Kad Wittayakom School was established in 1977, but in 1992 Japanese researchers discovered and identified scattered bones within the area around and within the school compound. The Japanese Ministry of Health and Welfare, the ambassador of Japan in Chiang Mai, Buddhist monks and General Shirabe Kanga arranged for the building of the memorial and shrine. Located on the school grounds, the memorial contains the remains of 18,000 Japanese soldiers who died under supposedly unknown circumstances in the Ban Kad area during the 1942 Japanese Burma expedition. General Shirabe Kanga had participated in this expedition<sup>57</sup> (Boggett 2000: 103), and in 1994 he started fundraising to support six Ban Kad high school students. He visited

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<sup>56</sup> Group discussion, 05. 08.09, 10. 08.09, Belle 08.12.09

<sup>57</sup> Belle, email 08.12.09

the school each year until his death in 2007. By 2009, 52 Ban Kad high school students had been supported through the ongoing work of the Foundation.<sup>58</sup>

In Ban Kad and Huay Tong, there is also support from other Japanese donors. For instance, since 2000, the Network Harmony Foundation has provided funds for the construction of dormitories, school supplies, lunches, as well as scholarship aids at a range of schools, including Huay Tong and Ban Kad. In February 2008, a Network Harmony delegation visited Huay Tong for the inauguration of a newly built dormitory funded with a donation of 350,000 Baht.<sup>59</sup>

#### *Catholic scholarship programme*

As outlined above, the Catholic Church has promoted and encouraged formal education to the Karen since the 1950s. Since their arrival in Chiang Mai province, Catholic missionaries have sponsored education by building schools in the highlands and/or connecting Karen children to educational institutions in the lowlands. Children who benefited from these educational connections in the 1950s and early 1960s are now leading Karen professionals in NGOs, universities and also within the Catholic Church<sup>60</sup> (Prasert 2007: 82). For example, in Huay Tong, Ratana finished higher secondary school during night classes at the private Catholic Regina Coeli school and worked for a few years as nurse in a Catholic hospital in Bangkok before she returned to Huay Tong. Her older brother, Rabiap, is a Jesuit priest at the Seven Fountains Centre in Chiang Mai. From Chiang Mai, Rabiap makes efforts to provide institutional support from the Jesuit Social Service (JESS) to highland villages in northern Thailand, including Huay Tong.

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<sup>58</sup> Belle 08.12.09

<sup>59</sup> ca. GBP 6,382

<sup>60</sup> Providing Christian leadership for the Karen through extensive educational activities has also been the main impact of Protestant Christian missionaries in Burma (Jorgensen 1997: viii).

Since 1992, JESS in Bangkok has provided scholarships for socio-economically disadvantaged students, and since 1998 also through the Seven Fountains Centre in Chiang Mai. In light of increasing numbers of Karen high school graduates since the late 1990s, JESS started in 2002 to support youth studying at university level. Scholarship holders in higher education are also helped in finding temporary jobs to generate income and support their families (Cholorsi 2007: 25–6; UCAN 2009: Thailand). The Jesuits raise funds and distribute them through local assistants to children and youth from economically disadvantaged households. The programme covers the costs of sheltering children from distant villages like Mae Ta La in foster households, as well as expenses for uniforms, study materials, school lunches, school fees and the construction of dormitories. Initially, the programme supported 20 children, but increasingly widened its scope.

During the academic year 2008–09 it supported a total of 468 students in more than 13 locations in northern Thailand with around 3,005 Baht (GBP 45.80, 22.11.09) per student (Seven Fountains 2009: 8). Funding stems from five major sources: donations from abroad, an annual fundraising dinner, Thai benefactors, Thai and international retreat guests, and collections during religious services (*ibid.*). Students are selected by local assistants on the basis of poverty. Most scholarship holders are Buddhist or without attachment to religious institutions. Money is distributed to local assistants who are personally known to the priest Fr Rodrigo, who is responsible for the scholarship programme. Local assistants are often Karen Catholics. In addition, there are also committees composed of Thai school teachers who help monitor the distribution process.<sup>61</sup> Local assistants thus mediate between Thai state schools, Karen villagers and Catholic priests and donors in Chiang Mai.

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<sup>61</sup> Rodrigo, 09.06.08

In Huay Tong, the scholarship supports many students. Money also goes directly to Huay Tong school for construction work, such as raising a canteen building in 2009. In Ban Kad, the programme maintains a student dormitory. In July 2009, the dormitory hosted 29 girls and four boys. Several of the girls are from Huay Tong. Increasing numbers of high school graduates with professional aspirations pose new challenges for the government and private sectors. Catholic religious in charge of scholarship programmes perceive the need to support older Karen students who wish to continue their education at colleges or universities. Yet, this is difficult because funds are limited and opinions differ about which age group should be prioritised. On the one hand, several donors prefer supporting younger children who ‘don’t have a choice’. In their view, older students should be able to support themselves with small jobs during their higher studies. On the other hand, there are also those who worry about dropping high school graduates, and wonder about the purpose of supporting students until the end of high school without offering them a way to make use of their degrees.<sup>62</sup> These dilemmas indicate the interplay of global markets, ideas and transitions of young people. Modern sentimentality around ‘childhood’ as period of vulnerability seems to shape donors’ preference for investing in younger children rather than adolescents or older youth. At the same time, the young Karen people aspire towards adult future in which paid work is central. In youth’s view investing in high school education can help in accessing attractive employment opportunities to support their households in the future. For high school education, in turn, students rely on institutional support, such as Japanese and Catholic NGOs described above. Moreover, as outlined below, socio-economic status differences among Karen

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<sup>62</sup> Bonpasteur, 23.08.09; Rodrigo, 09.06.08

children shape their access to scholarship institutions and thus their range of social mobility.

### **Economic diversification and social mobility**

Karen villages are structured according to status and children adapt to the socio-economic status of their households. Nevertheless, there exists a collective sense of shared poverty: 'Within Karen villages, the doctrine of shared poverty is adhered to for public image but is not followed in reality' (Kunstadter 1979: 134). The situation was similar in my study village Huay Tong, where richer residents in particular stressed a collective Karen village identity based on the shared fate of poverty.

Arguably, the Royal Project raises the socio-economic status of Huay Tong village vis-à-vis neighbouring villages. Year-round irrigation supply allows for more agricultural activities than other villages who continue growing their crop during the rainy season. The village economy relies on hired adult and child labour from other villages. The Project employs workers from surrounding villages as well as lowland Thai agricultural researchers and Shan workers from Burma.<sup>63</sup> In Huay Tong, earning cash is increasingly necessary in order to afford changing lifestyles and rising economical and educational aspirations. People continue growing their own paddies, but also need to earn an income: 'Après la rizière il faut chercher de l'argent'.<sup>64</sup> Villagers rely heavily on food purchased at local grocery stores and often send toddlers on errands. People have to finance the rising educational aspirations of the younger generation and to buy consumer goods such as TVs, DVD players and lowland fashion. Workers and students need vehicles and gasoline to commute to their places of education and employment beyond the village; for instance, in February

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<sup>63</sup> Rabiap 08.07.09

<sup>64</sup> 'After the rice field, it is necessary to search for money' (Bonpasteur, 23.08.09).

2008, the price for one litre of gasoline was 37 Baht, which is more than a third of a day's wage. Members of the poorest households often depend on wages at the Royal Agricultural Project. Still, for many, employment with the Royal Project is not enough to cover these expenses. At the time of my fieldwork, daily wages amounted 100 Thai Baht (around GBP 2), which villagers themselves value as 'little' (*noi*).<sup>65</sup> Poorer villagers thus minimise or stop their own rice-growing activities so as to maximise time for temporary and seasonal employment inside and outside the village. Adults and youth find temporal employment as agricultural wage labourers on lowland farms,<sup>66</sup> or else they work on construction sites in Ban Kad. Well-to-do farmers hold better-paid lower-middle-class occupations, e.g. in trade, local administration and teaching. These households are able to invest in education necessary for better-paid positions and can also access enough capital to pay for motorcycles, cars and gasoline necessary to reach work places outside the village. A minority of rich households participate in better-paid middle-class work, for example, as shop owners or in senior positions in NGOs (Yos 2004: 111).

In Huay Tong, enrolment in college education is not unheard of. By December 2008, 27 Huay Tong residents were holding academic degrees: 12 men and 15 women. The most common degrees are bachelor degrees in Primary Education (8), Agricultural Technology (8) and Social Science (5). Most degrees are earned at Chiang Mai Rajabhat University and Maejo University, two institutions known for having a high percentage of highland students. Typically, these students completed their bachelor studies, and a minority of three men and one woman enrolled in

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<sup>65</sup> Nauj Popu, 24.03.08. For example, in Chiang Mai, a fast food chain pays employees 20 Baht (c. GBP 0.4) per hour.

<sup>66</sup> Due to differences in altitude and temperature, the main agricultural season starts later in the plains and some tasks require year-round labour. Labour shortage exists because rural lowland Thais also migrate for seasonal work outside the agricultural sector to towns and cities (Chumpol 1999: 196–7).

master's and/or doctoral degrees. The degrees in Agricultural Technology were all earned by men (Chumpol 2008: 54–8). These studies have largely been supported by loans and scholarships from universities, NGOs as well as the Thai government. For those whose studies are part of their religious formation, study costs are covered by their order or congregation.

For employment, those with academic degrees often need to migrate. For example, only two female degree holders from Huay Tong found employment in kindergarten and nursery schools in Mae Wang. Both women are related to influential families in Huay Tong and their kin connections have likely been helpful in arranging positions in geographic proximity to their maternal households. For the others, flexibility for work migration seems a necessary requirement in order for them to apply their education. They work in lowland towns and other districts, such as Chiang Mai City, Bangkok and Lamphun province. Notwithstanding the geographic distance from the highlands, these Karen youth and adults do not cut off all links to their home culture. Instead, their lives remain interdependent with their households and communities.

Professional activities of degree holders from Huay Tong are sometimes connected to Karen society and, in fact, their ethnic minority status becomes an asset for middle-class job qualification. For example, Laa and Nauj Tik work for Thai NGOs operating along the Thai-Burma border. In these positions, their highland status is a clear advantage for communication with Burmese Karen forced migrants. Karen Catholic religious, like Rabiap or Malee, work with socio-economically disadvantaged Karen-speaking communities all over northwest Thailand. Their jobs involve youth work, aid delivery to isolated Karen communities, collaboration with Thai teachers at high schools for workshops, etc. Moreover, Rabiap and Malee also

worked on academic degrees at Chiang Mai University. In his master's thesis in Social Science, Rabiap examined Karen peoples' relation to natural resources through traditional songs, and Malee continue to work on a master's thesis in Women Studies on power relations in gender and ethnicity in religious life.<sup>67</sup>

They work with and for disadvantaged Karen people, while engaging academically with the situation of the Karen as an ethnic minority in Thailand. Although their occupations keep them largely in the lowlands, they continue to be part of an active social network with Karen relatives and friends who dwell equally in the cities. Once settled in the lowlands permanently, people like Rabiap become important points of contact for fellow Karen people who newly arrive in Chiang Mai. During major holidays and celebrations, such as Songkran in April, Huay Tong professionals return for a visit to their maternal households and thus remain to some degree interdependent with their households and the village.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the historical and political economic micro context of my major research site, Huay Tong village, in Mae Wang district. I explained that Huay Tong village is embedded into wider institutional structures and market systems. Since the village foundation, Huay Tong leadership has been on good terms with national and international institutions, such as the Royal Thai government and the Catholic Church. The village thus benefited since the 1950s from governmental and non-governmental economic and educational development aid. Local presence of national and international institutions enhances the political economic status of Huay Tong vis-à-vis other villages. Especially since the installation of a Royal Agricultural Project in 1976 and the introduction of formal Thai education in 1978, the village has been

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<sup>67</sup> Kwanchewan, 10.07.09; Malee, 12.07.09



intensively linked to regional, national and international socio-economic and political transformations. These processes, in turn, impact on the socio-economic diversification of village households and the lives of children attached to household economies. Thus, within a context of expanding cash economy and modern education, Huay Tong turned into a provincial destination for many migrating Karen children. The village became a place of transition for school and work. Young people arrive to study and work in Huay Tong and from there to other places for higher education or for work.

Together, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 build a strong contextual basis for my empirical analysis of Karen children's transition experiences. The following four empirical chapters explore how processes of changing modes of production and learning shape the political economy of Karen childhood transitions in Huay Tong village, Mae Wang district. The next Chapter 5 provides an analysis of political economic status differences among Karen children through the lenses of their changing economic activities.

## **CHAPTER 5. Economic diversification and Karen children's working activities**

### **Introduction**

Having established the conceptual, methodological, and historical context of my research throughout Chapters 1 to 4, I turn now to the analysis of my empirical data. This Chapter 5 asks how changing modes and sites of production impact on Karen childhood transitions. My findings evidence that in a Karen economy based on subsistence farming, children's working activities were largely organised according to gender and generation. I argue that socio-economic developments of the last several years have led to economic status diversification among boys and girls in Huay Tong. Accordingly, young peoples' gendered working activities are nowadays organised principally around their economic and political status. Moreover, my data suggest that children's gendered paid and unpaid working activities are interdependent with local and national and international legislation as well as formal and informal economies and related work ethics. Emergent life course aspirations highlight that girls and boys are aware of the interdependence between their lives and household economies, which in turn are shaped by modern institutions and an insecure labour market.

### **Changing modes of production**

Since the installation of the Royal Project in 1978, the village economy has continued to rely on the interdependence between households through labour exchange during peak agricultural periods of rice transplantation and harvesting. Yet scheduled work with the Royal Project, as well as labour- and care-intensive cash crop tending, narrow villagers' flexibility in assisting each other in activities related to the subsistence economy (Chumpol 1999: 152). Nevertheless, villagers negotiate ways for mutual assistance. For example, sending their children during weekends as work

replacement for the Royal Project allows them to help fellow villagers on their rice fields. All over rural Thailand, ploughing and harvesting are peak times in the agricultural circle. The hot and rainy seasons are the most labour-intensive periods for rice production and children's working assistance is highly demanded (Knodel 2002). School holidays cover cultivation and harvesting periods, thus allowing girls and boys to fully support their households' subsistence economies. Huay Tong experiences a literal population shift when youth return from their places of study during summer holidays. During the months of April and May, I observed these 'returnees' not only enjoying their school holidays, but also working hard to support their household economies. Twelve-year-old girls mentioned they help with the harvest, mostly during the weekends and not during school time.<sup>68</sup> Gender relations of productions have also changed. In shifting cultivation, women are responsible for hill farming whilst men dedicate themselves to rice fields. Women pass on knowledge of the seeds to their daughters. In contrast, the Royal Project trains male employees in agricultural techniques, who then pass the knowledge on to female employees and/or their wives. The women, in turn, apply the knowledge on their tenancy (e.g. Sarintip 1999).

In addition, generational relations of production have changed. With most adults working at the Royal Project, hunting and gathering tasks have been delegated to boys and girls. Working mothers hand the task of side dish preparation for dinner to their daughters. Moreover, girls and boys around the age of 14 assume responsibility for income generation when they replace or accompany their parents to work at the Project during weekends and holidays. Children have more work responsibilities now than in the past. At the same time, with increasingly longer participation in formal education, the labour force of village youth is drawn out of the village. Within the

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<sup>68</sup> Diary 30.05.08 and 06.06.08

expanding cash economy, Karen children are said to work more and at a quicker pace than did their parents' generation. According to Ratana, 20 years ago, only 'the older ones' grew rice. She started to help at the parental rice field when she was an older teenager returning to Huay Tong from Chiang Mai during school breaks. When she was younger, she would just help out in the household but not work in the fields. In the expanding cash economy, children started being included in rice production at an earlier age and work at a quicker pace. Compared to her own childhood, Ratana perceives adults pressuring children more to finish things quicker. For instance, 30 years ago, boys would take the buffalo out to the rice field in the morning. Buffaloes move slowly, and hence the chore took a lot of time: 'slowly, a waste of time.'<sup>69</sup> Especially during the rainy season, transplanting rice is a matter of correct timing and swift action. Any delay can cause real damage to the harvest, and thus impact on a household's rice provisions for the coming year. Since most adults in Huay Tong work for the Royal Project during weekdays, less time remains for their own rice production. Thus, immensely pressured by time, adults often ask boys and girls for their labour in order to speed up work on the fields. Very rich households are even prepared to employ young people at 120 Baht per day for such work.<sup>70</sup>

Modern Thai state education also impacts on the organisation of work. In Huay Tong, schooling does not abolish work. My data highlights how Karen childhood experiences have changed since the establishment of the Royal Agricultural Project and the introduction of Thai government schooling. For example, compulsory presence on the school compound may add to increasing children's time spent on work. Household chores that were previously accomplished during the day are not disappearing, but as my data evidences are rescheduled to accommodate the eight-

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<sup>69</sup> 'Cháa-cháa, sǎa wee-laa' (Ratana, 11.06.08)

<sup>70</sup> Ratana, 11.06.08

hour school day. As a consequence, children, in particular girls, may rise earlier and work until later in the evening. Also, within school compounds, boys and girls work to assist their teachers at menial tasks and/or in building and planting activities. Time spent in school and at home on study and homework also draws on children's energies.

In addition to these changes, children's economic activities are today more diversified than in the past. In the subsistence household economy, activities are organised according to gender, as well as generation composition. Seasonal agricultural work for a subsistence economy is intimately related to conventional gender identities in Karen society. Today, young people's gendered economic contributions are, like the economic activities of the villagers in general, also dependent on their socio-economic and political status within the village.

### **Children's gendered working activities and economic diversification**

Through their unpaid working activities, Karen boys and girls participate in the subsistence economy of their households and help their local schools with school maintenance. At the same time, the expanding cash economy renders households increasingly dependent on cash income. To support their households in this respect, teenage girls and boys search for seasonal paid employment.

#### *Unpaid work*

Children come to be familiar with gendered adult roles from an early age through 'playwork' (Briggs 1990). Among the Karen people, children mostly 'play' until around the age of five. The play of young children often consists in imitating adult

behaviour through observation and practice: ‘they watch the mother, then they are doing’.<sup>71</sup> Toddlers accompany others in the rice field, and play alongside their working families. Boys also ‘play’ catching birds, imitating the hunting activities of their older peers. Mothers ask toddlers to go with them to take care of the buffalo or just stay around while they prepare food with an older sibling, thus children learn through watchful participation in the cultural routine of cooking. Children below the age of five also help with washing dishes and fetching water.<sup>72</sup>

Gender and age shape children’s economic learning activities in a subsistence economy. In general, girls are considered harder working and more responsible than boys. Participatory research exercises also highlight that from a very early age, girls take care of younger children while performing a parallel task. These may be solitary household tasks, or activities carried out in the company of friends. Furthermore, girls help with guarding buffalo and raising pigs.<sup>73</sup> According to the village priest, girls are more mature than boys: ‘A girl of 12 is more responsible, she carries water and cooks the rice. The boys are not up yet and the girls went to find water and lit the fire’.<sup>74</sup>

Around the age of seven, children’s contribution to household chores increases gradually. Girls spend much more time in the home than boys. They begin to help their seniors more actively than before with household tasks such as fetching water, cooking rice, washing dishes and clothes and cleaning. They also start to wash themselves and their own clothes. Some girls care for younger siblings, for example, by taking them along when playing with their peers. Boys work less inside the house

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<sup>71</sup> ‘*Duu mae, léeo-gôo tam*’ (Rak, 22.02.08), Group discussion, 03.05.08

<sup>72</sup> PRE 15, PRE 16, diary 23.07.09. In 1922, Marshall (1997) described very similar childhood activities among Sgaw Karen in Burma.

<sup>73</sup> Diary, 30.05.08 and 19.04.08

<sup>74</sup> Bonpasteur, 12.02.08. Ewers Andersen observed similar patterns of gendered daily rhythms in the 1970s: ‘While boys play around till the age of 10, girls at the age of five start participating increasingly in domestic chores, fetching firewood and water and taking care of smaller brothers and sisters. Courted by the young men until late at night, a girl in her early teens resumes her domestic chores in the morning, while the young man sleeps all morning in the house of someone else’ (Ewers Andersen 1979/80: 315).

than girls. They contribute to the livelihood provision of their household, for example, through fishing with spears, as well as hunting snakes or birds with slingshots. Boys are aware of this privilege of being able to move around, and often value it highly.<sup>75</sup>

At the age of 10 or so,<sup>76</sup> children are considered to have achieved their first responsibilities. For example, instead of just cooking the rice, girls are by that age entrusted with the preparation of side dishes.<sup>77</sup> This way, adults convey to children the idea of contributing little bits to the successful completion of larger working processes.<sup>78</sup> Also at this age, boys and girls participate in unpaid seasonal agricultural work on villagers' fields. With the onset of their teenage years, working responsibilities increase. By the age of 12, girls and boys are fairly familiar with the gendered mastery of culturally valued tools and technologies. Weaving is a traditionally female activity, whilst boys learn to work with the plough and hunting tools such as slingshots and guns.

Most girls learn weaving from their mothers, other female relatives or foster mothers. Sometimes, girls produce a garment together with a more experienced weaver (see Fig. 3)

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<sup>75</sup> Diary 30.05.08, 06.06.08, 13.06.08

<sup>76</sup> Thai teachers also noted the age of 10 as the time when children in the plains achieve their first responsibilities in the household, such as preparation of light food. They also mentioned that children learn as they watch and imitate their mothers (Diary, 25.02.08).

<sup>77</sup> Interview, 22.03.08, Group discussion 03.05.08; diary, 06.06.08

<sup>78</sup> Discussion, 22.02.08

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online via ORA

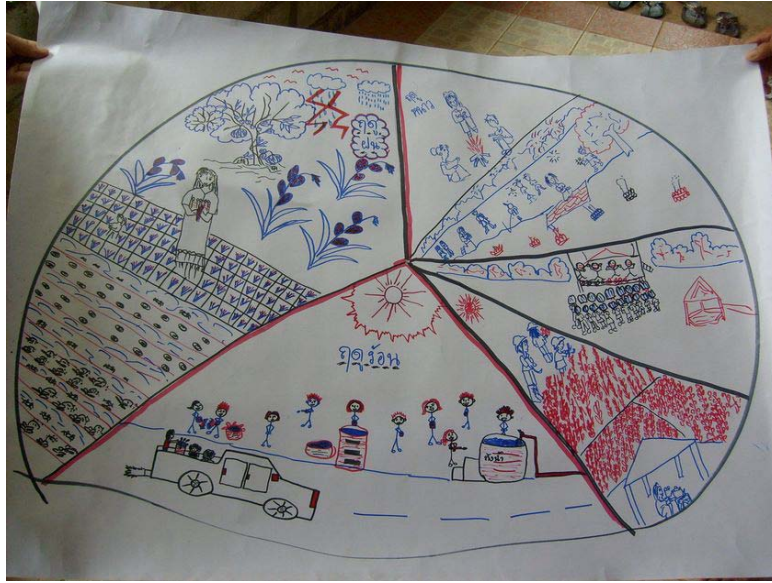
**Figure 3 Learning to weave from a neighbour woman**

The girl weaves the simple patterns while the older woman weaves the more complicated ones. During afternoons and weekends, I often saw girls in different homes occupied with weaving or winding threads. Girls often enjoy these activities and find them relaxing because they can be carried out in the coolness or dryness of the house and in the company of others. Therefore, weaving is an interactive activity, providing time for social interaction and peer networking.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, the girls' homespun white dresses, the *hsei wa*, is symbolically linked to gender identities. For example, in their seasonal calendars, some 14-year-old girls portrayed themselves cultivating (*bpluuk kâao*) and harvesting rice (*giào kâao*) (Fig.4).

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<sup>79</sup> e.g. Diary 13.02.08, 07.03.08, 21.04.08 and 13.06.08





**Figure 4 Seasonal calendar drawn by 14-year-old girls (06.06.08)**

The rice harvest in the cold season is depicted with them wearing their usual working clothes, while their clothing during rice cultivation in the rainy season is embellished. Interestingly, many of them draw themselves cultivating rice in their white Karen clothes. A few decades ago, girls used to wear the *hsei wa* on all occasions, and in many Karen villages this practice continues. Yet, in Huay Tong, young women do not appear in traditional dress on the fields. Nevertheless, in popular imagination, as well as in Karen peoples' self representations, femininity is intimately linked to the *hsei wa* and the rice harvest.

Boys' working and gender identities are culturally linked to the water buffalo. The water buffalo is particularly related to masculinity and ploughing. In Karen cosmology, the buffalo and the elephant are important assistants to humans and the only animals who can receive a *ci cu* rite<sup>80</sup> (Mischung 1984: 135). Until the 1980s, Karen boys spent their childhood to a great extent guarding water buffalo. In the expanding cash economy, water buffalo have largely been replaced by mechanical

<sup>80</sup> Animist *ci cue* ('tying the wrists') rites are usually performed for human beings in order to secure their physical vitality and prevent an imbalance of *k'la* (the spiritual essences which reside in various parts of the human body) (Kwanchewan 2003: 131).

ploughs. Research participants remember the gradual disappearance of buffalo from boys' working lives. For example, speaking about his childhood, Sanya recalls: 'Yes, being with the animal is a good experience. When we are with the animal, we have some close relationship, some special feeling. We love them. And the animal is friendly with us. For example, when my father wanted to sell one buffalo I was sad'.<sup>81</sup> Despite the disappearance of the water buffalo from boys' working lives, ploughing continues to be a masculine activity. From the age of 8 onwards, boys accompany older male children, youth and adults to the fields. They often learn through older male youth how to plough (see Fig. 5). In Huay Tong, boys are able to plough the field by themselves by the age of 12<sup>82</sup>.

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#### **Figure 5 Learning to plough from a senior peer**

Socio-economic background impacts on children's working contributions. Changing modes of production impact on subsistence work according to gender and age. Work relations and modes of work are changing. Inclusion into the market

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<sup>81</sup> Sanya, 28.05.08

<sup>82</sup> PRE 15 and PRE 16

increases socio-economic diversification in Huay Tong. Consequently, more than in the past, children's gendered working activities are also organised around the socio-economic position of their household. Participatory research exercises highlighted children's awareness of social difference. For example, 12-year-old Pit claimed that he already knew how to wash clothes at the age of five. However, his peer quickly reminded everyone that Pit used a washing machine and does not have to wash with his hands, like most children in Huay Tong.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, access to technology seems to be an important indicator of status. I also frequently observed that whilst most children walk to the village, those from more prosperous households use motorbikes for instance to fetch water. Girls and boys from wealthier households seem to have more play time than others. Although their families may own a number of fields, the children are not required to work in them and are free to 'stay at home' (*yùu bâan*). This implies they are not required to leave the domestic space for work in the fields<sup>84</sup> and have fewer responsibilities than their peers. According to his poorer classmates: 'Pit is doing nothing'.<sup>85</sup> Outside school, he can go around buying sweets, eating rice and noodles in shops, and visit friends of similarly wealthy households. Similarly, Pit's peer Cif Nof passes his time outside school watching TV and playing video games, while foster children perform the bulk of chores in his maternal household.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, staying as a foster child in another household means working more. My visits to foster children's home villages revealed that foster children work less at home than in the foster arrangements.<sup>87</sup> At the same time, they are less involved in seasonal paid work than the majority of their peers from Huay.

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<sup>83</sup> Pit and Saf Mauz Klei, 13.06.08

<sup>84</sup> Diary, 30.05.08

<sup>85</sup> '*Pit mâi tam arai*' (13.06.08)

<sup>86</sup> Diary, 25.06.08

<sup>87</sup> See Chapters 7 and 8 for my analysis of multilayered power configurations within foster systems.

### *Paid work*

In Huay Tong, children's financial contributions to the household income are increasingly important. Adult status is also linked to the ability of girls and boys to generate a livelihood for their households. In a subsistence economy, children reach the economic independence of adult status by the age of 12. This age usually coincided with mastery of culturally relevant gendered working skills, such as weaving and ploughing. Within an expanding market economy, rising educational aspirations and growing household needs for cash, young peoples' adult status is coupled with their ability to earn an income. According to the *Thai Labour Protection Act* of 1998, young people have to be above the age of 15 to qualify for employment (Ministry of Labour 1998: Section 48). Karen youth confirm that when children approach 15, life becomes more serious, 'they think more and work harder'.<sup>88</sup> This example illustrates how the impact of wider political economic developments on local socio-cultural constructions of 'childhood' and the timing of transitions to adulthood.

Paid work activities are shaped by gendered labour ideologies of global political economy. In Huay Tong, most high school girls find paid employment with the Royal Project during weekends. For instance, work in the Royal Project food processing centre is an almost exclusively female occupation. When asked why this is the case, Nauj Popu pointed at her fingers, thus indicating that nimble and agile fingers are needed for food processing, hence the preference for female workers. Because of this gender stereotype, men or boys rarely search employment with food processing. If they work in the centre, they are assigned tasks such as carrying heavy

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<sup>88</sup> Group discussion, 03.05.08

loads. Otherwise, boys work in the outdoor areas of the Royal Project, feeding and taking care of animals, burning rubbish, etc.<sup>89</sup>

The standards for child employment in Huay Tong reflect the needs of the Royal Project as well as of individual households. These circumstances are not in conformity with Thai law. According to the *Thai Labour Protection Act* (1998), children under the age of 15 and without an ID card are not allowed to engage in paid work. Furthermore, Section 48 of the Labour Protection Act states that an employer is prohibited from allowing child employees to work overtime or during holidays. Finally, according to the law, an employer is prohibited from handing out a child employee's wage to any person other than the child (Ministry of Labour 1998: Section 48).

Official employment times at the Royal Project are 25 days per month. Yet, at times, the Royal Project also relies on short-term employment of the young. According to Nauj Popu, Head of the Food Processing Centre of the Royal Project in Huay Tong, girls are normally between 15 and 16 when they start working in the processing centre. Sometimes they may be younger.<sup>90</sup> This was confirmed by another informant who added that there 'is no age limit. If the project needs helping hands, they allow young people to work. If there is no need, no interest. But if it is known that one family might be poor, they allow children to work as well. It depends'.<sup>91</sup> Students usually only work during school holidays and weekends. Oftentimes, girls replace their mothers (*tam-teen mae*). Especially during labour-intensive periods, such as the rainy season, mothers may ask daughters to cover their working hours at the Royal Project. That way, the mothers are free to transplant rice in their own fields. Furthermore, a mother might take Friday off for other activities and work on Saturday

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<sup>89</sup> Nauj Popu, 25.06.08

<sup>90</sup> Nauj Popu, 25.06.08

<sup>91</sup> Ratana 25.06.08

in a double effort of manpower with her daughter in the Project.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, the Project impacts indirectly on girls' economic activities as mothers hand household chores to their daughters. Because of the scheduled working hours at the Royal Project, or long opening hours of their small shops, many women in Huay Tong find it difficult to prepare food in the evening. Very often, this task is handed over and becomes the responsibility of their teenage daughters.<sup>93</sup>

High school students usually combine their studies with income generation for their households. My data reveals that independent of their gender and place of residence, high school students in Mae Win earn cash outside school times. Most boys and girls find seasonal paid employment at lowland farms. Throughout August 2009, 15 out of 44 students participated in the longan fruit harvest and 16 mentioned general agricultural work, such as planting. Eleven students earned money as sales assistants, two worked for the local administration, two produced weaving for sale, one said she labels and cleans bottles and another worked in an internet café. Most students mentioned helping their parents or grandparents with this work, accompanying them on their tasks at farms or assisting them in their sales business. Among male research participants, one worked in a shop and six earned money in agriculture. Independent of their occupation, most students earned 100 to 130 Baht per day.<sup>94</sup> In addition to the modest monetary value of their work, teenage boys and girls' paid economic activities have high social value because they are interdependent from their household economies.

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<sup>92</sup> Nauj Popu, 25.06.08, 21.06.08, 28.06.08

<sup>93</sup> For example, Diary 09.03.08. Tatek Abebe (2007) made similar observations during fieldwork with working children in Southern Ethiopia.

<sup>94</sup> 100 Baht equalled GBP 2 on 21.03.10

### **Social morality and children's working activities**

Having outlined gendered, generational, and socio-economic diversity among children's working activities, this section turns to the ethical and cultural values underlying young peoples' work. I explain how the work of boys and girls relates to local work ethics of labour exchange and interdependence as well as more globalized labour ideologies – such as the value of economic thrift – pertaining to industrialization and global political economy.

#### *Social morality and work ethics*

In Thailand, relations between adults and children are relations of reciprocity. Work during childhood is neither considered morally suspicious nor harmful. Instead, the work of girls and boys forms part of their cultural learning at home and at school. Parents value their children's contribution to the household. The importance of children's working contributions is succinctly expressed in the Karen saying that 'you have to pay back the milk you drink from your mother'.<sup>95</sup> Most parts of young people's work are not considered work (*ngaan*) but assistance (*chûai*). This implies that there is someone else with overall responsibility for the outcome of the task. On the one hand, this means that the assisting person cannot be blamed for potentially negative results, but on the other hand he or she does not receive full recognition for successes or accomplishments. Furthermore, the expression *chûai gan* (to assist each other) implies equality amongst all those involved in the working process. One situation of *chûai gan* is, for instance, when a school asks parents to help with major, though non-remunerated tasks, on the school compound such as tearing down old buildings and rebuilding new ones. Also, if teachers help each other, they are

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<sup>95</sup> Gravers, 27.01.08. This corresponds to the Buddhist precept of *bunkhun* (parental repayment) which obliges children to return the care they have received from their parents (Richter and Podhisita 1992: 11).

considered *chûai gan*.<sup>96</sup> Children's assistance in adult work is '*chûai*' (to assist), since the overall responsibility of the task rests with the leading adult and is not distributed equally as in *chûai gan*. Boys and girls assist their seniors both in the village and at school. In these processes, collaboration of peers is necessary for completing tasks in the village and at school. Having their company makes activities enjoyable and valuable in the children's eyes: 'It is fun, because I go with friends'.<sup>97</sup> Therefore, in the eyes of local adults and children, economic activities are important for socializing with peers and seniors and thus confirm mutual bonds and friendships.

*Being (not so) good: diligence and laziness*

Assisting seniors through unpaid work, therefore, offers the opportunity to demonstrate diligence and an overall good character. Assisting others through unpaid or paid work allows girls and boys to show that they are diligent (*kà yǎn*). Diligence, in turn, is highly valued among Thai and Karen people. In exchange for their services, children may gain the benevolent support of the senior, which is similar to patron-client relationships. This can become an important strategy when it comes to the planning of major steps in the life course, such as school transitions.<sup>98</sup> Karen youth of lower status, such as foster children, enhance their social position through unpaid work and good behaviour. Through their diligent work assisting at school, boys and girls secure the benevolence of local mediators like Thai teachers<sup>99</sup> who help them access scholarships for higher studies. The value of assisting or helping others is further revealed in children's gendered life course aspirations. For example, the occupations of nurse and policewomen are related to the virtue of helpfulness: 'I want

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<sup>96</sup> Aranya Siripphon, 05.03.08

<sup>97</sup> '*Sanuk prowa bpai gap pûan*' (Nauj Cooz, 05.06.08)

<sup>98</sup> Diary, 15.03.08

<sup>99</sup> Diary 05 and 27.02. 08



to be a policewoman because I like to help others'.<sup>100</sup> Diligence is also a major criterion for determining whether someone is overall 'a good girl' (*pûu-yǐng dii*) or 'a good boy' (*pûu-chaai dii*). In Karen and Thai students described a 'good girl' or a 'good boy' as someone who is not lazy, who studies, who speaks well (*puut dii*), who does not walk around (*mai tiao*) and does not travel by night, who thinks well (*kit dii*), and who has a smiling face all the time so that others around are happy. In contrast, a bad girl or boy is selfish, unhelpful, smokes cigarettes and drinks alcohol.<sup>101</sup> Karen society expects girls in particular to demonstrate modest and industrious behaviour: '(Y)oung Karen women should be quiet, tidy and primarily take care of domestic work. Any young women talking too much and going out of their home very often will be seen as behaving improperly as women' (Naiyana 2001: 104). Good girls 'help their parents, go to church' whereas not so good girls are 'escaping school and don't like to listen to their parents'.<sup>102</sup> Through diligent behaviour, children also avoid being regarded as 'lazy' (*kîi giat*). For instance, a 16-year-old girl explained assisting her mother makes her feel 'unlazy': 'I like it, because I can help mother, and she does not have to feel tired. I feel well when I can help mother, it makes me be someone not lazy'.<sup>103</sup>

'Lazy' and 'diligent' do not always refer to the performance of girls and boys in all domains of life. Rather, these values inform whether a person meets the expectations of a senior like a parent or teacher in a particular social context. Children and adults can be perceived as 'lazy' in one domain like intellectual activities and at the same time as 'diligent' in another such as work.<sup>104</sup> For example, at Huay Tong

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<sup>100</sup> Girls Mae Win, 03.08.09

<sup>101</sup> Group discussion, 03.08.09

<sup>102</sup> '*Chûai pomaē, bpai kao wat*', '*nîi ron rian mai choop fang pomaē*' (Hse, 23.07.09)

<sup>103</sup> '*Choop, pro daai chuai mae, mae ja dâai mai nuai, lee rusuk dii tii daai chuai mae. Tam hai rao mai bpen kon kii-giat*' (BK, M3/N, 17.08.09)

<sup>104</sup> Nauj Sav Geiz, 08.06.08

school, Deif is not a particularly dedicated student. He has already repeated one year and has little ambitions to study further. However, he is very active in helping with all kinds of mending work on the school compound. Moreover, well known as a talented entertainer, he often contributes at school performances, singing songs to teachers' high-ranking guests such as the school inspector. Because of his comic talent, he is also very popular among his peers at school and functioned even as student representative during his last year at Huay Tong school. Because of all his extracurricular activities everyone at school considered Deif as talented and 'kà yǎn', his low grades notwithstanding.<sup>105</sup>

The examples of the two boys Sanya and Hpa Sav Hsoof also illustrates the flexibility of the notion of 'lazy'. After graduation from Huay Tong school, Sanya and Hpa Sav Hsoof enrolled for higher education at the Agricultural Polytechnic College in Sanpathong. They only stayed for a few months before deciding to leave. Sanya explains his decision: 'Because at that time I like to study more than work. In Agricultural College there is more work than study, you are farming, go and walk plant beans. *I am not lazy to work. But at that time I was not yet adult. I wanted to study*'.<sup>106</sup> Hpa Sav Hsoof joined his peers back in Huay Tong, yet in the eyes of his sister: '*he was lazy and returned. But, he liked to work*'.<sup>107</sup> Hpa Sav Hsoof was thought of as 'lazy to study' because he wanted to work, while Sanya had to make an effort not to be labelled as someone 'lazy to work' because of his aspirations for more theoretical formal education than what was offered at the Agricultural Polytechnical College. In both cases, 'laziness' seems to indicate personal value dissonance with the expectations and ideas of others, such as households or village communities.

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<sup>105</sup> Diary, 10.03.08; PRE 15, 13.06.08

<sup>106</sup> Sanya, 28.05.08, emphasis PMV

<sup>107</sup> 'Kii-giat, glap. Dtae, chaoop tam ngan' (Sav Geiz, 08.06.09, emphasis PMV)

### *Social morality and household interdependencies*

The occupational aspirations of primary school boys and girls reflect the values and needs of their households. Div Hsei, an 11-year-old boy in Huay Tong, says that after graduation from Huay Tong school he wants ‘to go and learn becoming a mechanic’ and re-enrol in vocational studies alongside this. Afterwards, he plans to return to Huay Tong because ‘I am happy with my family. I want to stay with my parents’.<sup>108</sup> He envisages opening a garage and ‘if there is any money’ to give it to his parents. His peer Pit has different aspirations as he wants to study for a bachelor’s degree. Nevertheless he also emphasises that he wants to ‘get a job to assist my family’.<sup>109</sup>

Teenage boys and girls also value their work when they see that it relates to their household and thus helps them be ‘good’. They are aware of the importance for their work to contribute to their household economies. In Ban Kad, 11 students told me that the best thing about work is the possibility to earn extra money to support their parents and thus contribute to their study expenses. Nine persons said they like their work because they can help their relatives with income generation and eight said it was because they can find good learning experiences for life through this work. Arguably, the value of a job decreases the more they feel it is ‘tiresome’ (*nuai*). A girl from Nong Tau village engages in seasonal agricultural work on lowland farms during weekends and applies for jobs with the local administration during school breaks: ‘If you ask about “likes” there are things I like and dislike because the work that I do there are some parts that are tiring and others which are not. But if I can choose, I rather do a better job that is more comfortable (*sabaai*) and not hard (*ngaan mai nak*) and which also allows me supporting my parents’.<sup>110</sup> Others felt that their work was tiresome, yet the social, moral or financial advantages outweighed the negatives and

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<sup>108</sup> ‘*Mii kwaam suk gap krop kua. Yaak yuu gap poma*’ (Div Hsei, 13.06.08)

<sup>109</sup> ‘*Haa ngang tam chuai krop kua*’ (Pit, 13.06.08).

<sup>110</sup> BK-M2, 17.08.09

rendered the job worthwhile. For instance, students appreciate engaging in ‘honest work’ (*ngaan su-ja-rit*) even if it is tiring.<sup>111</sup> Another classmate helps her uncle grill pork liver for 130 Baht per day. She uses the money for her studies and for gasoline and says about her working activities: ‘sometimes I like it, sometimes not, sometimes I am frustrated and tired (*bira*) with it, but I have to persevere. If I don’t persevere there is no money’.<sup>112</sup>

Nauj Cooz’s case highlights interdependencies between Karen children, their household economies as well as wider national and international institutions.

*Textbox 1: Case study of Nauj Cooz from Huay Tong*

In 2008, Nauj Cooz was 14 years old. She was the second of three siblings in a Buddhist-Christian household in Huay Tong. She had an older brother (17 years old) and a younger brother (8 years old). Her parents were gardeners who cultivated their own garden and rice field (*tam raai tam suan*). Cooz’s mother was also employed with the Royal Project. In addition, the household produced alcohol (*laao*) for sale in their village. As outlined in this textbox, Nauj Cooz’s working and study activities were interdependent with her household and related to national and international institutions.

Cooz’s mother was a Catholic Christian and her father a Buddhist. Cooz was knowledgeable in both religions, but rarely attended Buddhist ceremonies. Her mother was an active parishioner in Huay Tong, attending prayers and Mass every day. Cooz herself was responsible for guiding morning prayers once per week. Cooz and her mother had a very good and confidential relationship. Together they have already made excursions to sacred Buddhist sites like the mount Doi Suthep and Ayutthaya. Her father, by contrast, was a burden to the family. He used to consume drugs (*yaa baa*) and continued drinking a lot of alcohol.

Nauj Cooz’s economic activities were interdependent with her household and related to the wider national economy. Cooz’s work supported her household economy. In order to help her mother, Cooz took on a lot of economic responsibilities. At home, she was responsible for preparing food. She downplayed her own cooking talents, saying that she only made rice. However, once we became friends, she invited me for evening meals and I learned that she was also in charge of preparing side dishes. When she cooked, she also sent her father on errands. This highlighted her high status in the household and her father’s rather low role.

Cooz’s economic activities were also linked to the wider regional and national economy. During weekends, she helped with income generation at the Royal Agricultural Project. She replaced her mother, for example, in working with saplings in a greenhouse. This replacement, in turn, allowed her mother to cultivate their own

<sup>111</sup> BK, 17.08.09

<sup>112</sup> ‘*Ban kran choop, ban krang goo mai choop. Ban krang bua. Dtae dtong ton, taa mai ton, goo mai mii nung*’ (BK-M3/P)

garden. During school holidays, Cooz accompanied her mother for half-day work in their garden. When she was at home during school free days, she received customers for their home-made alcohol. The beverage was sold in a small plastic bag for 15 Baht.

Her mother valued Cooz's working activities. As recognition for her economic responsibility, but also as sign of confidence, Cooz was granted by her mother certain freedoms other girls her age did not enjoy. For example, Cooz was allowed to go swimming at the dam outside the village, a popular place to meet with boys. Moreover, she was allowed to use the family's mobile phone. Access to the telephone enhanced Cooz's social status among peers. She received calls from romantic suitors on the mobile phone. Moreover, Cooz lent the phone to girlfriends, who otherwise had no possibility to make or receive phone calls thus elevating her own higher status.

At Huay Tong school, Nauj Cooz was a good student and very responsible. Her studies were supported by the Catholic Christian JESS Programme. After graduation from Huay Tong lower secondary school, Cooz made in May 2009 the transition to a high school in Mae Sot (Tak Province). Like this, she left her home village Huay Tong and relocated as a foster child into the household of her older maternal uncle (*naa*) in Mae Sot. This uncle was a widower with two adopted Karen children from Burma. One of the two children was a handicapped girl who used crutches. Since she and Cooz were the same age, Cooz was called to help in the household and befriend (*maa bpen puan*) the girl. As a foster child, Cooz did the laundry, cooked rice and side dishes and drove her peers on the motorbike to school. Because of the geographic distance between Mae Wang and Tak province, it was impossible for Cooz to return to her home village, except for major seasonal school holidays. However, for Cooz temporary migration for education and future work seemed not to contradict guarding a sense of belonging to her home village, Huay Tong. In her life-course drawing (Fig. 6), Cooz depicted herself working in the future with a friend as an air hostess outside the village. She wanted to return for her old age be buried in Huay Tong.

Boys and girls who become a financial drain to their households are not thought of well. Occasionally, I heard stories of teenage boys who dropped out of school because they struggled to finish their higher education in the lowlands. Often, they leave school and search for employment without informing their households. So they continue for a while to receive money from their parents for studies while also generating their own income. They are said to be prone to mischief. As a young Karen woman put it: 'naughty. They do not really study, they go and find employment in the city'.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Nauj Bof, 22.08.09

Moreover, in the eyes of Karen householders, youth employment loses its value when it challenges generational power relations within the household and/or the socio-economic status of the household vis-à-vis others. Problems arise when the working activities of young men and women are coupled with a strong aspiration for independence and transition to full adulthood.<sup>114</sup> Adults may even try to curb male teenagers' aspirations for earning money when this income goes towards private expenses, such as alcohol consumption or gasoline. For instance, I observed a clash between three young men and their foster mother Ratana. It was mid-February, the peak season for picking strawberries. Like many other adults, during one weekend, the three boys took the opportunity to earn 100 Baht a day by helping with the strawberry harvest. They travelled to the workplace with a peer who owned a motorcycle. Upon their return on Sunday evening, the foster parents reproached them for their behaviour and inquired why they felt the need to earn money if everything is free in their house, including clothing, housing and food. The boys argued that they needed the money to 'play somewhere'. In this case, the foster father suggested the youth should also contribute to the household with their salary. Thus confronted with the full implications of adult responsibility, the young men agreed not to work for cash anymore.<sup>115</sup>

Preventing youth from paid working activities also speaks about socio-economic status. Not all parents can afford to withdraw their sons from the formal labour market. In Huay Tong, I heard parents of higher socio-economic status commenting that they prefer their teenage sons to help them with their own rice cultivation than work elsewhere for money. For example, although there exists the possibility for income generation at Sanpathong Agricultural Polytechnic College, the

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<sup>114</sup> Nauj Bof, 22.08.09

<sup>115</sup> Diary, 16.02.08

mother of Chaa prefers her son to return during weekends to help her with rice cultivation for their household: 'it is better to help the mother than to be employed'.<sup>116</sup> Interdependencies between young peoples' work and their household economies is therefore very important when it comes to the social morality of children's economic activities.

### **Children's occupational aspirations**

My data suggests that Karen boys and girls are aiming for attractive, middle-class careers within wider Thai society. Children's representations of such occupations are slightly gendered. They emphasise their need for institutional intermediaries in achieving these goals. At the same time, my data also reveals teenagers' awareness of the labour market's structural limitations. Girls and boys know they cannot rely blindly on the supportive structures of modern institutions. In addition, household economies may suddenly require young people's working presence. Thus, boys and girls negotiate their individual job aspirations against the reality of an insecure labour market and household interdependencies.

### *Occupational aspirations and popular beauty standards*

Popular beauty standards tell of gendered stereotypes and socio-economic status. Details in girls' life course drawings illustrate their desire to comply with popular beauty standards associated with socio-economic middle-class standards and professions. For example, one high school student said she wants to be a policewoman 'because the uniform is beautiful'.<sup>117</sup> Arguably, in Thai society, the most popular role model for a beautiful female profession is an 'air hostess'. According to one Thai research assistant: 'I think when adults talk to young girls, they can only think of one

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<sup>116</sup> 'Chuai mae dii qua rap jan'(Chaa Moj, 18.07.09)

<sup>117</sup> Girls, 03.08.09

“glamorous” or inviting job which is an air hostess. I remember when I was young and playing dressed-up, adults around me would say oh do you want to grow up and become an air-hostess?’<sup>118</sup> Agricultural work, by contrast, conflicts with the beauty standards of Thai middle class salaried work<sup>119</sup>. Indeed, in their life course drawings, boys rather than girls depicted themselves as agricultural labourers. As outlined above, agricultural work is symbolically related to masculinity and social adulthood. However, one 14-year-old research participant explained that he does not like the rice harvest, and another boy mentioned that rice cultivation causes him to have backaches. Moreover, girls as well as boys in my research were concerned that their work on the fields left marks on their bodies. Clean nails, beautiful hands and ‘not dark’ skin are important beauty standards for both genders. Manual transplantation of rice as well as exposure to the sun during long working hours are not conducive to these ideals. Girls often found their hands ‘not pretty’ (*mâi sǔai*). Both boys and girls wear long sleeves when working in the fields in order to protect their skin from getting ‘black’ (*sǐi-dam*).<sup>120</sup>

#### *Children’s awareness of political-economic constraints*

My data evidences that girls and boys understand their restricted occupational opportunities in an insecure labour market. There is a real problem between the promises of education, and the reality experienced by Karen people. They have a realistic understanding that academic degrees cannot guarantee them an attractive job in town. For example, in their illustration (Fig. 6), Nauj Cooz and her good friend Mugi expressed the intention to study at high school, and then at university.

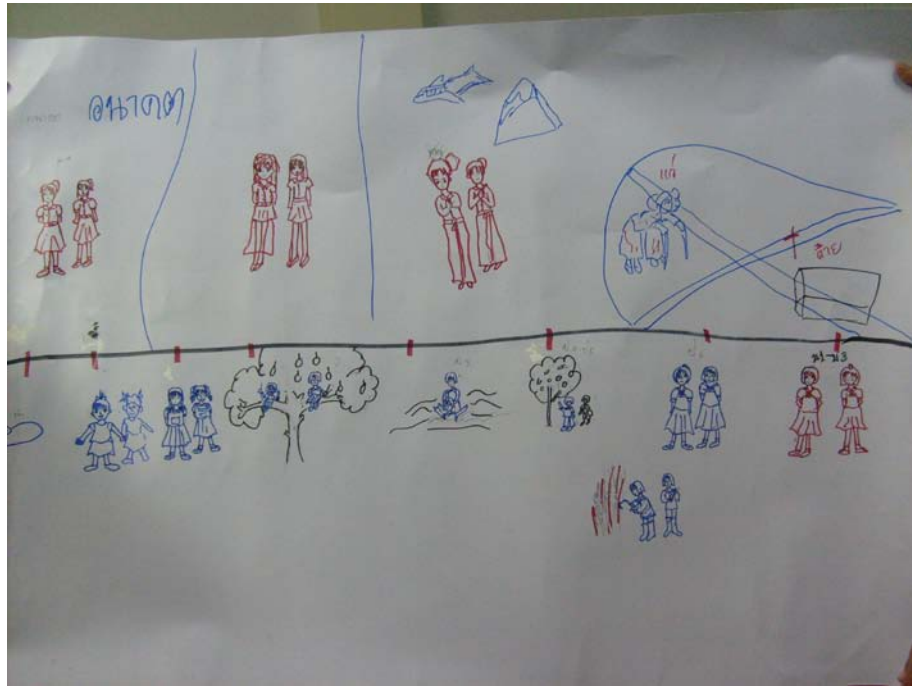
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<sup>118</sup> Yok, 10.02.10

<sup>119</sup> Diary, 06.02.08

<sup>120</sup> Diary, 16.04.08



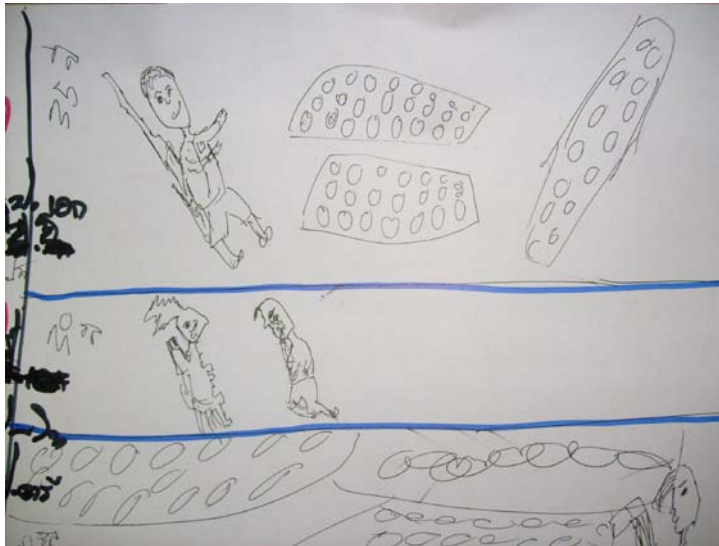


**Figure 6 Life course drawn by 14-year-old girls (13.06.08)**

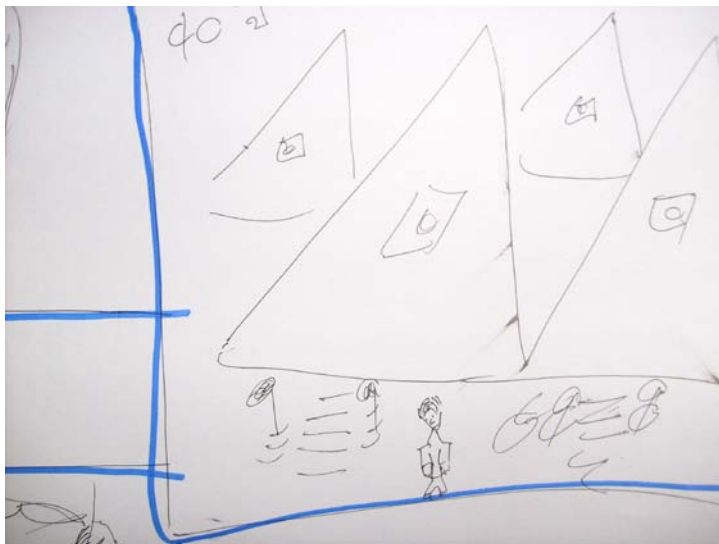
The girls decided drawing their life course starting at right hand lower part of the paper with their past childhoods. Their present situation as last secondary school students is depicted at the lower left side. Then, they projected their future lives within the upper part of the life course line. There, they portrayed themselves attending high school with increasingly long hair and shorter uniforms. After graduation they want to work as air hostesses and return to their village when they are old.<sup>121</sup> Yet, the reality of their career pathways is limited by the needs of their respective households. Their aspirations for an attractive job as air hostess may have to yield to the needs of household and financial constraints. Both do not come from wealthy households and are supported in their studies through scholarships and kin connections. A detail in the lower part of their drawings reveals these economic interdependencies: we see the two girls in typical working uniforms of plastic boots worn for rice harvesting work towards the end of the rainy season.

<sup>121</sup> Cooz and Mugi, 13.06.08

Also boys are aware that unemployment may require them to return to their villages, even if they earned degrees. Somchai's life course drawing (see Appendix E and Fig. 7 and 8) illustrates young men's negotiations towards adulthood in a setting of social constraints.



**Figure 7 Detail of life course drawn by Somchai (13.06.08)**



**Figure 8 Detail of life course drawn by Somchai (13.06.08)**

Figures 7 and 8 show details of Somchai's life course. After lower secondary school, Somchai would like to move to the lowlands and learn to be a mechanic. But he is additionally interested in studying agriculture academically in order to become a

researcher in this domain. If he likes it, he might stay for a while outside the village. Yet, he sees himself as unemployed (*dtok ngaan*) when he is 30 (Fig. 7). *Dtok ngaan* literally means ‘dropping an occupation’ and is translated as ‘being unemployed’. It does not say explicitly whether one decided to quit the job or was fired. However, for Thai native speakers *dtok ngaan* carries the connotation of involuntary unemployment. After losing his job, Somchai plans to return to Huay Tong. What follows are years of unpaid work, where at 35 he sees himself roaming the forest as a hunter equipped with a gun (Fig. 7). This indicates that he knows how to maintain a livelihood in the forest. Then again, at the age of 40, he anticipates being a waged labourer for the Royal Project (Fig. 8).

Indeed, my data suggests that the availability of paid employment in Mae Wang is a major reason why Karen youth can return for their transitions to adulthood.<sup>122</sup> Whether school dropouts or high school or college graduates, most male returnees take up employment at the Royal Agricultural Project. Dav Leij’s case highlights the complexities involved in individual decisions for return migration and the associated transition to adulthood. His movements highlight his eagerness to make a transition to adulthood through paid work and marriage, and in interdependence with the values and needs of his household. In July 2009, Dav Leij and his new wife Mux worked at the Royal Project. After dropping out of St Joseph minor seminary and Sanpathong Agricultural Polytechnic College, Dav Leij decided to return to Huay Tong to marry and start paid employment at the Royal Project whilst continuing his Agricultural Studies during weekends. In June 2009 he married his girlfriend Nauj Mux from the neighbouring village Huay Kao Lip. After the marriage, Nauj Mux moved to Huay Tong, where the couple stays at Dav Leij’s maternal household and

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<sup>122</sup> Research assistants, 19.06.08, Bird, 25.04.08

works at the Royal Project. Importantly, Nauj Mux and Dav Leij broke with the Karen tradition of matrilocal residence after marriage. Instead of moving into his bride's maternal household, Nauj Mux moved to Dav Leij's household in Huay Tong. They decided to do this because Huay Tong offers paid employment. Both their households encouraged this step. Moreover, during weekends, Dav Leij commutes to the plains where he continues studying in Sanpathong.<sup>123</sup> With a high school or college degree in Agriculture, Dav Leij also has prospects of finding employment with the Royal Project. Thus, in an insecure market economy, the Royal Agricultural Project becomes a local 'safe haven'.

#### *Aspirations and household interdependencies*

The aspirations of teenage boys and girls illustrate awareness of their responsibilities towards household economies. For example, 15-year-old Deif envisages 'going to study somewhere else',<sup>124</sup> without specifying where or what subject. He sees himself at 18 clearly returning after two years to the village to assist his mother who suffers from an incurable disease. In the vague future Deif might be a 'guide' in the city. Knowing Deif as a great friend of the forest, and of hunting, I was a bit confused by the city as a potential destination in his life course and asked him to explain this a bit more. It transpired that it is the availability of money rather than other attractions that make Deif ponder such a step. His idea might further be motivated by the role model of his twin sister's boyfriend, who supports his sick mother's medical treatment with his job as a tour guide.

Chaa plans for a professional life in accord with his responsibilities towards the maternal household. His life course drawing (Fig. 9 and Appendix E) clearly

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<sup>123</sup> Rabiap, 01.07.08, 04.07.09, Dav Leij, 17.07.09

<sup>124</sup> 'Bpai rian doo tii uun' (Div Hsei, 13.06.08)

highlights how he perceives both his past childhood and his future adult life as economically interdependent with his parental household economy.



**Figure 9 Detail of life course drawn by Chaa (13.06.08)**

According to his drawing (Fig. 9), Chaa envisages in his life course drawing finishing his studies and also learning the skills of a mechanic in the lowlands. Afterwards, he plans to return to Huay Tong and to work for the Royal Project. At the same time, he wants to continue working with his parents, thus contributing to the economic aspirations of the household. Furthermore, he would like to earn an academic doctoral degree and afterwards cultivate his own vegetables and keep cows as well as chickens. He underlines that he wants to have two cars and a house. The two cars indicate an aspiration to upward social mobility because his family owns one car already, thus considered as one of the economically better-off villagers.

In summary, Karen boys and girls in Huay Tong aspire towards (semi-) professional adult lives. In doing so, they are conscious of their interdependence with their households and realise they have a responsibility to contribute a cash income. In order to access a well-paid job, they perceive the need for formal education in state

schools as well as the financial support of governmental and non-governmental institutions.

## **Conclusion**

Karen peoples' gradual integration into the national economy has led to economic diversification among Karen children. The establishment of the Royal Agricultural Project in 1977 furthered socio-economic and cultural transformations in Huay Tong. These include the improvement of infrastructure and intensification of contacts beyond the village, transformation of local modes and relations of production and increasing monetisation of village economy. These changes impact on gender and generational power relations. Moreover, these transformations caused increasing socio-economic status differentiations among the Karen in general and Karen children in particular.

My empirical findings reveal the importance of integrating gender with political-economic considerations of childhood. According to my data, economic changes and modern legislation impact on the political economy of 'childhood' as institution. For example, in my research setting, the period of childhood has been extended from around the age of 12 to the age of 15 years. Political economic forces also shape the lives of individual girls and boys. Today, Karen children's gendered paid and unpaid working activities are principally organised by children's socio-economic and political status. Moreover, gendered labour ideologies of the global political economy shape local gendered patterns of youth employment, for example at the Royal Project in Huay Tong. The economic activities of girls and boys are locally valued provided they contribute to wider working processes at schools and in households.

Children's life course aspirations reflect the values of the Thai middle class, their awareness of political-economic constraints as well as their sense of interdependence with their households. Their life course drawings are slightly gendered. Girls portrayed themselves in idealized occupations that reflect popular beauty values of the Thai middle class. By contrast, boys rather developed realistic drawings of future adult lives as agricultural wage labourers. However, independent of their gender, Karen children in this study highlight awareness of their household responsibilities and their need to find paid employment in an insecure Thai labour market. In the eyes of boys and girls, education at Thai government schools seems a necessary means to securing future employment. Yet, occupational aspirations are not uncomplicated, because of Karen peoples' marginal socio-economic and political status within the political economy of northern Thailand. Therefore, young people in my study envisage themselves reproducing socio-economic inequalities as they negotiate transitions towards working adult lives. They have a realistic understanding that school degrees cannot guarantee them attractive occupations in Thai mainstream society. Instead, they see themselves returning to highland Karen villages and working as agricultural wage labourers and/or subsistence farmers thus reproducing socio-economic inequalities. In the next chapter, I turn to the impact of modern Thai education on Karen children's marginal social status within the political economy of northern Thailand.

## **CHAPTER 6. Thai Schools as sites of socio-economic and political dissonance**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I discuss the role of Thai government schools as sites of socio-economic and political dissonance. I explain the role of formal schools as heralds of ‘development’ and modernity, as representatives of the Thai nation in the highlands, as well as sites where socio-economic inequalities are abated and produced.

I argue that socio-cultural learning supports the working activities of Karen peoples’ subsistence economy which depends on gendered and generational skills. Thai government education, however, is not training children for the gendered adult roles required in a small-scale village economy. Instead, modern schooling emphasises the role of children as future citizens and consumers in a national political system that is embedded within global market relations. In this political economic context, Karen students are conceived as a political/ethnic minority as well as members of the rural poor. Migration for education becomes a necessary means by which they negotiate their political and socio-economic marginality. Throughout the last thirty years, the Thai government school in Huay Tong turned into a regional key destination for Karen children’s migration for education.

### **Access to literacy and political economic status: myths and symbols**

Karen mythology juxtaposes formal learning with agricultural work. The Karen people identify themselves with agricultural work and ascribe the power to access written knowledge to political ‘others’. These ‘others’, in turn, are ascribed higher political economic status. For example, the myth of the Karen’s Loss of the Book (i.e. literacy) sheds light on their valuing of literacy and education as sources of power.



According to the narrative, the Karen people received and then lost the gift of the book from the creating deity (*ywa*). *Ywa* had many children, among them the Karen, Burmese, Thai, Chinese and the White Brother. The Karen was the eldest brother and the White Brother the youngest, and *Ywa* entrusted to the eldest brother the golden book of wisdom. The Karen went with the book to the field, but when he burned the field, the book was also caught by the flames. All that remained were ashes. Chickens arrived and walked over the ashes, pecking at them. The youngest White Brother also obtained a book of knowledge. However, in contrast to the elder Karen brother, he kept the book, and that is why foreigners from the global north are said to be so developed in terms of modern technology and knowledge. As for the Chinese and Thai brothers, they are said to have picked the remains of the Karen's book out of the ashes. For this reason, their writing systems with stroke characters are reminiscent of chicken scratchings. Finally, the Karen eldest brother was left with nothing for himself but the bones of the chickens that pecked at the ashes (Hayami 2004: 25–6). In the previous subsistence economy, Karen people perceived themselves as working without access to the written word and thus to formalised knowledge. Access to formalised knowledge through literacy, in turn, was associated with holding 'power' over those who are illiterate and working in the fields (*ibid.*: 43).

To this day, access to formal education is associated with high political economic status. In contrast, highland subsistence farming is conventionally related to rural poverty and ignorance. For example, the symbol of the labouring water buffalo is often used in Thai society to indicate 'backwardness'. One Thai kindergarten teacher reprimanded late-arriving children with the following, saying: 'If you don't

want to be a buffalo, you have to come to school; you have to come and study'.<sup>125</sup> A

Thai anthropologist confirms this attitude in writing:

I have heard a lot of these phrases. [I]n Thailand buffalo always refer to 'stupid/dumb', I don't know why, even the word 'buffalo' can be used to insult people. We call someone '*kwai*', means that he is stupid. I think it might be because of the buffalo gesture, kind of do not care, slow, ignorance and *do nothing else except working in the field*.<sup>126</sup>

Deprecating the symbolic value of the water buffalo comes close to ignoring what it means to be a working man among the Karen people. Recently, there have been attempts to restore the prestige of the buffalo, and thus agricultural labour, in children's literature produced by ethnic minority NGOs funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, an international organisation. In these stories, buffalo appear as intelligent storytellers and are associated with work and *kwaam chà-láat* (intelligence, cleverness, wisdom). However, the impact of this re-imagining of the buffalo symbol remains unknown.

### **Thai state schools, modernisation and development**

Around the world, modern education introduces to local settings globalised ideas of and practices associated with 'development' and 'modernity'. These new sets of practices may differ from traditional and/or indigenous learning. Also in Huay Tong, the promotion of modern education through the local Thai school is not a straightforward process. Instead, the state school and associated modern values create dissonance and contestation along political economic and generational lines within the village community as well as within individual households. The overarching theme of this section is the impact of modern state education on local childhood transitions in Huay Tong. The following section suggests how modern Thai state education may impact on local socio-cultural values associated with 'childhood' in Huay Tong.

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<sup>125</sup> '*Tâa mâi yàak bpen kwaai, tæ dtông maa roong-rian, maa rian năng-sǔu*' (Eik, 06.02.08)

<sup>126</sup> Pop, 20.11.08, emphasis PMV

Thai government schools also foster legal notions of childhood and adulthood. According to Thai law, young people are called ‘children’ (*dèk*) until the age of 15. From then on and until marriage, young people are called *ya-wá-chon* (youth). Those holding an ID card are formally referred to as *naai* for married and unmarried men, and *naang sǎao* for unmarried women (Department of Provincial Administration 2008: Identification Card). The Thai ID card, in turn, is a prerequisite for application to higher secondary education and/or paid employment in the lowlands.<sup>127</sup> The next life phase aspired to by many Karen is adulthood through marriage.

These formal understandings of life phases may conflict with young peoples’ own perspectives of their maturation process. In line with legal definitions, the Thai school system refers to all pupils as *dèk* until the end of lower secondary school. Schooling contributes, therefore, to an extension of the ‘childhood’ life phase, the emergence of ‘youth’ and a delay in reaching adulthood. However, at Huay Tong school, I frequently observed boys in particular in their last year of lower secondary school would frown at being included in the ‘*dèk*’ category. School celebrations of the national Child Day<sup>128</sup> (*wan dèk*) also highlight young men’s unease with the institutional category. For ordinary celebrations, pupils from kindergarten to secondary school gather in front of a stage. When I approached the stage with a group

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<sup>127</sup> Kwanchean, 06.03.08

<sup>128</sup> The National Child Day (*wan dèk*) became institutionalised during the period 1957–62, when Marshall Sarit Thanaratat was in power. With this step, the Marshall politicised childhood in the sense that he portrayed Thai citizens as members of the nation-family whose benevolent head is the King. Indeed, kinship names started to express wider social relations and thus enhance the idea of the nation as family. This way, patterns of control and dependence pertaining to the family were projected onto the relationship between citizens and those in power. The emphasis on values such as duty, respect, obedience and gratitude were in line with traditional Buddhist teaching, while the institutionalisation of the National Child Day and accompanying discourses pertain to the modern nation state (Montgomery 2006: 61–2).

of 14-year-old boys, one of them commented in English to me that this was ‘for babies’.<sup>129</sup>

Government education introduces modern understandings of human maturation. These legal and psychological ideas of child development contrast with local practices. Teachers are challenged to expand their ideas through weekend workshops on alternative teaching methods, etc., which provide ideas of how to bring more excitement and creativity into their teaching. Yet, I observed that they only apply these alternative teaching methods to a limited extent in the classrooms at Huay Tong school.<sup>130</sup> Through this training, teachers become acquainted with psychological notions of child development, which they contrast to traditional Karen practices of childrearing. For instance, one teacher presented me with a leaflet on child brain development. He emphasised that nursery school is meant to stimulate children in this respect ‘because the parents cannot develop their children.’<sup>131</sup> This promotion of institutional infant care contrasts with local views on early child development. In the eyes of Karen villagers, it seems more advantageous if a mother can stay at home with her child, rather than having to take it with her to work or leave it in the nursery. This preference speaks of socio-economic status differences among the Karen. As explained in Chapter 5, working activities lose their social value if they involve ‘hard work’. Accordingly, young Karen adults today feel sorry for mothers who have to ‘work hard’<sup>132</sup> and take their children with them to the rice field. The possibility of staying at home with her child means that the woman does not have to ‘work hard’ in either a subsistence or cash economy.

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<sup>129</sup> Boy, 11.01.08. *Wan dèk* is commonly celebrated on the second Saturday of January. Reluctant to travel on Saturdays to the village, Thai teachers of Huay Tong school tend to bring forward the celebrations to the second Friday of January.

<sup>130</sup> Attendance of Teacher Training course in Sanpathong 15.02.08

<sup>131</sup> Tong, 13.02.08

<sup>132</sup> ‘*Tam ngan nak*’ (Hpa Sav Hsoof, 07.06.08)

Institutional care in the nursery also reveals intra-Karen socio-economic differences related to economic changes in agricultural production. Working parents drop off their children at the village nursery at 7.30am and are expected to pick them up at 4.00pm. Children whose mothers are engaged in wage labour at the Royal Project seem to attend nursery to a greater extent. For example, Jiew – whose mother works for the Royal Project – went to the nursery when she was two years old. In contrast, Pit – who comes from one of the richest families in Huay Tong – never attended nursery school and went straight to kindergarten at the age of four. Pit's parents do not have to engage in wage labour and thus have more time for child care<sup>133</sup>.

Modern ideas of personal hygiene are promoted by Thai state schools. In accordance with modern school regulations, Thai school teachers critique Karen practices of hygiene and body care. School regulations expect girls' hair to be no longer than below the ears and boys to have their hair very short. These regulations differ for children in the plains, especially at private schools where girls are allowed to keep their hair long. Thai teachers explain the obligation for short hair in the mountains with reference to ethnic minority children being 'lazy to wash' and more prone to catch lice during the cold season. Therefore, during term time, students at Huay Tong school have a monthly hair cut. Those with richer parents go to a hairstylist in a village further down in Mae Win. Teenage girls often cut their own hair or help one another, while those who do not receive a haircut at home have their hair shortened by a teacher in the school compound. Moreover, teachers pay meticulous attention to children's body care, controlling the state of their nails and clothes regularly. If children appear in what is not considered hygienic, they are asked

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<sup>133</sup> PRE 12

whether they took a bath the other day. Teachers feel that children often respond to this question with a lie because they fear scolding or punishment. There may be several reasons children do not conform to the standards set by the government school. Teachers claim children in kindergarten and primary school cannot take care of themselves and rely on their parents, and some adults argue that certain parents do not care well for their children. One teacher complained Karen parents do not care sufficiently for their children because of their work load in the fields<sup>134</sup>. Yet, my own exchanges with the children suggest that they know how to take care of themselves but do not necessarily *want* to conform to school standards. Participatory research exercises I conducted with children of different age groups suggest that girls and boys at around the age of seven *can* wash themselves, as well as change and wash their clothes by themselves. For example, in his life course (Fig. 10) the 14-year-old boy Noi depicted himself washing and drying clothes at the age of 7 years.



**Figure 10 Detail of life course drawn by a 14-year-old boy (13.06.08)**

The Thai school promotes modern market economy values of time discipline and economic efficiency. These ideas may be in dissonance with local patterns of

<sup>134</sup> 'Kîi giat àap-nám', 'glua kruu dàa', 'glua kruu tam toot' (Giat, 05.06.08)

timing activities according to diurnal and seasonal changes. Indeed, time budgeting is a rather new idea. In the Karen language there is no word for ‘time’. Instead, Karen people use in their own language Thai words when discussing general notions of ‘time’ (*weelaa*), when they measure the hours of the clock (*chûa-moong*), or when they say that some activity was a ‘waste of time’ (*sia weelaa*). For example, one 45-year-old female research participant said ‘there were many ceremonies in the past. It was not funny. It was a waste of time’.<sup>135</sup> In addition, there exists a discrepancy between the time-use priorities of the socio-economic groups of farmers and bureaucrats. These differences are often ethnicised, i.e. explained with references to ‘ethnic’ and not ‘economic’ differences. For example, teachers tend to regard people in Huay Tong as lacking a sense of time discipline, being carefree, doing as they please and taking life easy. They feel that Karen people get up late and only arrive at appointments when they want to.<sup>136</sup> This leads some teachers to question Karen peoples’ work ethos: ‘lazy to learn, lazy to work’.<sup>137</sup> Yet, school demands on children’s and parents’ time use may be in dissonance with seasonal labour requirements in the fields. Parents may be unable to attend teacher-parent meetings during the day when they have to work in the fields. Because of their working obligations in the rice fields, many parents find it impossible to attend school meetings, or to wait for teachers to visit their homes.<sup>138</sup> In the eyes of teachers, this amounts to parental lack of interest in their children’s educational affairs. However, my study suggests that Karen interest in modern Thai education relates to the socio-economic status of households and individuals.

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<sup>135</sup> ‘*Mii pítii yō yō, mâi sanúk. Sǎa we-laa*’ (Nauj Moj, 06.05.08). Surprised by this statement, I double checked, asking my friend whether she does not like ceremonies? She laughed and replied: ‘Indeed. They are a waste of time’.

<sup>136</sup> Rak and Nok, 10.06.08

<sup>137</sup> Sun, 12.03.08

<sup>138</sup> Diary, 09.06.08

### Local values and modern education

Today, Karen adults of high socio-economic status echo the values of the urban Thai middle-class teachers. Many of these Karen adults were among the first generation of Karen children who attended high school outside their village, like Nauj Moj, Ratana or Pit's mother. They believe in the value of modern education as a means for socio-economic advancement. This is not only a value stemming from Karen mythology of the Loss of the Book, but also reflects the images of educated, successful white collar careers conveyed by the popular Thai media.

Yet, not all Karen embrace modern education, and dissonance emerges along socio-economic and/or generational lines. Karen children may question the values and prestige associated with formal education. In Huay Tong, boys and girls show their disinterest in education by 'escaping' (*nĩ*) from school, preferring to roam the countryside or hide in the village mango trees<sup>139</sup>. Children reject the value of certain school subjects because they do not see any future use in learning them. For instance, some 12-year-old children suggested to their Thai teacher that good grades may not improve their situation: 'Some here, they don't pay attention if they get grade 0.<sup>140</sup> They say, grade 4 can't help them. Their parents don't support their study'. Other children protest against certain subjects: 'We don't like English. No interest. It's enough already! It's enough already!'.<sup>141</sup> The teacher of this class suggests that children's disinterest is related to the fact that after graduation from lower secondary school in Huay Tong, many of them stay in the mountains, marry and work as gardeners at the Royal Agricultural Project.

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<sup>139</sup> Bonpasteur, 12.06.08, Hpa Sav Hsoof 15.06.08, 13.06.08

<sup>140</sup> In Thailand, 0 is the lowest grade, 4 the highest.

<sup>141</sup> 'Mâi *chôop* paa-săa ang-grît. Mâi sôn jai. *Poo léeo, poo léeo!*' (Kru Sun, interview, 12.03.08)



Karen and Thai adults sometimes underestimate children's preference for working activities. In the eyes of Thai teachers, students who drop out of school and start working are 'lazy'.<sup>142</sup> Children's preference for work is 'not so good' because 'when we study we can make good work'.<sup>143</sup> Contestations over the value of formal education are also subject to generational power relations at Thai schools and within Karen households. For example, I observed Karen high school students echoing dominant values of education in front of their Thai teachers. During a classroom survey I conducted, 10 out of 17 students expressed the wish to become either a Thai or Japanese teacher. Our conversations were conducted in the presence of their Thai teacher who added 'most of hilltribe student want to be a teacher, especially Thai'.<sup>144</sup> I was surprised by this because whenever I asked Karen children within their home context in the highland village about their aspirations, not one of them said they wanted to become a teacher. I realised that the classroom students were not necessarily giving a genuine response, but were trying to use their answer to meet the possible expectations of a senior, in this case, a teacher. In other words, more than their actual future plans, their answers express respect and high esteem for their teacher and the value of Thai-ness in combination with formal education.

Within households, Karen children may also feel pressurised to value formal education. For example, 16-year-old Tej Suf is currently enrolled in the high school programme at a minor seminary in Nakhon Pathom Province, close to Bangkok. During summer vacations, Tej Suf returned home to help in the fields and in his mother's shop. He is a very sensitive young man, polite, friendly and very skilled in agricultural work. His only 'problem' is his lack of interest in academic learning. According to his mother, 'he is not so clever'. However, already during his childhood,

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<sup>142</sup> Giat, 21.08.09

<sup>143</sup> 'Mâi koei dii' (Rak, 09.06.09)

<sup>144</sup> Belle, 03.08.09

Tej Suf preferred working with animals to school work. From his uncle, I learned that Ratana, Tej Suf's mother, used to tie little Tej Suf up in the house in order to prevent him from going outside. She urged him to read in Thai and punished him if he failed. Because of the long hours spent in the house with animals, Tej Suf today is said to be at ease even with scorpions and spiders. Teachers informed his parents that they found him raising beetles in his dormitory room. Studying books still makes Tej Suf feel uneasy. According to his uncle, it is because of the treatment he received during childhood that Tej Suf today still starts crying when others urge him to read out loud.<sup>145</sup> Although Tej Suf's example cannot be generalised, it suggests that for some Karen children the practical learning through working activities is preferable to formal education at Thai government schools.

### **Learning to be a Thai citizen**

Thai state schools prepare students to become 'Thai citizens'. At school, Karen children are trained to master the Thai language and to respect national symbols through the famous three pillars: the Buddha, the Royalty and the flag. My empirical findings suggest that Thai national schooling enhances children's participation in dominant society, especially through the teaching and learning of the Thai language and the inculcation of national values. Lack of literacy in the national language – as well as ignorance of culturally valued body language – severely restricts ethnic minority peoples' agency and opportunities in the country.<sup>146</sup> For these reasons, Karen parents in Huay Tong generally support their children's introduction to Thai socio-cultural values and manners at school. They know that in order to engage with national and international institutions, such as access to higher education or jobs in the Thai labour market, children need to be able to show respect for mainstream Thai

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<sup>145</sup> Rabiap, 03.03.08

<sup>146</sup> Rak, 10.06.08

culture and national symbols. Children's own perception of the close association between the state school and Thai national culture transpired during participatory research exercises: in their drawings, the school building is often adorned with the national flag (Fig. 10 and 11).



**Figure 11 Detail of life course drawn by Deif (13.06.08)**

The figure originally located here  
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**Figure 12 Morning assembly and flag flying at the nursery**

In Huay Tong, children are introduced to the Thai language and national symbols from nursery school onwards. The nursery school in Huay Tong allows children to adhere to home practices, whilst gradually being exposed to dominant Thai

social values. The children are supervised by a female Karen caregiver, who usually speaks to them in Karen, and the toddlers are not required to eat at tables but have their lunch sitting on the floor, just as they would do in their Karen homes. At the same time, the caregiver practises the Thai and English alphabets with them through games and concentration tasks. Furthermore, the caregiver teaches children respect for Thai national symbols, such as the flag, the national anthem and the King. Like their older peers in the school compound, children in the nursery assemble in the morning to fly the flag and sing national songs (Fig. 12).<sup>147</sup>

By the time they attend kindergarten, Karen children have learned the characters of the Thai script through singing and playing. Despite these preparations, however, most children continue to struggle with reading and writing Thai throughout primary school. Children's difficulties with written language were evident throughout my three participatory research exercises. Observing how the children distributed work amongst themselves, I found that it was always the same girl and boy who were in charge of writing.<sup>148</sup>

In kindergarten, all children also become familiar with religious practices of silent meditation and vocal prayer. For example, in the morning, the teacher encourages them to sit down quietly in a circle and pass a little candle around. Each child holds the candle for a while, gazing at the flame and becoming calm.<sup>149</sup> At the morning assembly, children recite Buddhist and Christian prayers after flying the flag and singing the national anthem.

At Huay Tong school, Karen children are introduced to the *maa-ra-yâat Thai*. The *maa-ra-yâat Thai* is a code of good social behaviour, including all kinds of subtleties of verbal and non-verbal behaviour (e.g. Howard 2004; Leo 2007). It

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<sup>147</sup> Diary, 21.06.08

<sup>148</sup> Diary, 30.05, 06.06, 13.06.08

<sup>149</sup> Diary, 14.02.08

prescribes how to show respect for political economic status differences, through body language and other aspects of social interaction. For example, when passing by a teacher, students have to lower their upper body and greet them with a proper salutation (*wâai*). Similarly, younger students are expected to show respect to their older peers and to obey them in both the village and the school.

Mastery of these manners is associated with maintenance of social order and discipline.<sup>150</sup> By the same token, ignorance of *maa-ra-yâat Thai* can have awkward consequences when interacting with (majority) Thai people. Buddhist-Thai mainstream society instructs children from infancy onwards in the gradual mastery of this code of conduct, through their parents, teachers and monks. Children seem to have a certain liberty in mastering these manners until roughly the age of 12: ‘the little ones are listening, in secondary school they must do it’.<sup>151</sup> In Huay Tong, students also learn from their teachers and parents about the *maa-ra-yâat Thai*. Yet, because Karen culture does not require the young to constantly use these manners as lowland children do, highland children struggle with mastering this body language. Unfamiliarity with socio-culturally valued body language, in turn, may create dissonance and misunderstanding between Thai and Karen people.

Teachers scorn the reproduction of home culture in the classroom. Hence, what is normal at home is considered awkward behaviour at school. For example, the teacher Sun complained: ‘They shout together. Their parents don’t teach them about good behaviour. Not the same in the city’. She described students who would sit on their chairs with their knees high: ‘I scold them, but their parents do the same’.<sup>152</sup> Teachers tend to frame dissonances in behaviour in ethnic terms, explaining that Karen behaviour differs, for example, from Hmong or northern Thai behaviour.

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<sup>150</sup> ‘*Mii rá-biang, wínai*’ (Rak, 10.06.08)

<sup>151</sup> ‘*Lék fang, máttayom dtong tam*’ (Nok, 22.05.08)

<sup>152</sup> Sun, 12.03.08

However, as most teachers are of the Thai urban middle-class, their attitudes towards the children reflect also class attitudes.

My participation in school events, as well as follow-up research in the village, illuminated the Karen people's relaxed attitude towards showing respect for national Thai symbols. The importance in mastering Thai Buddhist non-verbal language was highlighted during the National Teacher's Day on 12 June in Thailand. On the annual Teacher's Day (*wan waai kruu*), students have to show deference to the Buddha, the King and their teachers. On a stage, a Buddha shrine was placed with the Thai flag and a picture of King Bhumibol Adulyadej. All the teachers were seated next to this arrangement. Students climbed onto the stage in groups, prostrated themselves in front of the sacred arrangement, and then proceeded to bow in front of their teachers. All seemed well and jolly. Yet, after the performance, during lunchtime in the teachers' canteen, the teachers expressed strong emotions when speaking about students' performances, ranging from anger to disappointment and sadness. According to the teachers, the young people had not properly paid their respects. Rather than honouring the Buddha, the monarch and their teachers, they seemed to the teachers to be mocking these authorities. Even teachers who were usually sympathetic to Karen children's difficulties with combining different cultures insisted that what had happened on the day was lamentable, and they expressed concerns for the students' future outside of the village.

These observations led me to consult both adult and child key informants in the village. Most research participants suggested that students showing deference to teachers and the Buddha was not a problem (*mâi-bpen-rai*) – 'not so serious in Thailand'.<sup>153</sup> I learned that Christian Karen parents encourage their children to salute

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<sup>153</sup> Ratana, 12.06.08

the Buddha, telling them that the *wâai* is like a word of greeting and that ‘they must not do it with their heart’.<sup>154</sup> 29 years old Nauj Sav Geiz, a Catholic Christian from Huay Tong, remembered that during her time at high school teachers went with students to worship at the local Buddhist temple. She thinks that if she had refused to join the class, she would not have graduated. Yet she also found that this was not a reason for concern (*mâi-bpen-rai*).<sup>155</sup> After school, I asked Nauj Cooz, a 14 year old girl resident in Huay Tong, how she felt about bowing in front of the Buddha and her teachers. I learned that she felt good about it.<sup>156</sup> The village priest, who is French, reminded me that in Asia matters of religion and identity are treated less strictly than in Europe. He understands that people of his parish live as minority Catholic Christians in wider Buddhist Karen and Thai society, which implies they correctly use the *waai* towards teachers, parents – and the Buddha.<sup>157</sup>

Notwithstanding state school efforts for national integration, Huay Tong school is also a site of political dissonances. Karen children continue to grow up learning according to a standardised curriculum with little sensitivity for their political minority status. Students are called by their Thai name and are only allowed to speak Thai in class. Children are required to strip off their Karen names and adopt Thai names. The use of any language except Central Thai is forbidden. Concealing their linguistic diversity is probably the most immediate and defensive reaction in settings dominated by ethnic Thai people. Methods of concealment include feigning shyness of speech, falling completely silent, and being secretive about one’s place of origin. Karen people becoming shy and silent in a situation where ‘others’ are in the majority, both in the lowlands and in the highlands, is something I observed several times when

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<sup>154</sup> Ratana, 12.06.08

<sup>155</sup> Nauj Sav Geiz, 12.06.08

<sup>156</sup> ‘*Rúu-sùk dii*’, Nauj Cooz, 12.06.08

<sup>157</sup> Bonpasteur, 12.06.08

accompanying Karen adults to the plains.<sup>158</sup> In the lowlands, it can take time for Karen people to reveal their geographic background to mainstream Thai people: ‘If they speak good Thai, they will never tell first “I am Karen from Huay Tong”. But once they are friends they will tell’.<sup>159</sup> A Thai teacher describes Karen in the lowlands as ‘shieeeee’ (sic!) and ‘timid’.<sup>160</sup> They become quieter and less self-confident: ‘If not necessary, they don’t speak. They are silent’<sup>161</sup>. But teachers suspect that Karen students use their mother tongue or fall completely silent in order to conceal shyness and to avoid the mockery of their northern Thai peers.

Teaching quality is also an issue of concern and weakens learning processes of knowledge and socio-cultural values associated with Thai citizenship. Thai centralised education policies are not encouraging multiculturalism, and teaching methods remain largely insensitive to the necessities of students whose mother tongue differs from the language spoken in class rooms. Educated Karen adults are concerned about the quality of Thai language teaching. They mentioned to me worries about Thai teachers not being motivated or having the right aptitude. In the past, Karen teachers were better equipped to teach the national language. For example, 31-year-old Nauj La – who holds a bachelor’s degree – wonders why there are no Karen teachers, unlike during her childhood. She finds that Karen teachers taught the Thai language better than Thai teachers are doing now. Rather emotionally, she adds: ‘Pia, some people can already not read Thai, cannot write Thai! Before they could read’.<sup>162</sup>

Indeed, Thai teachers in Mae Ta La and Huay Tong are often poorly prepared to teach in culturally diverse classrooms. This is particularly true of the older

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<sup>158</sup> For example, Somboon 04.02.08, Sav Geiz and Hse 19.08.09).

<sup>159</sup> Yos, 11.08.09

<sup>160</sup> ‘Aaaaaai’, ‘kii-glua’ (Kru Rak, 27.07.09)

<sup>161</sup> ‘Taa mai jam-bpen kao mai pûut. Ngiap’ (Rak, 27.07.09), Jirasak 18.03.08, Sangwan 15.07.08

<sup>162</sup> ‘Mûa-gòon kru soon dii qua. Pia, baang-kon paa-săa Thai an mâi dâai léeo, kian mâi dâai léeo. Mûa-gòon an dâai!’ (Nauj La, 12.05.08)



generation of teachers. Unfortunately, these teachers in turn are those often sent at the end of their careers to teach in the highlands. This issue was raised by Ratana, the local parents' representative at Huay Tong school, in a letter to the school director. In it, she complained that the standard of Huay Tong school was far below the national average<sup>163</sup> and remarked on the following issues: teachers should arrive punctually in the morning, just as they ask of the children; time in the classrooms should be fully used; and teachers should inform parents if children are not coming to school, because only in collaboration can teachers and parents improve the situation. Finally, she argued that more young teachers were required as they would be more motivated than older teachers who were close to retirement.<sup>164</sup>

Indeed, schools in the highlands generally have lower teaching quality than in the plains. When making the transition to high school in the plains, therefore, students often need to make additional efforts to catch up with their new classroom standards. Even if they were excellent students in the mountains, their performance tends to be far below those who attended lower secondary school in the lowlands.<sup>165</sup>

Bullying and ethnic stereotyping is still common, especially at government schools in the lowlands. For instance, at Ban Kad school, teachers estimate that 30–40 percent of students are either ethnic Karen or Hmong.<sup>166</sup> Remembering her studies in Ban Kad during the early 1990s, Nauj Sav Geiz recalls: 'Thai people looked down on Karen. They "liked bullying"<sup>167</sup> calling them "*chao khǎo*" [hill people] and "dirty".' Today, ethnic discrimination in schools persists. In northern Thai society, ethnic

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<sup>163</sup> Rak, 13.07.08

<sup>164</sup> Ratana, letter, 18.03.08

<sup>165</sup> For example, Nauj Sav Geiz was a leading student in Huay Tong. However, when she moved to Ban Kad she turned number 43 in class and had to make hard efforts and pay strict attention to her studies ('*dtâng-jai rian*') (Nauj Sav Geiz, 09.06.08)

<sup>166</sup> Belle, 27.01.09

<sup>167</sup> '*Mûa-gòon kon Thai duu-tùuk kon Pgaz k'nyau. Choo rang gēē*' (Nauj Sav Geiz, 09.06.08, 20.05.08)

stereotypes are often conveyed through jokes and seemingly benign comments. Thai teachers and classmates bring them into the classroom. For example, I frequently heard teachers making general comparisons between different ethnic groups, describing ‘the Karen’ as being ‘messy in their house’, ‘dirty’, ‘getting up late’, with no social rules governing their everyday behaviour or ‘taking it always easy’.<sup>168</sup> Thai schools’ efforts to instil values of citizenship and national belonging are creating dissonances. On the one hand they help children with integration into national society and economy. On the other hand, state school attendance renders children more sensitive of their political marginality within mainstream Thai society.

### **Thai schools as sites of socio-economic inequality**

Processes of uneven economic development in the highlands shape Karen children’s access to Thai state schools. School access largely depends on a village’s geographic location. For example, Mae Ta La village in Mae Chaem district, the home village of several research participants, has a school building but no regular teaching. Children in the village remain largely illiterate. At around the age of 10, some are sent for formal education to foster households in resource richer Karen villages, such as Huay Tong. Moreover, school uniforms are not provided for free;<sup>169</sup> while the Royal Thai Government helps impoverished households with one uniform set per child, children are required to have four different sets to be worn on different days of the week. In Huay Tong, these are the ordinary uniform, sport clothes, scout uniforms and traditional Karen clothes. Obtaining these can cause financial hardship for poor households, and some students may only have one set of uniform. This becomes problematic during the rainy season when garments dry slowly, which means that

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<sup>168</sup> ‘*Sùk-ga-bprók*’, ‘*doon sai*’, ‘*arai godai*’, ‘*sabaai, saabai*’ (Nok and Rak, 10.06.08, Belle 05.08.09)

<sup>169</sup> For example, whilst the sport set only costs 300 Baht, the ordinary set for girls with a white blouse and black skirt already costs 450 Baht. In total, each student has to contend with an expense of 1,000 Baht per school year for uniforms.

some children come to school with wet clothes, shoes and socks.<sup>170</sup> Moreover, students and their home communities are requested to fund or provide other in-kind contributions for Thai school maintenance.<sup>171</sup> Often teachers, parents and children make collective efforts in negotiating economic benefits with national and international non-governmental donor institutions. My analysis of institutional interdependencies in Chapter 7 illustrates such collective processes of accessing funding for school maintenance and/or scholarships.

Socio-economic dissonances between middle-class Thai consumer culture and Karen highland villages are evident in Thai government schools. In Huay Tong, kindergarten teachers use leaflets from city supermarkets to teach children the Thai language and widen their general knowledge. From primary school onwards, teachers take students on excursions to the lowlands, such as the hot springs, the zoological garden in Chiang Mai or the famous Buddhist temple on Mount Doi Suthep. A shopping mall visit is an integral part of such excursions.

The figure originally located here cannot be made available  
online via ORA

**Figure 13 School excursion to a shopping mall in the lowlands**

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<sup>170</sup> Giat, 05.06.08

<sup>171</sup> Diary 21.03.08, Hse 21.07.09, Yodt, 03.08.09

As seen in the picture above (Fig. 13) the Karen children enjoy excursions to shopping malls. It is a exciting and very different from their everyday lives in the highland villages. Nevertheless, the confrontation with urban consumer culture highlights the economic inequalities between Karen children as well as between highlanders and lowlanders. For example, talking about shopping mall visits in Chiang Mai, Panida explains that she likes to look at things but ‘cannot buy because there is no money’.<sup>172</sup> Karen parents also complained to me that high school canteens in the lowlands are expensive<sup>173</sup> and/or provide small food portions insufficient to meet the hunger of teenage boys. For instance, speaking about her 15-year-old son’s transition from Huay Tong school to Sanpathong Agricultural Polytechnic College, Chaa’s mother worries that: ‘They eat and are not full’.<sup>174</sup> Still hungry, Chaa and his friends go outside school to buy food.

Thai teachers also emphasise the socio-economic differences between Karen village life and the lowlands. Throughout my fieldwork in Huay Tong school, teachers were anxious to point out the status differences between northern Thai students in the lowlands and the Karen children I studied in Huay Tong. For example, they stressed the difficulty of organising overland school excursions in Huay Tong, explaining that Karen parents have less money than lowlanders to support these trips. A three-day trip to Bangkok and a close-by beach costs roughly 500 Baht per student. In lowland schools, parents pay this once, whereas in Huay Tong parents make monthly contributions to a collective depot according to what they can afford. When Thai teachers organise bus journeys rather than train travel, this is because on the

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<sup>172</sup> ‘*suu mâi dâai, mâi mii nung*’ (Panida, 10.05.08)

<sup>173</sup> During the time of fieldwork, students at Ban Kad paid 15 Baht (0.3 GBP) for a plate of rice with one side dish and 20 Baht (0.4 GBP) for two side dishes. Prices were the same at Chiang Mai University (20.06.08 and 10.08.09).

<sup>174</sup> Nauj Moj, 9.06.08, Sav Geiz, 24.08.09, ‘*gin kaa, mai im*’ (Chaa Moj, 18.07.09)

coach ‘everyone is equal’,<sup>175</sup> while trains operate with a class system. The teachers, therefore, avoid having to adapt to the lower socio-economic position of highlanders who can only afford a third-class ticket.

Socio-economic status differences between children themselves can also be seen in schools. School transitions to the lowlands insert Karen youth into Thai lowland society where people are generally wealthier, own different products and have different consumption practices. Rural parents may underestimate the influence and pressure of peer comparisons and blame TV commercials for their children’s rising consumerist aspirations. For example, 12-year-old Pit migrated in May 2008 from Huay Tong to lower secondary education at St Joseph school in Sampran Province. A few months after the transition, he mentioned to his mother on the telephone his need for new underwear. Throughout primary school in Huay Tong, he had been using underwear bought for 20 Baht on sale in his mother’s shop. At the minor seminary, Pit felt that these were not good enough anymore and asked his mother to buy men’s underwear from a well-known brand costing over 100 Baht per item. Pit’s mother attributed his new desires to the influence of TV commercials. Although from a wealthy household in Huay Tong, she found the request exaggerated and advised her son: ‘do not worry, none can see it’.<sup>176</sup> His mother probably overlooked the fact that boys share sleeping rooms and changing rooms for sport which offer plenty of opportunities for mutual comparison.

Balancing increasing study and school obligations is stressful for Karen high school students. As outlined in Chapter 4, most highland students contribute cash income to funding their studies. Concern for money is a major cause of stress among high school students, especially those of low social status. The higher the children’s

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<sup>175</sup> ‘*Tuk kon muan-gan*’ (Rak, 03.06.08)

<sup>176</sup> ‘*Mai bpen rai. Mai mi krai hen*’ (Pit Moj, 18.07.09)

social status, the less they feel ‘tensed’ or ‘tired’ because of the weekly commute between their highland villages and lowland schools. In Ban Kad, most students work outside school time. According to my survey, 40 out of the 41 students worked. Of these students, many felt ‘tensed’ (*krîat*) because of balancing study and work obligations. Moreover, 37 students felt ‘exhausted’ (*nîrai*) because of work and 30 because of their studies.<sup>177</sup>

The case study of Nauj Panida illustrates how poverty coupled with high occupational aspirations causes stress among migrating Karen children.

*Textbox 2: Case study of Nauj Panida from Mae Chaem*

Panida is originally from a poor Catholic household in a village in Mae Chaem. She is the fourth of six children. In 2008 she was 14 years old.

After completing primary school in her home village, Panida arrived for lower secondary school to Huay Tong as a foster child. She stayed with her younger sister (12 years old in 2008) and with her younger maternal aunt (*naa*). This aunt was a waged agricultural labourer at the Royal Project and her household was rather poor. Panida worked in her aunt’s household helping with chores, such as preparing the evening meal, taking care of the younger children and looking after cattle. During weekends she also assisted her aunt with rice and vegetable cultivation. In 2007–08 she stayed with her younger sister throughout the school year in Huay Tong. During the school break in the dry season of 2008, she returned for a two-week visit to her maternal household in Mae Chaem. Panida liked her native village better than Huay Tong as it was more enjoyable (*sanuk qua*). Nevertheless, Panida preferred Huay Tong and the highlands to life in the lowlands where she felt poor. In the highlands, she did not have to spend money on everyday items, such as food and water.

Panida’s older siblings studied in Chiang Mai and the younger ones attended school in Huay Tong. Being in Huay Tong allowed her to socialise with peers from other villages and to foster contacts for support of her further studies. Like Hpo Muf, Panida is one of the most ambitious students in her class in Huay Tong. In the future, she wanted to work as a medical doctor.

The low socio-economic status of Panida’s family in Mae Chaem made it necessary for Panida to access institutions for funding of her high school studies. Through her friend Hpo Muf, she accessed Ratana, Hpo Muf’s foster mother. Ratana, in turn, mediated between Panida and a scholarship programme of the Catholic Church. In this way, Panida accessed funding for high school attendance at Santisuk school, a local welfare school.

In May 2008, Panida made the transition to high school. According to her neighbours, Panida is said to be ‘really much tensed’ since her transition to Santisuk school. There, Panida stayed at a school dormitory. She found sleep in the dormitory less pleasant than in the mountains because of the hot lowland climate and because she had to share the space with many other girls. Because of the distance to Huay

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<sup>177</sup> BK, 17.08.09

Tong village, travel costs are fairly high and Panida could not afford to return every weekend to her aunt's household. When there was a chance, however, Panida enjoyed her visits to Huay Tong because she could catch up with peers like Hpo Muf. When visiting Huay Tong, she also helped her relatives with seasonal agricultural work, such as rice cultivation. During longer school holidays, Panida searched with friends from school for paid employment, for example, in a doll manufacturing company in Chiang Mai. The money thus earned was used for personal items such as toiletries and sandals.

In July 2009, Panida was still enrolled in Santisuk School, still pursuing her ambition to become a medical doctor. However, at the time of my visit, she was hospitalised after she had a nervous breakdown. Neighbours of her aunt in Huay Tong were all upset about this incident and attributed it to her being 'tensed' (*kriat*) about financial issues. Reconciling her occupational aspirations with her social background stressed her. She was afraid being a burden to her relatives and made every effort to contribute financially to her own studies. After her release from the hospital, Panida returned to her aunt's household in Huay Tong for a weekend's recovery before she resumed her studies at Santisuk school.

The reputation of particular schools is also a socio-economic status symbol. School prestige is important and can enhance or mitigate children's social status. Students worry about the value and the social prestige of their future school. As a public welfare school, Santisuk school is known to be an institution for 'poor people' (*kon jon*). While school expenses in Ban Kad are around 300 Baht per week, in Santisuk the same amount of money is sufficient for one month's school expenses. Students' general performance is also lower at Santisuk than at Ban Kad.<sup>178</sup> The low prestige of Santisuk school worried Panida and Bauf Sof. Before their transition to high school, they eagerly searched for positive comments on their future school. During his application in person to Santisuk, Bauf Sof turned to me, commenting that the school compound 'is pretty, isn't it?'<sup>179</sup> Struggling with her disappointment at being unable to attend her first choice of school, Panida also asked for my confirmation that Santisuk was 'like Ban Kad, isn't it?' and which school was

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<sup>178</sup> Ratana, 22.05.08, Belle, 27.01.09

<sup>179</sup> 'Sǔai mâi kap?' (Bauf Sof, 04.02.08)

prettier<sup>180</sup>. Thus, Karen children seem aware that education is a means to boost or lower their social status among their peers and within their households and village communities.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter, I analysed the role of Thai state schools in shaping the political economy of childhood transitions in northern Thailand. I explained how schools are linked to wider questions of socio-economic ‘development’ and the modernising agenda of the Thai nation state. I discussed the role of schools in instilling children with notions of Thai citizenship, centred on politicised symbols such as the national flag and anthem, the use of Thai national language and referential body language expressed in the *maa-ra-yâat Thai*. Then, I analysed schools as sites of political economic and socio-cultural dissonance. Although often promoted as means for upward social mobility, the state school in Huay Tong actually accentuates and fosters political-economic inequalities between and among Karen villagers and Thai lowlanders.

In summary, my data on children’s changing learning and working activities suggest that in the past, socio-cultural learning supported the Karen subsistence economy. As described in Chapter 5, socio-cultural learning took place largely in children’s village communities where adults and peers introduced children into a mastery of gendered working activities. The learning of socio-cultural skills continues to play an important part in children’s growing up. At the same time, however, modern education introduces new values related to child development, modern institutional discipline, nationalism and a capitalist economy. Modern Thai education is not supporting activities associated with an ethnicised rural underclass. Teachers

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<sup>180</sup> ‘*Mǔan Ban Kad, chai mâi?*’, ‘*arai sǔai qua?*’ (Panida, 20.05.08)



devalue work in rice fields as 'backward' and juxtapose agricultural activities against academic studying, and formal learning is promoted as the means to attractive future paid employment. Beyond children's gender roles, modern education emphasises their political roles as future citizens and their socio-economic consumer and worker identities.

Within the modern Thai education system, the Karen emerge as a rural underclass and ethnic minority. They are doubly disadvantaged in accessing formal education because of their rural poverty and their political marginality. Karen people see education as a means for social advancement and are increasingly supporting their children's prolonged education. To fund their education, students need to access national and international institutions, like the Thai government or different NGOs. They, therefore, contact institutions through cultural intermediaries, such as priests, monks or NGO workers. The following chapter analyses the role of local, national and international institutions in regulating translocal processes of Karen children's migration for education.

## **CHAPTER 7. Regulating translocal processes: institutional interdependencies**

### **Introduction**

Karen children migrate because of rising economic household needs and their educational aspirations. Their migratory arrangements are regulated and mediated through multilayered processes by local, national and international institutions. This chapter explores how regulatory institutions - such as households, NGOs, the Catholic Church and the Thai administration – shape children's movements. Patron-client relations are, according to my findings, the underlying dynamic guiding these institutional networks and relations.

The first part of the chapter analyses local patronage politics by investigating foster relations between households in Mae Ta La and Huay Tong. My case study illustrates the unequal socio-economic and political relations among Karen households in different locations. I show how fosterage reveals the socio-economic aspirations of children and households as well as the power configurations of everyday life. The second part of the chapter explores the local operations of modern national and international institutions. Modern institutions mediate between wider national and international political economic developments and local institutions. The presence of such institutions has a great impact on local power relations. At the same time, my data highlight how local relations of political patronage also shape the working of modern institutions. I explain the role of local cultural intermediaries in influencing how institutions operate along lines of political patronage.

### **The political economy of a foster system**

Based on a specific case study, I discuss in this section the role of fosterage as a means to negotiate access to basic education in the highlands. Rising economic

aspirations and the need for cash income compel households in remote areas to send their children to other places for school and future employment. To enable this, households mobilise (fictive) kin relations, establishing systems of fosterage, seniority and political patronage. Therefore, household relations reveal socio-economic status differences among Karen households in different geographic locations. My analysis of a specific case study of children from Mae Ta La who move into a resource rich household in Huay Tong helps understanding of the wider phenomenon of fosterage as a means to regulate Karen children's migration for education.

#### *Mae Ta La: a context of departure*

This section outlines the socio-economic context of Mae Ta La village. The descriptive material presented in this section highlights the political economic dimensions of 'ethnicity' in relation to geographic and institutional spaces. As outlined in Chapters 3 and 4, socio-economic development of the highlands of northern Thailand followed uneven patterns. As a consequence, some villages, like Huay Tong, are well connected to national markets and education systems, while other places lack access to modern institutions. Such spatialised inequalities, in turn, explain diversity of childhood transition experiences among Karen minority people residing at different locations.

The Karen village Mae Ta La is a typical context from which economically disadvantaged children migrate to highland villages, like Huay Tong, and lowland towns, like Ban Kad, for education and work. Mae Ta La is the home of several child research participants whom I met as foster children in Huay Tong. Researching their lives in Huay Tong, I found it necessary to better understand the home context of these children. So, in April 2008, during the school holidays I accompanied Mae Ta

La children to their home village. Although I was familiar with descriptions of the place, my fieldwork highlighted to me the extreme socio economic differences between Mae Ta La and Huay Tong.

Mae Ta La is situated in a remote, beautiful area in Mae Chaem district, Chiang Mai province (Map 2). On a slope outside the village there is a little Buddhist temple where villagers regularly gather for prayer and religious teaching. Villagers also practice animist rituals. Forty-five households are spread along a river, and houses are smaller here than in Huay Tong. Whilst in Huay Tong the ground floor of a house is protected by walls, this is not the case in Mae Ta La where houses stand on poles. People sleep in the upper area and use the open space below for social gatherings, eating or washing laundry.<sup>181</sup> Social village life centres on the river. People gather for daily baths, as well as the washing of clothes, dishes and motorbikes. Children enjoy snorkelling and playing games in and along the river.

Like in Huay Tong, village space reveals socio-economic and political status differences among villagers. Social differentiation is observable alongside the river, where wealthier and more established households are located upriver. Poorer villagers use the river further down. For example, the household of the village headman is located right at the entrance to the village, the most upstream point of the settlement. This location bears the privilege of being the first point where foreigners are received and where the clearest water for personal care, cooking and laundry can be used. Mae Ta La children migrating to Huay Tong are both ‘upriver’ and ‘downriver’ children.<sup>182</sup>

Livelihoods are based on swidden agriculture and supplemented by the riches of the flora and fauna around the river. For example, women and girls venture out to

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<sup>181</sup> Nauj Hpo Muf, 18.04.08

<sup>182</sup> Bauf Sof and Hpo Muf, 24.04.08

gather green plants, fishes and shells for daily food preparation. Children in Mae Ta La assist their household economies, yet rarely participate in the market economy. The young do not receive or spend pocket money. In contrast to the children in Huay Tong, Mae Ta La youngsters are not active consumers confronted with a choice range of candy; instead, they eat local sweets such as homemade rice snacks or sugar cane cubes (*náam oi*). Some of the everyday tasks in Mae Ta La, like rice pounding in the morning, are considered ‘archaic’ in Huay Tong where few households pound their own rice. One of the first differences between Huay Tong and Mae Ta La I noticed was that it is unnecessary to buy things in Mae Ta La.<sup>183</sup> Apart from a little grocery store owned by the village head household and an even tinier shop, no one runs a business. Nevertheless, there is a growing need for cash income to pay for children’s education in government schools, the maintenance and running of motorbikes and gasoline costs, etc.

However, Thai state development projects have not transformed the landscapes of Mae Chaem as they did in Mae Wang. Compared to Huay Tong, the infrastructure in Mae Ta La is poor. The village is not connected to paved roads and is inaccessible during the rainy season. There is no running water and for communication people use a telephone at the village headman’s household. The village relies on solar energy. Connections between Mae Ta La and other localities are therefore difficult, and outsiders find it difficult to access the village. The poor infrastructure also explains the gaping absence of modern institutions in Mae Ta La.

The Thai administration is marginally represented through the village head man. Otherwise, only the Buddhist *wat* and the state school outside the village serve as gentle reminders of the Thai nation state. Until 2001, Buddhist monks formally

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<sup>183</sup> ‘*Mâi dtong suu*’ (Hpo Muf, 17.04.08), Nauj Eu, 16.03.08

educated in lowland monasteries provided basic modern education to villagers.<sup>184</sup> To this day, the monks help link male adolescents with temple schools in lowland towns where the boys become ordained as novices and study for lower and higher secondary education. Yet, even national Buddhist holidays are not celebrated according to the timing set by the provincial administration in Chiang Mai. Instead, the monks in Mae Ta La follow the traditional lunar practice.<sup>185</sup> This is different in Huay Tong, where villagers celebrate national Buddhist holidays according to the days set by the Thai administration. The large absence of modern Thai state institutions and bureaucratic processes impacts on the seemingly ‘unorganised’ way villagers conceive of bureaucratic issues, such as filling out forms as part of the enrolment procedures for education at Thai state schools. They often access assistance in these steps by relatives who are familiar with the working of modern institutions because they work and study in more centralized locations, like Huay Tong<sup>186</sup>.

State education is largely absent in Mae Ta La, despite the existence of a school building. There is no kindergarten, and primary education is scarce and of poor quality. In the wake of the 1997 education policy and the Thai governments’ commitment to improve access of formal education in the highlands, the first government school in Mae Ta La was built in 2001. Located around 300 metres outside the village, the school is indeed easily accessible. However, few Thai teachers are willing to work in such a remote location. Consequently, the first two years of primary school are taught on a very irregular basis.

During my fieldwork in Mae Ta La, after a shared evening meal with my host’s relatives and neighbours, we embarked on a spontaneous and lengthy

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<sup>184</sup> For example, in 1997, Hpa Nif, worked during one year as teacher before he moved to Huay Tong for employment with the Royal Project (Hpa Nif, 21.04.08)

<sup>185</sup> ‘*Tii Huay Tong tam muan-gan Chiang Mai*’ (Nauj Hpo Muf, 19.04.08)

<sup>186</sup> Hpa Nif, 13.03.08, Ratana 28.05.08

discussion on education in the village. At this time, there was one teacher in charge of 35 children. According to villagers, the teacher only taught one week per month. On these occasions, he does not lodge in Mae Ta La but sleeps in another village. Therefore, parent-teacher contact is scarce and the teacher gives the impression of shunning interaction with Mae Ta La villagers.<sup>187</sup> Moreover, he is accused of arriving late in the mornings, and precious study time is not used well because he apparently prefers to sleep while the children are sent to work on little tasks at the school compound. Mae Ta La children thus remain largely illiterate.

During our discussion, one young man, who works as a teaching assistant, became very agitated about the situation. In his spontaneous complaint he pointed at the link between villagers' political economic marginalisation, geographic isolation and unequal access to education: 'They say people here are more stupid than they are there. But in reality, it is the teacher who is stupid, isn't it? The teacher is stupid! No, and even more stupid is the minister who does not send enough teachers here'. He added: 'They say the children here cannot read and write and that they are stupid. But if the teacher does not come, how shall they learn?'<sup>188</sup>

In the eyes of Mae Ta La villagers, their limited access to state education also explains their political economic marginality. Yet, in an expanding cash economy, they need to connect to the institutions of the modern nation state, such as health clinics and schools. Cash is necessary for covering health bills and school fees as well as gasoline expenses for motorbike journeys. Parents largely rely on their children to provide this income. Thus, in order to improve household situations, children are sent to other places for education. In order to attend state schools, most children relocate to live in foster households or governmental dormitories in other villages. Their

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<sup>187</sup> Group discussion, 19.04.08

<sup>188</sup> Assistant teacher, 10.04.08

movements are not unstructured but are instead regulated by institutional networks between households, state schools, and the Buddhist Sangha.

The example of Nauj Hpo Muf's relocation to Ratana's household in Huay Tong highlights the interdependencies between household economies, modern institutions as well as individual aspirations.

*Textbox 3: Case study Hpo Muf from Mae Ta La village*

I met Nauj Hpo Muf for the first time in Huay Tong in December 2007. At the time she was 16 years old, lived in a foster arrangement and was about to finish her last year of lower secondary studies at Huay Tong School. Nauj Hpo Muf was born in Mae Ta La village, Mae Chaem district. Her mother died when she was three months old, so she was raised in the village by her father and maternal grandmother, as well as an uncle and aunt. Hpo Muf has an older brother who works in a hotel in Chiang Mai. As a child, Hpo Muf rarely attended school. Instead, she helped her father with agricultural work. The family suffered economic hardship where at times there was no rice available and Hpo Muf ate bananas for days. Her father lives in the same village in a house close to her grandmother's house and struggles with drinking and drug problems.

In 2004, Hpo Muf was 12 years old and became the first Mae Ta La child to move to Ratana's household in Huay Tong village. The relocation was mediated through kin relations by Ratana's younger sister Nauj La who is married to the son of Mae Ta La's head of village. When Hpo Muf arrived in Huay Tong, she could not read. She joined Huay Tong School in the last year of primary education and had to catch up on a lot of instruction that the other child had already mastered.<sup>189</sup> She received a government scholarship for her studies in Huay Tong school and lived and worked in her foster household. In 2007 Hpo Muf was attending the last year of lower secondary school (M3).

She was an outstanding student both in grade performance as well as in taking on responsibilities in the school compound. Before and after school, Hpo Muf worked in the grocery shop of her foster mother Ratana. The shop opened at 7.00am and closed at 7.00pm. She also helped with seasonal agricultural labour in Ratana's rice fields and took care of her youngest son. Different to her peers with families in Huay Tong, Hpo Muf was not free to play and hang out after school or before the evening meal. Sometimes, I had the impression that extending her responsibilities at school gave her time to arrive a bit later for the work waiting for her at the foster household. For example, sometimes she would stay until 5.00pm in the school library, ordering books with her peers and chatting with the teachers.

Hpo Muf's foster mother insisted she treated her like her own daughter. Indeed, Hpo Muf had privileges other foster children did not have, e.g. eating together with the family. Yet, there were also many differences between the daily lives of Hpo Muf and of Ratana's biological children. For example, Hpo Muf did not share the family's bed but slept in a separate room. Hpo Muf said she did not mind working and living with Ratana, her foster mother, who supported her learning activities.

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<sup>189</sup> Nauj Hpo Muf, 18.04.08; Nauj Sav Geiz, 21.04.08



Ratana often emphasised that she ‘saved money’ for the girl to finish high school in Ban Kad and for her social welfare studies.

Indeed, it seemed that Ratana planned for Hpo Muf’s future in relation to her own projects. After graduation from high school, Ratana would like to see Hpo Muf continue with higher studies in social welfare. Afterwards, she envisaged Hpo Muf working for COERR, a respectable Thai NGO where Ratana’s younger sister was already employed and her cousin held a high position. In no circumstances did she want Hpo Muf to marry beforehand or even have a boyfriend: ‘I don’t want Hpo Muf to be like the other women in the village’.

Hpo Muf herself said she would like to become in the future an English guide in Chiang Mai. With her income she hoped to support the development of her village, for example, via building a community centre. Nevertheless, she had ambiguous feelings in regards to her home village. The distance between Mae Ta La Ta village and Huay Tong took around three hours to cover on motorbike. Usually, Hpo Muf only returned once per year to Mae Ta La for the national Songkran festival in April. She missed feeling comfortable at home where she can do whatever she wants. At the same time, she placed a high value on education: ‘Sometimes, I like to go home, I miss home but education is important’.<sup>190</sup> In addition, she had a difficult relationship with her father, a heavy drinker, who makes her feel ‘sad’, ‘fed up’ and ‘annoyed’.<sup>191</sup>

### *The economy of the foster system*

Ratana’s family is prestigious and well connected beyond Mae Wang district to Chiang Mai, Mae Sot and Bangkok. Her case study highlights how foster practices help children who move into a household of higher socio-economic status in order to access formal education. At the same time, her example draws attention to the socio-economic aspirations of kin who regulate children’s migration for education. Two kin relations make foster arrangements possible for Ratana: her younger sister’s in-law connections to Mae Ta La and her older brother’s membership in the Jesuit Order in Chiang Mai. The connection between Ratana’s household in Huay Tong and the children of Mae Ta La village was established by Ratana’s younger sister Nauj La and her husband Hpa Nif, the son of Mae Ta La’s village head man. In accordance with marriage practices, the young husband relocated with his bride to her home village of Huay Tong. Here, he found employment at the Royal Project, an opportunity not

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<sup>190</sup> Hpo Muf, 10.08.09

<sup>191</sup> ‘Sia-jai, bura, ram-kaan’, Hpo Muf 18.04.08

found in Mae Ta La. In addition, Nauj La had previously lived in Mae Ta La as a volunteer teacher. Because of her familiarity with the village and especially through the kinship connection with the village leadership, Nauj La is in the position to mediate movements of Mae Ta La children to her sister's household in Huay Tong. Thus, in 2004, Nauj La encouraged Nauj Hpo Muf to move to Huay Tong. Since 2005, other children from different villages followed Hpo Muf through the same kin connection, Nauj La, into Ratana's household and the classrooms of Huay Tong School.<sup>192</sup>

In May 2008, Ratana was taking care of 15 foster children: 10 girls and five boys between the ages of 10 and 17. The foster children have different origins. In May 2008, four girls and one boy came from poor villages in the surroundings of Huay Tong (Ban Gluai and Pum Lung Reng village 8 kilometres from Huay Tong). These children were not related to Ratana through kinship. Instead, they are recipients of scholarships distributed by the Catholic Jesuit Order. As outlined below, Ratana assists her older brother Rabiap, a Catholic priest, with the implementation of this scholarship programme. One boy, a nephew of Ratana's, grew up in Mae Hong Son province, while nine of Ratana's foster children originate from Mae Chaem district, eight of whom are from Mae Ta La. Two children from Mae Ta La are close kin of Ratana's brother-in-law Hpa Nif. All the girls were accommodated within the family compound, whilst the boys spent their nights in a hut on land owned by Ratana behind the school compound. While she cares for her foster children's basic needs, such as food, accommodation and study material, Ratana also passes on cultural knowledge like weaving.<sup>193</sup> She takes on responsibilities she believes the foster children's parents do not fulfil and corrects what she perceives as parents' lack of education. For

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<sup>192</sup> Rak, 10.06.08

<sup>193</sup> Hse, 21.07.09

example, although eight-year-old Giliwi regularly spends weekends in his mother's village, he tends to return to Huay Tong with unwashed clothes. Giliwi is considered too young to wash his own garments, and Ratana insists that it would be the duty of his mother to care for this.<sup>194</sup>

The foster system is economically supported through various sources. Firstly, Ratana receives through her brother's connections scholarship money for the school expenses of all children in her care. In addition to the scholarship money, Ratana mobilises other sources to finance the expenses of foster children in her house. Some parents contribute with rice and vegetable provisions, yet not all are able to do so. So Ratana makes additional efforts to generate household resources. For instance, in February 2008, I accompanied her, her husband, five foster girls and one boy to harvest cabbage leftovers in a field in the nearby village. The owner of the field usually sells his products to the Royal Project, but he allows others to pick the remains for free. In a short period of time, we had gathered five large sacks of cabbage. This is enough to sustain the household for up to two weeks and to serve in her seasonal noodle stall business.<sup>195</sup>

While the foster system makes it possible for highland children to pursue their educational aspirations, it also allows Ratana to increase her socio-economic household aspirations. For household tasks, the foster children worked in separate groups before and after school in 2008. The boys helped to construct wooden chicken coops or took care of the cattle. Especially during the hot season, they accompanied cattle beyond the village together with Hpa Nif, Ratana's brother-in-law from Mae Ta La. During the long school holidays in the hot season, two foster boys engaged in paid work as gardeners in the Seven Fountains retreat centre in Chiang Mai. The boys

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<sup>194</sup> Ratana, 09.03.08

<sup>195</sup> Diary, 08.01.08, 03.02.08, 05.02.08

enjoyed the experience as they earned more than they would have at the Royal Project and were free to explore the surrounding city in their free time.<sup>196</sup>

The girls worked in separate groups according to their location of origin and thus their socio-economic status. Ratana said she divides tasks among them in order to mitigate intra-group conflict and tensions. So in the morning those from Ban Gluai usually arose early between 5.00 and 5.30 to prepare rice for the whole household and after school they helped Ratana's parents pound rice, take care of animals and other tasks. In contrast, the girls from Mae Ta La stayed at home: the older ones in the group prepared the side dishes for all the foster children and often conferred the washing of dishes to the younger girls. The most trusted foster children, Hpo Muf and Kannika (both from Mae Ta La), assisted Ratana in her general store, serving clients and guarding the money bag. During the rainy season, all the children's labour is particularly important. Ratana's family possesses many rice fields, in Huay Tong and the surrounding area. Since most of her family members are professionally active in the lowlands, they rely on others to maintain these fields. If it were not for the foster children, the family would need to hire labour to complete the seasonal work on their many rice fields on time.<sup>197</sup> Throughout May most households in Huay Tong were busy with rice transplantation and towards the end of June weeding has to proceed very fast. During this time, most children in Huay Tong assist their families on the paddies. However, my data suggest that foster children work more than their peers and have less free time to socialise or attend religious ceremonies. They also work

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<sup>196</sup> Poox Loox and Bauf Sof, 09.04.08

<sup>197</sup> Hpa Sav Hsoof, 17.5.08. Such is the situation of Nauj Mux and her family. Everyone has left the village in Mae Hong Son, and their rice fields are sublet to others who maintain them (Nauj Mux 22.08.09).

without the full rain and leech protection used by family members and other villagers.<sup>198</sup>

With foster children working in the fields, the household and the shop, Ratana can expand her business. Over the last years, she has been able to improve her shop at a surprising speed. For example, her shop was the only one in the village open everyday from 7.00am to 7.00pm, including Sundays. Other housewives in Huay Tong also run small businesses, yet they open and close their shops according to their changing daily practices and usually never open on Sundays. Ratana's shop also offers the widest range of products in Huay Tong. In early 2008 she offered sweets and snacks, toiletries and household items, as well as antibiotics and other medicaments. In order to maintain this standard of offerings, Ratana travels with her husband almost every week to the lowlands to fill up their stocks at the local market in Ban Kad. During her absence from the shop, Nauj Hpo Muf or another trusted foster child is in charge of the business.<sup>199</sup> Ratana had also acquired a cooling cabinet to sell frozen fish and meat. When her children Nini and Tej Suj returned from their high schools for the summer holidays to Huay Tong, they helped her run a small noodle stall. In contrast to the foster children, however, Ratana's own children received some pocket money for their assistance. In 2009 Ratana's business had expanded considerably; the size of the store house had doubled, and she now offered agricultural products such as fertilisers and fodder for pigs.<sup>200</sup>

The foster system reveals the unequal political economic status relations between Karen households and villages situated at different geographic locations in northern Thailand. While foster and biological parents negotiate about the treatment

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<sup>198</sup> Diary, 14.06.08

<sup>199</sup> Diary, 14.06.08

<sup>200</sup> Villagers in Huay Tong usually feed their pigs with the remains of human food. I therefore suspect she sells these products to the Royal Agricultural Project.

of children, they do not negotiate on an equal basis. For instance, Ratana's higher social status above the foster children's biological parents gives her unilateral power. Yet, her powerful position does not remain unchallenged. Foster children and their parents critique and contest Ratana's authority. For example, some of the foster girls, complain to other villagers in Huay Tong about their exhaustion from the intensity of the household work or the taste of food in the foster household.<sup>201</sup> Nauj Hpo Muf, for instances says that her peers are sometimes tired and frustrated with having to cook every day.<sup>202</sup> The parents also complain to Ratana about the amount of work she demands from their children. Such complaints frustrate Ratana who feels she already busies herself trying to satisfy as many people as possible. However, at the end Ratana is well aware of her authority in setting the rules and ready to remind parents of this: 'If you don't want your children to work hard, you can keep them in your village'.<sup>203</sup>

Indeed, Ratana feels tired because of the girls' low working morale. The older girls from Mae Ta La in particular need constant encouragement, and Ratana feels she has to control their work performance. She ascribes their slow working pace and unreliability to their rurality and thus their lower socio-economic and political status. In her view, the girls arrived in Huay Tong already 'lazy from the village'. She feels that in Mae Ta La, parents never conferred major chores on their daughters and so failed to instil in them a sense of modern values of duty and economic efficacy. Indeed, because of uneven socio-economic development, people in Mae Ta La are not as exposed to the values of modern market economies. By contrast, Huay Tong is strongly connected to the national Thai labour market and the state education system, as well as national popular media. Therefore, children and adults in Huay Tong are

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<sup>201</sup> 'Mâi sanuk' (Hpa Sav Hsoof, 17.05.08); 'ngaan nak' (Fee 14.06.08)

<sup>202</sup> 'Mâi dii', 'bura' (Hpo Muf, 19.06.08)

<sup>203</sup> Ratana, 13.01.08, 09.03.08

more familiar with globalised modern values than are people in Mae Ta La. The resulting contestations between Ratana, the foster children and their parents highlight the importance of geographic location and modes of production in generating diversity in children's upbringing. Although children in Mae Ta La and Huay Tong are equally labelled as 'ethnic Karen', they actually inhabit different social positions within the political economy of northern Thailand. Emerging status differences, in turn, strongly shape local childhood transition experiences.

### *Everyday politics of the foster household*

Having discussed foster children's position within the household economy, I now turn to everyday politics within the foster home. My analysis highlights how daily domestic life is structured by social boundaries. These boundaries confer status to individuals within each household institution. At the same time, the boundaries are to some extent flexible and subject to occasional negotiations between and among children and adults.

Continuing to use Ratana's situation as an example, her foster children have a different status within the household, depending on their responsibilities and their relatedness to her. As mentioned above, Hpo Muf and Kannika have the highest status and the most responsible working activities within the foster home, namely, dealing with cash in the shop. Hpo Muf was often referred to as being 'like a daughter' and Kannika is indeed related to Ratana through actual kinship.

Status differentiation and dimensions of power are also reflected in children's and adults' uses of household space. The foster family expanded the facilities on their compound when children arrived. They built new sleeping areas and sanitary facilities, which all have cesspool toilets, although the family's bathroom was more

elaborate. Foster children use the same washing machine as the core family, which is situated in the family's bathroom. The girls sleep separately from the family, but also segregated in groups amongst themselves. The two youngest girls from Mae Ta La village sleep in a little annex building owned by Nauj La and her husband Hpa Nif. The girls from Ban Gluai sleep in a barn, while Hpo Muf has a room for herself. The family sleeps in a separated living area within Ratana's shop, the centre of domestic life. This living area is also home to the family's television set. During the day, Somboon, Ratana's husband, often lies in front of the television, while his wife joins him in the early afternoon hours when the village is generally at rest. Their youngest son, 11-year-old Cif No, watches television after school and sometimes before, cuddled up in blankets. Sometimes, Cif No's cousins and other adult relatives come to watch television in the shop with the family. The only foster child who watches television with Cif No is Kannika, his same-age peer from Mae Ta La.<sup>204</sup>

Difference in food consumption also expresses status differences between Cif No and the foster children, as well as among the foster children. In general, Cif No receives better food than the foster children. For example, during an excursion, I observed during a break Cif No choosing a snack and opting for the most expensive ice cream, while the foster children were not asked for their choice and received much cheaper portions of orange jelly.<sup>205</sup> Usually, foster children do not eat with the householders. One of them prepares a pot of a side dish for her peers, and they eat in a separate space. Only Hpo Muf and Kannika eat regularly with Ratana. Hpo Muf's access to a better diet at the family table remains not unnoticed in her home village, Mae Ta La. During a home visit in April 2008, her 12-year-old cousin Nauj Jersie

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<sup>204</sup> Diary, 10.02.08

<sup>205</sup> Diary, 09.01.08, 03.02.08, 23.02.08



remarked that Hpo Muf is now 'fatter than before'.<sup>206</sup> Notwithstanding her better treatment and privileged position among the foster girls, Nauj Hpo Muf acutely though silently observes everyday household policies of segregation, describing it to me as 'not good'.

Respecting or transgressing social boundaries demonstrates the everyday politics within a household. Those who take initiative in blurring distinctions attempt to assert their power over others. Therefore, transgression of boundaries speaks about intra-household negotiations of authority. In respecting or transgressing status boundaries, children act as political persons within the household institution.

Children can and do initiate boundary transgression. In the absence of the foster family, I observed foster children's deliberate transgression of spatial boundaries. For example, they gathered around the television, something they would normally not be allowed to do. On another occasion, they also made a barbecue for themselves. Despite having their own separate sanitation facilities, the Mae Ta La teenage girls frequently used the bathroom usually reserved for the family. Shoplifting is definitely the most severe form of intra-household boundary crossing, as children steal the property of their foster mother. Once, teenage boys at school put pressure on Ratana's youngest foster boy, Giliwi. They wanted him to steal cigarettes from the shop. However, he confided the affair to the older foster boys who passed the dilemma on to Ratana. But when she knows who of her foster children is tempted to steal, she avoids confronting them directly. Instead, she issues general warnings and ensures that only those who enjoy her confidence are present in the shop.<sup>207</sup>

Foster parents may also willingly suspend social segregation when rewarding children for their work. By creating such moments of exception, they reinforce their

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<sup>206</sup> 'Hpo Muf uan qua muan gan' (Nauj Jersie, 19.04.08)

<sup>207</sup> Diary, 13.01.08, 23.06.08, 02.07.08

power in a benevolent way. For example, after hard work in the rice fields, foster children might be allowed to eat grilled meat and fish with their foster parents.<sup>208</sup> These rare occasions are major treats.

Arguably, the blurring of social boundaries creates intra-household tensions. The foster system poses challenges to the receiving household and demands spatial and emotional concessions from Ratana's family. The mere presence of foster children drains space and time resources and is sometimes perceived as an intrusion into family life. Ratana's parents are said to have moved to another area in the village because of the increased activities and noise at the compound since the arrival of larger numbers of foster children. Although he receives better treats as Ratana's child, Cif No sometimes feels neglected and struggles for the attention of his mother who cares for many.<sup>209</sup> Ratana herself also mentioned her desire to eat better food and spend more time in the intimacy of her family, but she feels this is not possible under the foster children's watchful eyes. It sometimes goes so far that Ratana feels 'shy' to eat better food with her biological family than what the foster children eat. When she buys plain snacks at the market for her son Cif No, she feels she also has to bring something back for the foster children. Yet, additional snacks and treats for the foster children are an issue of debate between Ratana and her husband. Indeed, Somboon wonders why Ratana cannot just feed them with the money she receives from the scholarship programme. Moreover, the foster girls' attempts at encroaching on the family's private space frustrate and tire Somboon. He frequently complains about the looming presence of the teenage girls and would prefer a quieter atmosphere in the house. As a result, Ratana decreased the number of foster children not only because of the financial burden, but also to alleviate the household from the stress caused by the

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<sup>208</sup> Diary, 07.06.08

<sup>209</sup> Diary 12.01.08, 18.01.08, 10.02.08

strong presence of foster girls and boys.<sup>210</sup> Thus revealed are foster children's discreet and subtle attempts to negotiate intra-household power configurations. However, more often than not children fail to challenge political economic forces that structure their everyday lives. Their agency remains constrained and needs to be understood in relation to obedience and enactment of culturally valued behaviour sets.

### **The role of local cultural intermediaries**

Today, many Karen children aspire for high school education in the lowlands. Modern institutions provide scholarships and other material benefits that help realise children's educational aspirations. Karen children access modern institutions through the mediation of high ranking local persons.

#### *Children identify local intermediaries*

Karen children in Huay Tong participate to some extent in the regulation of their migratory experiences. For their high school studies, they need access to local intermediaries who facilitate contact with international institutions. Local intermediaries are often adult guardians, priests, monks and/or Thai school teachers who connect students with scholarship programmes run by the local administration or the religious networks.

Access to scholarships is unequal and depends on children's political economic status, which is linked to their household and/or place of residence. Children whose households are well connected and familiar with the working of modern institutions and state bureaucracy may access several funding sources. This is highlighted by Darunee's case study. Her example illustrates political economic status

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<sup>210</sup> Ratana, 13.01.08

differences between Karen children growing up in different households and different geographic locations.

*Textbox 4: Case study of Darunee from Huay Tong village*

In 2008, Darunee was 14 years old. She is the first of two children, the other being her sister Jarupon, who is two years her junior. During my fieldwork, their father acted as the official head of the village. Her father's occupation thus provided a source of regular income. Other benefits of his role were in providing administrative financial support for his daughters' studies. Moreover, the household owns rice fields and raises horses outside the village for sale. It is thus one of the wealthiest households in Huay Tong.

Darunee likes to be 'at home' as her health is delicate, and I never heard about her working in the rice fields. At home, Darunee studies, rests or helps with household chores, such as doing the laundry.

Darunee has taken up several responsibilities for social life in the village and at school. In the village, she is one of the few children who regularly read at prayers and Mass. At school, she helps at morning assemblies, reading out prayers. During the school day, she assists teachers with her peers Panida and Hpo Muf. Darunee is also always among a small group of girls who perform northeastern Thai dances in front of high-ranking visitors to the school. For these performances, they received instruction by a Thai teacher. Although a good and applied student, Darunee tends to worry about her studies and doubts her abilities in public.

After graduation from Huay Tong secondary school, Darunee made the transition to Ban Kad high school. Her high school studies are supported by three sources, the Thai administration, the Japanese Network Harmony and the Jesuit Social Service. She receives government funds because of her father's employment as village head; thanks to her good grades and diligence her Thai teachers selected her for a Japanese scholarship; and in Ban Kad she lodges like all the girls from Huay Tong in the dormitory built by the Jesuits.<sup>211</sup>

At Ban Kad high school, Darunee occupies a lower status than in Huay Tong, where - as daughter of the head of village - she has a very prominent position. In contrast, in Ban Kad she shares most aspects of everyday life with her lower-status peers from Huay Tong. Their daily studies at school and work in the dormitory create space for new interactions. However, this weekday solidarity does not translate during weekends once the girls return to Huay Tong.

In the future, Darunee aspires to become an assistant nurse. So she plans to continue her formal learning after high school. However, once a trained nurse, she envisages returning for an adult life in Huay Tong. She says that as a nurse she wants to take care of her family and others in the village.

For the majority of households in Huay Tong, Ratana is a principal mediator to scholarships. Ratana offers all foster children in her household assistance with identifying high schools and securing funding. Application procedures require a lot of

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<sup>211</sup> Ratana, 11.03.08

coordination and time resources from Ratana and her husband. They have to bring students to the local administration to copy their ID cards, bring them on assigned days to the schools and help them fill out the application forms.

Thai teachers also help individual students to find places of study in the lowlands. For instance, Thongchai relied on his Thai teacher Rak to arrange for further studies in Sanpathong, a town close to Ban Kad. Originally from Mae Ta La, Thongchai arrived in Huay Tong as a foster child in Ratana's household. Yet, he had frequent arguments with his foster mother because of his high degree of independence. His motorbike excursions and engagement in paid labour during weekends provoked Ratana who, in return, gossiped about him in the village as 'no good' and 'lazy'.<sup>212</sup> After graduating from Huay Tong, Thongchai broke contact with Ratana. But throughout his studies at Huay Tong school he was on good terms with his Thai teachers who facilitated his further studies.

In addition, some students apply through the village priest to Catholic educational institutions, such as Mae Pon school. During the time of my fieldwork, I followed 13-year-old Sedha's process of moving to Mae Pon school. In early 2008, Sedha had decided to stop attending Huay Tong school and assisted his parents in their grocery store. Because of his young age, his parents felt that Sedha should finish the obligatory period of schooling. Not being comfortable with the national Thai language, the boy wanted to study 'far away' and in his Karen mother tongue. Sedha consulted with the village priest who suggested an *année sabbatique* at Mae Pon school. This way, Sedha could take a rest and consider with other students what he could do there in the future. By 2009, Sedha had finished his studies in Mae Pon and

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<sup>212</sup> Rak, 13.07.08

asked for further assistance to continue his education at the minor seminary in Payao province.<sup>213</sup>

Peers also help one another to access intermediaries for identifying schools and funding. For example, Ratana's foster children introduce their friends to their foster mother and her social networks. In February 2008, Bauf Sof, from Mae Ta La village, applied with two school friends to Santisuk school. Bauf Sof is a foster boy in Ratana's household. His peers commute daily and weekly from nearby villages for lower secondary school in Huay Tong. Bauf Sof received information about Santisuk school from Ratana and passed it on to the other two boys. They relied on his sharing the information as they would not have learned about the opportunity and application procedure from their own parents. As farmers with poor education and limited institutional contacts, these parents are not equipped for planning their sons' education themselves. In contrast, Ratana's good command of the Thai language, her familiarity with the Thai school system and administration as well as her contacts with the Jesuits in Chiang Mai all allow her to discern opportunities and find ways to follow them up.<sup>214</sup> Nauj Hpo Muf also connected her best friend Panida to Ratana. Up until her graduation from lower secondary school in Huay Tong, Panida's studies had been supported by a Japanese scholarship. Throughout her last school year Panida thought that she would continue her education in a high school close to Sanpathong and trusted that her older sister would provide the necessary financial support. However, in mid-April it transpired that her family could not support her. Panida worried about not being able to continue her studies,<sup>215</sup> but as she is a close friend of Hpo Muf's, Panida's case became immediately known to Ratana. Through her connections to the Jesuit Social Service scholarship programme, Ratana arranged

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<sup>213</sup> Bonpasteur, 31.05.08; Nauj Eli, 28.06.08

<sup>214</sup> Diary 04.02.08

<sup>215</sup> Diary, 12.04.08

modest funding that allowed Panida to attend Santisuk school,<sup>216</sup> a regional welfare school labelled as for ‘the poor people’. Karen foster children of low political economic status are thus able to assist each other in finding ways to follow their educational aspirations. This highlights children’s attempts to participate in social change despite their marginalized political economic status.

#### *Intermediaries connect with international institutions*

Foreign institutions collaborate with local Karen and Thai intermediaries for implementation of scholarship programmes. The Jesuit Social Service (JESS) operates their scholarships in consultation with Karen villagers, and programme implementation is entrusted to local kin and other affiliated persons. Karen social workers employed by JESS conduct interviews with potential scholarship candidates to assess their situation of hardship.

Indeed, the implementation of the Jesuit scholarship programme relies largely on Fr Rabiap’s kinship networks in the highlands. In 2008, Rabiap and two of his sisters, one of them being Ratana in Huay Tong, were among the 13 local assistants of Fr Rodrigo’s. According to the priest’s records, the three siblings have been managing almost half of the total scholarship amount to date.<sup>217</sup> Serving as local assistant to the JESS programme, Ratana receives from the Jesuits in Chiang Mai annual donations for educational and everyday expenses for the foster children in her care, as well as for other scholarship holders. In May 2008, she managed the expenses of 109 children. Fr Rodrigo has full confidence in the work of local programme assistants. According to the priest, Ratana is ‘very generous and very organised’ and the most

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<sup>216</sup> Ratana, 22.05.08

<sup>217</sup> Not all local assistants are responsible for the same number of children and funds. While Fr Rabiap and his two sisters are in charge of a lot of money and students, some assistants only look after two or a few more children (Rodrigo, 09.06.08).

diligent assistant in accounts. He is also aware of her personal outreach efforts to kin in Mae Ta La village.<sup>218</sup> Ratana mediates between the Catholic Jesuits in Chiang Mai and the local Karen villagers. Moreover, as local parent representative to Huay Tong school, she also mediates between the Thai state school and the villagers.

Thai government schools are interested in maintaining contacts with potential outside benefactors. As explained in Chapter 3, throughout Thailand, government funding is not enough for school maintenance costs. Most state schools need to raise additional funding from non-governmental institutions, such as students' households and civil or religious NGOs. In 2009, Giat had been stationed as an English teacher in Huay Tong for five years.<sup>219</sup> Because of his language and social skills he developed an informal fundraising role. During my fieldwork, Giat mediated between Thai teachers, the Catholic Jesuits in Chiang Mai and the Japanese NGO, Network Harmony. He maintains English language correspondence with Network Harmony and is responsible for the delegation's well-being during their visits. During their stay in Chiang Mai, he also organises and accompanies Japanese donors on elephant rides and evening performances.<sup>220</sup> In Huay Tong, Giat regularly liaises with Ratana, visiting her shop during his free hours. I often saw him and Ratana sitting at the wooden bench in front of the shop chatting and exchanging village and school gossip. However, these informal meetings are also used to ask for favours and mutual mediation with the Jesuits in Chiang Mai and/or the Thai school. For example, through Ratana, Giat contacts on behalf of Huay Tong school her brother Rabiap at the Seven Fountains Centre in Chiang Mai. Giat submits funding requests with Rabiap who evaluates and presents them to his superior Fr Rodrigo who is in charge

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<sup>218</sup> Rodrigo, 09.06.08

<sup>219</sup> Giat, 21.08.09

<sup>220</sup> Diary, 26.02.08



of fundraising.<sup>221</sup> In this way, Huay Tong school accesses money for school maintenance, such as the building of a school canteen or additional dormitories for commuting students.

#### *Local intermediaries as regional political patrons*

Regulating the scholarship programme locally allows Ratana and her husband to build up their political networks, while distributing money allows them to gather political clients and raise their socio-economic and political household status. This power, in turn, allows Ratana to make interventions on behalf of other Karen.

In her mediating function, Ratana selects children, distributes funds and maintains personal contact with scholarship holders' families. She visits families' villages by car in the company of her husband Somboon, who works for the local administration. It is important for them to visit villages in the region and catch up with villagers. Some of them are biological parents of Ratana's foster children or other scholarship holders. These journeys help promote Somboon's career in local politics.<sup>222</sup> During such visits, Ratana and Somboon usually share meals in different households, then Somboon gathers with other men to exchange thoughts over drinks while Ratana visits women in their households, consulting with them about their welfare and sharing information about their children.<sup>223</sup> In addition, there are other social obligations that require the couple's presence, such as blessings of a new household, marriages, etc. However, maintaining these contacts is time intensive and tiresome. For example, on 19 January the couple visited 30 households in one day. Declining an invitation is inconceivable because of their high socio-economic status.

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<sup>221</sup> Diary, 18.03.08, Rodrigo 09.06.08

<sup>222</sup> Diary, 22.05.08, Ratana, 06.05.08

<sup>223</sup> Diary, 12.01.08, 23.02.08

According to Ratana, the rejected household would reproach them with class conceit: 'you are not eating with us because we are poor'.<sup>224</sup>

Managing the scholarship programme adds purpose and status to the couple's village visits. Those who receive financial aid from the Jesuits via Ratana might not directly perceive the Catholic Church's charity but Somboon and Ratana's social status and benevolence in its stead. In accepting them as benefactors for their children's welfare, households enter into a patron-client relationship with the couple. This creates benefits on both sides and requires mutual loyalty. Parents may support Somboon's political career. Having many clients enhances the social power of a household, also vis-à-vis lowland Thai people. Ratana's household thus has an extraordinarily strong position in Huay Tong village and, in many respects, holds more socio-economic power than an average salaried northern Thai school teacher.

On the other hand, Ratana's high socio-economic and political status increases her moral obligations towards others. For example, poor villagers may come by Ratana's house asking her for help, such as car transport of sick persons to Chiang Mai. During her village visits she is regularly confronted by parents asking her to take their children into her household. Complying with these regional social obligations would be impossible for Ratana and Somboon if their foster children did not maintain the fields and keep the household and the business going.<sup>225</sup>

Ratana's high status enables her to make interventions on behalf of other peoples' welfare. For instance, in her role as a parent representative at Huay Tong school, she presents collective demands and criticisms to the school director. Moreover, she is not shy about informing the local administration about problems at school, such as a teacher's late arrival in the morning. Thai teachers in Huay Tong

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<sup>224</sup> Ratana, 19.01.08

<sup>225</sup> Diary, 14.03.08, 07.01.08

respect her influence and are anxious not to offend her.<sup>226</sup> The funding that Huay Tong school accesses through Ratana and her brother Rabiap for school maintenance also impacts on teachers' collective reputation during the periodic visits of the school inspector from Bangkok.<sup>227</sup>

Ratana's kinship networks and institutional affiliations not only bestow her with status but also allow her and others to negotiate collectively the political economic marginality of Karen people – between Mae Ta La, Huay Tong and Chiang Mai. Emergent connections of kinship and modern institutions remain based on patron-client relations and thus foster conventional local power configurations. At the same time, the interweaving of kinship and modern institutions allows individuals and groups to contribute to the reshaping of political economy of the highlands in northern Thailand. I further discuss this point in Chapter 8 with the example of my analysis of negotiations for scholarship money between local Karen and Thai people and international donor organisations.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter analysed the role of households and modern institutions in regulating translocal processes of children's migration for education within the political economy of northern Thailand. My research shows that spatialised socio-economic and political status inequalities among ethnic minority people are a result of uneven development processes in the highlands of northern Thailand. The example of Mae Ta La highlights the effects of restricted access to modern state and non-state institutions. Political economic inequalities among Karen are negotiated through foster systems and kinship relations. In these systems, villagers from remote areas like Mae Ta La send their children to foster families in resource-rich villages like Huay Tong.

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<sup>226</sup> 'Greeng-jai' (Rak, 13.07.08)

<sup>227</sup> Diary, 12.02.08

Moreover, for accessing Thai high schools in the lowlands, children and their households negotiate access to international institutions through local intermediaries. Local intermediaries are attached to institutions that locally represent socio-economic and political power, such as the foster Karen household, the Thai government school and to a lesser degree institutionalised religions. Local brokers act as seniors/ political patrons vis-à-vis a clientele composed of migrating children and their households. Through their work, intermediaries gain social status and political influence, but also enter into an arrangement of obligation and social sacrifice. Emergent power relations between households and modern institutions are based on traditional patron-client relations.

Children's migratory movements are largely regulated by conventional and modern institutions. In these processes, children exercise constrained agency. My analysis of everyday politics within the foster home revealed foster children's subtle and discreet attempts and failures in negotiating intra-household power relations. In my research context, children's agency needs to be understood in relation to obedience and the enactment of approved social norms. In this respect, I drew attention to children's participation in accessing local institutions as points of negotiation for funding of their high school studies.

Having established the patterns of how Karen children's migration for education is regulated, the next chapter turns to young peoples' negotiations of structural constraints between geographic and institutional locations and draws attention to emergent flexible identities.

## **CHAPTER 8. Flexible identities: negotiating political economic inequality**

### **Introduction**

As established in Chapter 7, Karen children migrate for education between different locations. Their movements are regulated by households and modern institutions. This chapter analyses how migration between geographic and institutional locations affects young peoples' social status and identities. I argue that more than 'gender' and 'generation', it is the socio-economic and political marginality of rural Karen children that structures their transition experiences between highland villages and lowland schools. Yet, their unequal status is contextual because Karen students shift socio-economic and political status between the different institutional and geographical locations. Like this they negotiate power configurations operating at local, regional and international levels. Their emergent identities are flexible and adapt to the demands of the national labour market and institutions like households, Thai state schools and NGOs.

Data presented in this section explores children's flexible identities through four themes. My analysis of children's peer relationships highlights the importance of socio-economic status and political/institutional affiliation in children's flexible identities. Then, I draw attention to norms of gendered behaviour and how these are changing at different locations. This is followed by an analysis of Karen children's flexible identities through their deliberate use of politicised/ethnicised status symbols. The last section explores the collective negotiations of economic resources between local Karen and Thai people and foreign representatives of scholarship funding bodies.

### **Peer relations as status relations**

My data highlight the importance of institutional affiliation and geographic location in children's changing peer relations. According to my analysis children's relationships in the village are largely organised according to the socio-economic status of their household. Kinship and socio-economic status thus structure the relationships among the children in the village. However, Karen children are not only members of household institutions but also of other institutional settings such as state schools. Government schooling has generated new patterns of peer relations among children. Unlike in the village, schools organise boys' and girls' activities according to age-graded batches. So on the school compound children form batch-bounded friendships and peer relations. Sanya explains: 'In school, when you are from the same batch, you are doing activities together and have more and more relationships. You don't mingle with the other batches at school. Sometimes you don't even have time to talk with the younger ones'.<sup>228</sup> In other words, children change their peer relations with one another even as they move within the same village space between the school compound and their households.

The relationship between Hpo Muf, Panida and Darunee illustrates this dynamic of flexible peer relations. Hpo Muf and Panida both grew up in resource-poor Mae Chaem district and live as foster children in Huay Tong. Both finished primary school in Mae Chaem and relocated for secondary school to Huay Tong. Hpo Muf lives with Ratana, and Panida dwells in the household of her younger maternal aunt. When they are not at school, both work for their foster homes. Darunee, in contrast, was born in Huay Tong and is the eldest daughter of the village head. She does not have to work at home and, except for the occasional household chore, she is free to do her homework and relax.

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<sup>228</sup> Sanya, 28.05.08

Arguably, there exist considerable social status differences between the three girls. Yet, at school they are peers (*pûan*) and their status differences are expressed only in very subtle ways. Throughout lower secondary school, the three girls attend the same class and are among the best students who sit in the front row. They are diligent in helping their teachers with errands, such as delivering messages, cleaning the library after school, etc. Because of their helpfulness and correctness of manner, their teacher considers them as having a proper (*riap roi*) demeanour. Neither Hpo Muf's older age nor Darunee's higher socio-economic status renders their school relation a senior-junior relationship.

However, outside school their alliance is not sustainable. In the village, different norms structure peer interaction. While Panida remains Hpo Muf's trusted friend in Huay Tong, Darunee associates mostly with her younger sister and her older female cousins. While in the village, Darunee does not mix with her school peers and makes no attempt to conceal her higher social status. For example, on Sundays, she and her village peers are regular clients at Ratana's shop where Hpo Muf works as a shop assistant. Darunee and her girlfriends usually take a seat on the bench in front of the shop, ordering noodles or ice cream from Hpo Muf who also serves them. I observed Hpo Muf, in turn, using strategies not to lose face because of her lower socio-economic status. Once, after Darunee left, Hpo Muf remarked that she does not like that particular ice cream her schoolmate just bought. Claiming that the ice cream has no personal value for her, Hpo Muf signals her indifference in regards to the product desired and consumed by Darunee. In this way, Hpo Muf saves face concerning her low socio-economic status. Importantly, she is doing so in assuming a

position of ‘indifference’ (*chə̀ə̀i- chə̀ə̀i*<sup>229</sup>). Thus, in keeping a detached and ‘cool’ demeanour, she positions herself in a morally higher valued state than Darunee who is excited by the ice cream and the desire of consuming it.

Despite their unequal socio-economic and political status in Huay Tong, the three girls have all been able to make the transition to schooling in Ban Kad. This is possible because all three access funding from international institutions such as the Catholic Church and Japanese donors. In May 2008, Darunee and Hpo Muf moved with other girls for high school to Ban Kad. Weekly commutes between Huay Tong and Ban Kad also impact on the status differences among peers. In the lowlands, Huay Tong high school students constitute themselves vis-à-vis others as a group that shares a common place of residence, i.e. Huay Tong village. In this way, they effectively reproduce modern Thai patterns of ethnicising political economic inequalities through different geographic locations, as outlined in Chapter 3.

Indeed, the shared high school experience in Ban Kad impacts on Hpo Muf and Darunee’s friendship. In the lowlands, Hpo Muf’s identity and status are not primarily defined by her being a relocated foster child belonging to an impoverished household from a remote village. Instead, she belongs to the peer group ‘from Huay Tong village’ and shares study and working activities at school *and* outside school with her peers, including Darunee. They all lodge in the same dormitory run and sponsored by the same institution, the Catholic Church; and they use the same school room and bedroom and eat out of the same rice pot. High school students form groups according to their villages, and within these groups they are organised according to seniority. Importantly, the place of reference must not be their village of birth, but

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<sup>229</sup> Young Karen in Huay Tong and in the plains often use the word ‘*chə̀ə̀i- chə̀ə̀i*’ to describe their welfare in everyday conversations. Literally means to be indifferent, detached, disinterested or impartial (Naemiratch and Manderson 2008: 189).



rather the village they ‘come from’ to study in Ban Kad. This is why it is possible for Hpo Muf and Darunee to be in the same group ‘coming from Huay Tong’ each week and returning there for the weekend.

The organisation of daily dormitory and school life mirrors the importance of geographic location. Although there are Karen students from other places lodging in the dormitory, the girls from Huay Tong rarely mix with them. The sitting order during evening meals, as well as the distribution of sleeping places, is arranged according to groups from similar geographies. Chores are also organised according to these group patterns. Usually, groups perform tasks in alternation, e.g. one week the Huay Tong group is responsible for cooking breakfast and the next week for sweeping the floor. Hpo Muf contrasts the rigid division of chores at her foster household with the task rotation at the dormitory: ‘here it is not like in Huay Tong’.<sup>230</sup> She enjoys the new liberty of relaxing after school, for example, playing volleyball with her peers at the dormitory. She emphasises that everyone at the dormitory gathers for shared evening meals and contrasts this with the segregated food consumption in the foster home.<sup>231</sup>

Throughout a school day, the girls from Huay Tong remain in their peer group and have only minimal contact with other students, such as Hmong and lowland Thais. Speaking about her social relations with students from other locations, Hpo Muf described Hmong students as ‘friendly’: ‘We can play together’.<sup>232</sup> In contrast, lowland Thai students seem less trustworthy to her: ‘I don’t know, but we do not like each other’,<sup>233</sup> because they bully and think they are better than ‘people from the

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<sup>230</sup> ‘*Mâi muan gan tii Huay Tong*’ (Nauj Hpo Muf, 19.06.08)

<sup>231</sup> Hpo Muf, 19.06.08

<sup>232</sup> ‘*Jai-dii*’, ‘*len duay gan dâai*’ (Hpo Muf, 14.06.08)

<sup>233</sup> ‘*Mâi ruu, dtae mâi choop-gan*’ (Hpo Muf, 14.06.08)

mountains’.<sup>234</sup> Remaining largely within the same group provides a sense of security and reduces the risk of being bullied. The teacher Belle at Ban Kad school confirms that Karen and Hmong girls tend to go through the school day in groups of the same ‘ethnicity’. They rarely mix with local Thai students in the classrooms, canteen or school yard when resting. Staying among peers also allows them to speak in their mother tongue. For instance, during difficult classroom exercises, students consult one another in their own language.<sup>235</sup> It is important to note that Belle, like other Thai teachers, speaks about ‘ethnic’ groups without reference to intra-Karen differences that are defined according to geographic location and thus political economic status.

However, the Huay Tong girls’ weekday solidarity does not extend to weekends. On Fridays, the girls return in the late afternoon or early evening to the village. Upon their return, they resume their village roles and responsibilities according to the political economic status of their households, so their weekend experiences differ accordingly. For example, Darunee and Nauj Muri, whose households are of high status in Huay Tong, stay at home most of the time during weekends. When asked about their weekend activities, they typically say: ‘I am at home. Lying down’.<sup>236</sup> However, this does not mean that they are literally lying down all weekend. Instead, they do leisurely work, such as feed the pigs and help their mothers sell gasoline while studying and chatting with others.<sup>237</sup> In contrast, Hpo Muf’s high school attendance does not mitigate her weekend working obligations in her foster home. From Friday evening until Sunday late afternoon, she works in Ratana’s shop. In fact, Hpo Muf’s weekend presence allows Ratana and her family to engage in social activities, attend Mass and leave Huay Tong for business or family

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<sup>234</sup> Hpo Muf, 14.06.08

<sup>235</sup> Belle, 03.08.09

<sup>236</sup> ‘Yuu baan. Noon’ (Nauj Muri, 18.07.09)

<sup>237</sup> Diary, 18.05.08, 18.07.09

affairs in Chiang Mai. Hpo Muf confided to her Mae Ta La peers that she is tired and tense because of her difficult studies and the huge amounts of daily homework.<sup>238</sup> At the same time, however, her new role as a high school student in Ban Kad enhances her senior status among the other foster children who still attend Huay Tong school. She signals her new status by making little comments and bringing gifts such as a hairband from Ban Kad market for Kannika.<sup>239</sup> Thus, commuting between the highlands and lowlands children assume different social status at different locations. My data on changing peer relations highlights children's ability to turn increasingly flexible in positioning themselves socially in different locations.

### **Managing morality: translocality, gender and reputation**

Morality standards among the Karen depend on the geographic location of the villages. The range of permissible sociability between boys and girls differs throughout the highlands. In Huay Tong, villagers police one another's behaviour. I found Karen high school girls seriously concerned over complying with moral standards and being careful not to disappoint their families. Indeed, the fear of 'not being a good daughter' is a major reason for 'feeling bad'.<sup>240</sup> For them, it is undesirable to be known as a rebellious character or 'not so good person'. Instead, girls who are smart convince others through their 'good behaviour' (*nísāi dii*) in public. Moral reputation is also linked to the peers with whom the girls keep company. Girls who appear in public with the same gender or kin peers have the reputation of being a 'good person'.<sup>241</sup> Gossip about 'bad' friendships or romantic relations can ruin reputations, so girls often conceal their feelings.<sup>242</sup> For example, in

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<sup>238</sup> Diary, 13.06.08, 31.05.08

<sup>239</sup> Diary, 30.05.08, 13.06.08

<sup>240</sup> BK, 17.08.09

<sup>241</sup> Sirapon, 03.08.09

<sup>242</sup> Sunaree 06.02.08, Ratana, 16.03.08

the village, a girl who meets boys after dark is considered ‘not a good girl’.<sup>243</sup> So it is considered unwise for girls to associate with boys, and even more so when a boy is popularly considered as a ‘not so good person’. Karen high school girls make efforts in their managing emotional expressions in front of adults and peers. In the lowlands, they need to ensure their lives are accountable to their home communities, lest they become topics of gossip. Indeed, stories of young women returning pregnant to the mountains do circulate. The common explanation is that in the city ‘they are lonely’, i.e. detached from their household and village community.<sup>244</sup> Karen girls who migrate for education and work to lowland towns often choose accommodation in reputable dormitories where they feel their good reputation is not harmed.

Moralities around boys’ and girls’ friendship patterns also differ according to geographic location and institutional affiliation. For teenage girls from Huay Tong, the Ban Kad dormitory run by Catholic religious provides a reputable abode during their high school studies. At the same time, the relatively relaxed dormitory structures and the weekday distance from the ever-vigilant village community provide sufficient space and opportunities for them to experiment with social morals for girls. For instance, the Ban Kad dormitory is a space where students are free to welcome male visitors, similar to visiting patterns in Mae Ta La. In Mae Ta La, people spend their evening hours visiting each other to chat over tea. These are permissible occasions for young men to visit female friends in groups. It is an opportunity to joke and get to know one another in the absence of adults, and young people from Mae Ta La value the heightened sense of evening sociability.<sup>245</sup> Yet, these nocturnal youth gatherings do not take place in Huay Tong, where encounters between unmarried men and women after dark are discouraged. Nearly every household in Huay Tong has a

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<sup>243</sup> Ratana, 23.06.08, ‘*pûu-yǐng mâi dii*’ (Hse, 23.07.09)

<sup>244</sup> Ratana, 23.6.08

<sup>245</sup> Group discussion, 20.04.08

television set and villagers usually spend their evenings watching television. But moving from Mae Ta La to Huay Tong impacts on the sociability between foster boys and girls. For instance, Hpo Muf and Thongchai are friends from Mae Ta La yet when they were in Huay Tong they were not allowed to meet after dark. However, after their transition to high schools in the plains, they were able to meet again during evening hours. Thongchai occasionally comes with school friends by motorbike from Sanpathong to spend evenings with the girls in the Ban Kad dormitory, playing ball and chatting.<sup>246</sup>

In another instance, Nauj Hpau Deif Nya is allowed to receive her boyfriend from Chiang Mai in the Ban Kad dormitory. In the large dormitory, they are visible to everyone yet there is enough space to allow the couple to speak privately. During my fieldwork, they invited me to join them; Hpau Deif Nya proudly showed me the small gifts her boyfriend had brought from Chiang Mai, such as anti-mosquito lotion and beauty products, and they exchanged news with each other. After the visit, he returned on his motorbike to Chiang Mai.<sup>247</sup>

Gendered patterns of mobility for young people change depending on where they are located. In general, Karen teenage girls' mobility seems more restricted than boys'. Karen male youth are free to roam the mountains and lowlands plains on their motorbikes, while girls' mobility declines as they move towards social womanhood. However, rather than lamenting their state of restricted mobility, I found girls priding themselves in having better behaviour than their male peers: 'girls are proper, they are not like boys'.<sup>248</sup> But this compliance with social norms, viewing them as a social asset rather than a limitation, is a pretence, for changing locations has an impact on girls' mobility. Although girls may comply with household norms in the village, once

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<sup>246</sup> Diary, 16.7.08

<sup>247</sup> Diary, 16.07.08

<sup>248</sup> 'Pûu-yǐng riap-roi, mâi mǔan pûu-chaai' (Diary, 30.05.08).

they change location and institutional attachment, they are also eager to be mobile. My data reveal that among high school students in Ban Kad, ‘strolling around’ features among the most popular entertainments. The ability to ‘go where I like’ is an important source of happiness. Indeed, during my visits to Ban Kad, girls also used motorbikes to travel from the dormitory to the market. They do not travel long distances like their male peers, but they do use motorbikes on excursions for pleasure.<sup>249</sup>

Girls’ appearance is also linked with public perceptions of their morality. They experiment with cosmetics and fashion to different degrees in Huay Tong and Ban Kad. In highland villages, girls need to be careful not to use too much toiletries or be too fashionable, lest villagers gossip about them trying to attract men. Once they approach the ‘Miss’ status at the age of 15, girls find it difficult to comply with the child status. But the village community is critical of female precociousness. For instance, in her last year of lower secondary school, 14-year-old Nauj Cooz enjoyed wearing tight jeans outside of school. An adult neighbour scolded her for wearing this outfit since she is ‘not yet *sǎao*’ (‘they are not yet “Miss”’). The adult felt that the tight trousers would attract the gaze of boys who might think ‘ah! Nauj Cooz wants to have a boyfriend’.<sup>250</sup> In high school in the lowlands, there is more liberty for girls to try out different beauty products and styles. During lunch breaks, girls entertain themselves by using facial powder and experimenting with friends’ hairstyles. Male classmates might even join them, playing with their gendered identities in putting on mascara and lipstick. Boys’ experiments with their appearance would not be easily allowed in the village. In the evenings at the dormitory, girls spend time with body care. They remain in their shared bedroom, sitting on their beds, combing their hair

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<sup>249</sup> Diary, 16.07.08

<sup>250</sup> Ratana, 09.06.08

and examining their facial skin in little plastic mirrors, carefully applying body powder and other scented products.<sup>251</sup> Studying in the lowlands thus enlarges girls' ability to experiment with gendered moralities linked to the social values of highland villages. Upon their weekend returns to Huay Tong, they flexibly re-adapt their behaviour to local morals thus ensuring their 'good' reputation remains unquestioned. Therefore, their overall agency in challenging gendered patterns of normative behaviour remains constrained and needs to be understood in relation to compliance of norms and values.

### **Signifying distance and belonging to locations**

Geographic locations can enhance or mitigate socio-economic and political inequalities among Karen children, as well as between them and lowland Thai children. Karen children signaled social distance or belonging to places by employing locally valued cultural symbols. Because of their association with the power configurations of particular locations, locally valued cultural symbols are imbued with political meaning. Children's deliberate use of such politicised status symbols gives evidence of their flexible identities.

Karen people frequently assess prices of products on sale. Research participants often compared places in terms of how much money one has to spend in everyday life there. Research participants value places where they do not need to spend money on things. Conversely, where people cannot afford the lifestyle, associating with others becomes difficult and awkward. As a consequence, Karen people feel marginalised and express social distance by making overly generalised remarks. For example, they may say the place is 'not so enjoyable'.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Diary, 16.07.08, 19.06.08

<sup>252</sup> 'Mai dtong suu', 'Dtong suu', 'mâi koei sanuk' (Panida, 10.05.08; Nauj Moj, 09.06.08; Hpo Muf, 17.04.08)

Socio-economic inequality is more acutely felt in the lowlands than in the villages. Despite socio-economic diversity among the children, high school students insist that the organisation of daily livelihood provisions and social relations at the workplace are easier in Huay Tong than in the lowlands because fellow villagers are not ‘serious about time’. In contrast, in mainstream society, Karen girls feel they ‘have to think hard’ to organise their daily livelihoods.<sup>253</sup> Living expenses are indeed lower in the mountains where there is no need to pay rent, food is either grown in personal gardens or gathered around the village, and portable water is freely available at the village well.<sup>254</sup> This is partly why people say they prefer living there and value that location over the lowlands.

Subjective feelings also indicate distance and belonging to locations. Social distance seems to increase as children move to bigger places. For instance, foster children from Mae Ta La say that in their heart they miss their home village. Although Mae Ta La is much poorer than Huay Tong, in the eyes of Hpo Muf and Too Too it is more ‘fun’, ‘because it is our home’.<sup>255</sup> In contrast to Huay Tong, they feel that in their home village they can make themselves comfortable and do as they please.<sup>256</sup> Children from Huay Tong, in turn, feel marginalised when they are in lowland towns, detached from their household institutions in the highland village. Nauj Hpau Deif Nya says that in Huay Tong ‘everyone is friendly’; in contrast, in Ban Kad people know each other from school yet do not greet each other outside the parameters of the school compound. Social distance is felt even more intensively in ‘the city’. In Chiang Mai, for instance, neighbours are said to live next to each other

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<sup>253</sup> ‘*Jing-jang wee-laa*’, ‘*dtong kit nák*’ (Hpau Deif Nya 10.08.09)

<sup>254</sup> Sanya 21.07.09

<sup>255</sup> ‘*Kít-tǔng baan*’, ‘*sanuk*’, ‘*prowa bpen baan rao*’ (Too Too, 24.02.08, 13.03.08)

<sup>256</sup> ‘*Tam sabai*’, ‘*tam arai go dai*’ (Hpo Muf, 10.08.09)



without making any contact.<sup>257</sup> During a chat at the village well, a 12-year-old girl explained: ‘Chiang Mai is hot, there is no happiness’. In contrast, the highlands are described as having a ‘pleasant and better atmosphere’. She further explained that in the lowlands, ‘you are not with your parents and start missing them’, emphasising her argument by making a gesture of a tender embrace in the air.<sup>258</sup>

As outlined in Chapter 1, cultural symbols like names, clothes and language function as signifiers of ethnicised political and socio-economic inequality. Therefore, use of such symbols is a strategic means to emphasise belonging or distance to a place. Between poor and resource rich Karen highland villages, the symbolic value of products changes according to location. Thus, a product considered valuable in one place can become a sign of poverty and a cause of shame in a different location. For example, in Mae Ta La, sugar cubes and tea are popular snacks. Hpo Muf enjoys consuming these snacks with peers and relatives during her home visit to Mae Ta La. However, when she is in Huay Tong, Hpo Muf ceases to eat sugar cubes or drink tea. This is because in Huay Tong manufactured sweets and juices can be bought in shops, and sugar cubes are sold as the cheapest sweets; Hpo Muf knows that for villagers in Huay Tong, sugar cubes and sweets are associated with their past childhoods and/or poverty.<sup>259</sup>

Between highlands and lowlands, Karen children and youth shift strategically between their Thai and Karen names. When they move to Ban Kad for high school, they make increasing use of their Thai names. I naively assumed that they might be unhappy at not being able to use their Karen name in the plains. However, my survey revealed that girls were much more relaxed about the issue than I had thought. They emphasise their initiative in choosing to use Karen or Thai names, depending on the

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<sup>257</sup> ‘*Túk-kon jai-dii*’ (Hpau Deif Nya, 10.08.09), Sanya 21.07.09

<sup>258</sup> ‘*Chiang Mai rón mîi mii kwaam-sùk*’ ‘*Sabaai, aa-gàat dii qua*’ (Girl, 20.08.09)

<sup>259</sup> Diary, 21.04.08

local context. For example, according to village youth, it is possible to use Karen names in official documents, but out of consideration to Thai officials they use their Thai names as these are familiar to Thai people: ‘if it is the Karen name, some people cannot translate it’.<sup>260</sup> Asked about her feelings in shifting between names, Darunee explained: ‘I do not feel anything. It’s normal’.<sup>261</sup> Another youth Hpau Deif Nya said she enjoys the liberty of having many names, and switching between names between the highlands and lowlands protects her from unpleasant visitors. If a Karen person she does not like comes to Ban Kad looking for her but only knows her Karen name, they will not be able to locate her.<sup>262</sup>

Clothes are general markers of socio-economic and political status (Leo 2007: 64). Among the Karen, home-spun clothes are conventional markers of gender, generational and marital status. Today, the Karen largely use clothes to instrumentalise their ‘ethnicity’ for political and economic purposes. Often, the use of clothes depends on geographic location and their range of interaction with lowland Thai people. For example, in remote areas of Mae Chaem district, such as Mae Ta La village, young people wear their traditional clothes daily.<sup>263</sup> In contrast, in Huay Tong, industrially made clothes have increasingly replaced traditional garments since the 1980s. Today, village youth only wear their *hsei wa* and *hsei gauz* for religious feasts, during Sunday Masses and on Fridays at school.

As visual symbols of local belonging, home-spun clothes speak of socio-economic and political difference and marginality. For instance, wearing home-spun clothes can render people vulnerable to discrimination. Accordingly, Karen people avoid wearing home-spun garments in the lowlands. During my fieldwork, I only

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<sup>260</sup> ‘*Taa chuu Pknyau, ban kon bplec mâi dâi*’ (Girl, 19.05.08).

<sup>261</sup> ‘*Mai rusuk arai, tamada*’ (Darunee, 10.08.09)

<sup>262</sup> Hpau Deif Nya, 10.08.09

<sup>263</sup> Hpo Muf, 18.03.08

observed highlanders of very low socio-economic status wearing their traditional clothes at Ban Kad market or in hospitals around Chiang Mai. Usually, Karen highlanders in Mae Wang wear clothes purchased in the lowlands. Those who have the financial means might even purchase clothes that are popular in enhancing their ‘Thai-ness’. At the time of my fieldwork, the yellow Thai shirt in particular served as a powerful symbol of loyalty to the Thai royalty and nation. On a weekly basis, each Monday all over Thailand, civil servants wear yellow shirts, including school teachers at Huay Tong school. The yellow T-shirts are available in every market in the lowlands, which is also where Karen women obtained these status symbols. In particular, I observed that Karen women changed into their yellow T-shirts when they were about to make a visit to the plains. A Thai anthropologist confirmed that minority people often wear the T-shirt not only to honour the King but also as protection against discrimination.<sup>264</sup> Significantly, teenagers often receive their first Thai T-shirt upon transition to high school in the plains. Signifying belonging to a geographic location is therefore not only an expression of subjective feelings, but also a way to negotiate political belonging.

### **Negotiating international resources locally**

This section outlines collective negotiations of economic resources between Thai and Karen adults and children and international institutions. Encounters between local Thai teachers, Karen children and adults and the Japanese and Spanish representatives of international institutions reveal collective status shifts along ethnisised political economic inequalities. As outlined below, processes of collective negotiations highlight three conceptual issues: first, flexibility of status relations within patron-client relations at local, regional and international levels; second, the

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<sup>264</sup> Aranya Siriphon, 18.02.08

instrumentalisation of ‘ethnicity’ as strategy to access political economic resources, and third, children’s constrained agency in relation to obedience and enactment of social norms.

*Hosting the internationals: patron-client relations and foreign visitors*

The visits of Japanese and Spanish NGO representatives to Huay Tong illustrate how local patron-client relations between and among Thai and Karen people operate in relation to international guests. As outlined below local Karen and Thai people collectively assume the inferior role of ‘clients’ vis-à-vis foreign visitors who are treated as patrons. At the same time intra-group relations among Karen remain unchanged.

The directors of the Japanese Network Harmony Foundation and the Jesuit Social Service pay periodic visits to Huay Tong. They visit schools and meet with Karen students and adults as well as Thai teachers. The whole procedure of hosting foreign guests takes place in an organised form and involves the collaborative participation of Karen children and adults as well as Thai teachers. Interactions between donors and recipients reveal the ethnicised socio-economic and political status differences underlying these relationships.

The Japanese delegation headed by Kanagawa Tomoko, the vice-president of Network Harmony Foundation, visited Huay Tong in late February 2008 to inaugurate a newly built dormitory. They arrived in the evening, spent a night in the school compound and left the following day. A Jesuit delegation from Bangkok visited Ratana’s household during one day in mid-March 2008; on this trip, Fr Juan Carlos, director of the Jesuit Social Service, arrived with two Karen social workers as well as his niece and her husband on a visit from Spain.

Karen and Thai people spent a lot of time preparing for both visits. A week before the arrival of the Japanese guests, students and teachers were still busy finalising the dormitory and decorating the area around it with flowers. The day before the guests' arrival, the whole school was in a commotion.<sup>265</sup> The library had been transformed into a dining and sleeping hall for the visitors. On the inauguration day, the school compound was in an exceptional state. Regular teaching was suspended and the entire day was dedicated to the visit. Although it was a Tuesday, students were exhorted to wear their traditional clothes, and teachers insisted more rigorously than usual on maintaining discipline.

The visit of the Jesuit donors to Ratana's household for dormitory inspection fell in the first week of the long school summer break (13 March to 16 May 2008). Days before the arrival of the important delegation, Ratana was anxious that everything should proceed 'well ordered and without fault' (*rîap rooi*). Although her foster children from Mae Wang province were allowed to return home on the first weekend of the school holidays, she repeatedly reminded them of their duty to return to Huay Tong in the following week for Fr Juan's visit. As for the Mae Ta La foster children, Ratana asked their relatives to pick them up from her household on the day of Fr Juan Carlos's visit so that the children and their parents would be present on the important occasion. She also relied on the foster girls to clean the whole house over the weekend. On the day of the visit itself, careful food preparations started in the morning, and the donors arrived before noon.<sup>266</sup>

The quality of food, as well as the timing and location of the meals, reflects status boundaries between guests and their local hosts. Guests are honoured through the preparation of special food. Throughout the visit of the Japanese donors, food

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<sup>265</sup> Diary, 19.02.08, 23.02.08

<sup>266</sup> Ratana, 16.03.08, diary 16.03.08

preparation was not entrusted to the usual Karen school cook; instead, a senior Thai teacher took responsibility for preparing the food. Similarly, in Ratana's household, special food was prepared for the Spanish visitors, including a lot of meat, whilst the foster children and their parents were served *tapopo*, an ordinary and simple Karen dish.

Food consumption mirrors social hierarchies. At Huay Tong school, a canopy was set up on the compound for the Japanese visitors to have snacks and take a rest from the sun. Main meals were taken in the library, and food was served according to the hierarchical non-verbal behaviour prescribed in the codified polite manners of the *maa-ra-yâat Thai*. According to the *maa-ra-yâat Thai*, social juniors serve their seniors. So Thai teachers are usually served by their students. However, during the visit of the Japanese donors, the Thai teachers served their high-ranking guests food, thus emphasising the visitors' patron status. After the Japanese visitors had started eating their meal, their Thai hosts took places further down the table to eat the same food. The teachers also invited those Karen teenage girls who had helped in serving beverages to join them.

A similar table hierarchy emerged during the Jesuit delegation's lunch at Ratana's house. The guests were seated at the table outside the shop, visible to all passers-by. They enjoyed their special meal and also tried *tapopo*, while Ratana ate the same food combination inside her shop in the company of four children: her biological son Tej Suj, her foster daughter Hpo Muf, and the twins Naux Hpau Deif Nya and Deif, two children of other residents in Huay Tong. In contrast, the foster children and their relatives ate *tapopo* in a separate space in the compound's interior yard. In separating children and adults according to their place of residence and

household attachments, Ratana evoked social boundaries according to location and political affiliation.

Gift exchange is the highlight of Karen children's encounters with outside donors. The values of the exchanged goods are not commensurable and reflect status differences between donors and recipients. The Japanese donors handed symbolic cheques to the Karen girls during the inauguration ceremony of the newly built dormitory, while photos were taken. In 'exchange', the Japanese received the honour of the Thai teachers and Karen students who served and entertained the high-ranking guests. In Ratana's household, visitors were also paid respect through the service and entertainment. Fr Juan Carlos and his team posed for a picture with the foster children, and the Spanish visitors each received a wrapped gift of a hand-woven Karen bag from the girls who handed the gifts to the seated guests. In accordance with the *mattaya Thai*, the girls moved on their knees towards the donors who were seated on chairs. In this kneeling position, they bowed down and handed the wrapped bags to their guests.

Interestingly, the Japanese and Spanish guests differed in their interactions with the locals. The Japanese donors appeared more detached from the Karen children than the Spanish visitors. Throughout their visit, the hierarchy between Japanese guests and their Thai and Karen hosts was maintained. For example, no mixture of food occurred. They guarded cultural and social distance with Karen children, neither sharing food nor wrapping themselves with Karen-made fabrics. The head of the delegation also demonstrated her high status vis-à-vis the Thai teachers through a deliberate breaching of the school's non-smoking policy. Despite a general non-smoking policy in government buildings throughout Thailand, the Japanese lady lit a cigarette in the library without any intervention from the teachers. Teachers' tolerance

of the smoking evidenced their assumption of an inferior position vis-à-vis the Japanese donors. In contrast, the Spaniards' exchange with Karen children was more immediate and mutual. They entered Ratana's household, ate Karen food and received Karen bags.

### *Instrumentalising ethnicity*

Children participate in the process of hosting foreign guests. Throughout Thailand, children's dancing and singing performances accompany most major events at different places, such as temples, night bazaars, schools, etc. Also in Huay Tong, encounters between Karen aid recipients and outside visitors of higher social status include entertainment delivered by children.<sup>267</sup> Local children and adults instrumentalise 'ethnicity' as a means to highlight the superior status of foreign visitors. They use different strategies such as the wearing of local clothes, the performance of dances and the presenting of locally produced gifts, as well as the exhibiting of polite body language. Their strategic performances emphasise their low socio-economic and political status vis-à-vis the Thai teachers and foreign donors. In this way, international institutions and their representatives are effectively treated as political patrons.

'Ethnicity' is instrumentalised through Karen and regional Thai clothes and dances. What children wear in performances typically underlines their 'Karen-ness' and hence their rural highland background and socio-economic and political 'otherness'.

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<sup>267</sup> For example, during a visit of Thai school inspectors, at the Royal Project or of European donors to a Karen village such as Bernard van Leer and Impact (12.02.08, 08.07.08). During major Karen celebrations, such as Christmas or at sport festivals, youth tend to provide on-stage entertainment.



**Figure 14 Karen girls performing rice harvest dances for Japanese donors**

Girls usually wear their *hse wa* and perform seasonal group dances related to the rice harvest (Fig. 14), while boys tend to perform individually in their *hsei gauz*, mostly singing songs about the agricultural circle. For performances at Huay Tong school, the Thai teachers chose four girls to dress up in Lanna (northern Thai) costume and dance typical regional dances. At Huay Tong school, the female teacher who instructs in such dances is a woman from Isan. Isan people (*khon isan*) usually tend to conceptualise themselves as a distinct ethnic group. Therefore, the fact that an Isan woman is instructing Karen girls in northern Thai dances shows how flexible the use of ‘ethnicity’ is. Neither the teaching nor the mastery of local ‘ethnic’ dances – in this case Lanna dances – depends on an individual’s biology but on practice.

During the Japanese visit, all students appeared in their ‘ethnic’ clothes. Female toddlers even had to wear their mothers’ decorative turbans (*hkò hpè*). As they were not used to wearing turbans, the Karen school cook had to keep constantly rearranging their *hkò hpè* behind a barn. While the Japanese were waiting in the school compound, the toddlers had to parade in a seemingly casual way in front of the foreign guests. During lunch, kindergarten children performed aerobics to the national

Royal anthem, and teenage girls presented local Thai Lanna dances as well as Karen 'rice dances'. This was eventually followed by the boys' karaoke performances, mostly by Deif, a Karen youth used to performing songs for outside visitors. In Ratana's household, after the Spanish delegation's meal, Deif also presented his standard repertoire for the donors, his peers and their relatives. With feigned shyness, he explained the lyrics of the harvest song to the visitors and then performed it.

Children's ethnic performances have a strong effect on foreign visitors. Seeing Karen children in their ethnic clothes engendered nostalgic feelings among the visitors, while the performances stirred naïve enchantment among the spectators because of the cultural exoticism embodied by the schoolgirls. Network Harmony vice-president Kanagawa Tomoko is convinced of the students' intelligence (*atama ga ii*) and eager application (*ishokenmei*) to formal learning. She was pleased to find Karen students wearing their traditional dresses and performing their dances and emphasised the importance of ethnic consciousness (*minzoku ishikii*). She contrasted these qualities of Karen youth with Japanese students who are less interested in their studies and ethnic identity.<sup>268</sup> Juan Carlos' adult niece also revealed how much seeing Karen girls in their white dresses evoked nostalgic memories for her. After the exchange of gifts, she gave thanks for Ratana's hospitality and explained that since childhood she had followed the lives of the Karen children through the photographs her Jesuit uncle sent 'from this far away land' to Spain. Especially intrigued by girls' *hsei wa*, she had always wanted to meet them.

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<sup>268</sup> Kanagawa, 26.02.08

### *Children's constrained agency*

Karen children are not entirely passive during the visits of foreign donors. They actively participate to these processes and sometimes make attempts to resist or critique them. However, their overall agency remains limited and needs to be understood in relation to obedience and enactment of social norms. For example, during the Japanese school visit, several children who were not involved in assisting the Thai teachers in serving or entertaining the guests left the school compound, while others put in an unexpected appearance. Indeed, during the dance performances of their older peers, primary school boys and girls gathered at the library windows to observe the girls dancing. The teachers eventually chased them away.

During the Spaniards' visit, the children in Ratana's household gave discrete signs of resistance to the hosting procedure. When Ratana's foster children walked the donors through the village to the dormitory in the school compound, Tej Suj and Deif went very slowly, keeping a large distance from the group; when they arrived at the dormitory, these two boys hid behind the building, thus distancing themselves radically from the other children. This is because Tej Suj and Deif felt uncomfortable with Ratana's efforts of homogenising all of the children, presenting them as a group of needy persons in front of the foreign donors. They are both from Huay Tong, and although they both receive financial help for their studies from the Jesuits, they are not in the same social situation as the foster children from other locations of residence. Their status difference was already apparent when they took their meal with Ratana and not with the other children. But walking with the other children as a group through the village proved an awkward experience for Tej Suj and Deif. They showed their discomfort by walking more slowly and remaining behind the group of foster children.

Additionally, the other foster children acted independently when out of sight of the high-ranking visitors. While they appeared punctually in their Karen clothes to welcome and accompany the donors through the village and gathered after the meal in front of the guests for songs and the gift exchange, it would be misleading to see them as purely acquiescent. During the visit to the school compound's dormitory, most foster girls hid behind the building instead of standing in the donors' presence. Only Hpo Muf, Eu, Too Too and Hpau Deif Nya remained in the donors' sight; their greater responsibility within the household seemed to extend to representing the children's collective engagement with the foreign visitors. During lunch and thus out of Ratana's and the visitors' view, all the foster girls changed from their festive clothes into their casual clothes. After lunch they again put on their *hsei wa* before once more facing the donors for the farewell. When the Spanish visitors left Huay Tong, the children quickly changed their clothes, got their parcels together and returned with their relatives to their home village to start their summer holidays.

At Huay Tong School, after the Japanese guests left to visit another dormitory at Ban Kad and other activities, the students gathered under the canopy playing with the flowers made up for the visitors while the students and teachers continued throughout the afternoon to sing karaoke and eat the remains of the food. Thus, after their collective efforts in instrumentalizing ethnicity through performances for high ranking visitors, local Karen and Thai people experience a general relaxation. This relaxation, in turn, highlights once more the exceptionality of donors' presence on local grounds as well as the exhaustion associated with the work of performing 'ethnic' stereotypes for economic benefits.

## **Conclusion**

Having established the motives and processes of Karen children's migration for

education, my empirical analysis in this chapter illustrated how unequal political economic relations are played out in migrating Karen children's social identities. I argued that in navigating the political economy of northern Thailand, Karen children develop flexible identities. Findings in this chapter stress the importance of going beyond a mere focus on childhood as socio-cultural institution (e.g. James and Prout 1997; Montgomery 2009). Adding a political economy perspective reveals the crucial role of children's political and economic status in shaping their experiences of growing up in a changing society.

My data highlight the importance of 'location' in children's lives. Locations are always shaped by context-specific socio-economic and political power configurations. At the same time, geographic locations themselves impact on power configurations. Geographic issues such as access, remoteness and proximity to capital all help to shape the power dynamics in a location. These local power configurations, in turn, structure the flexible nature of children's social status, as well as personal and institutional relations.

I analysed how socio-economic and political inequalities are played out in children's changing peer relationships. My data evidence how a child's social status changes as children migrate to different study and work locations in the highland and lowlands. As an ethnicized minority group, migrating Karen children hold less power than their Thai lowland peers. Their political marginality coincides with their socio-economic loss of status when they move to the lowlands. At the same time, however, migration to another place may temporally suspend the village-bound power inequalities among Karen peers. As a consequence, individual Karen children may even gain status among their peers. Status changes, in turn, encourage children's development of flexible identities.

Social morality of girls' behaviour depends on geographic location. Local political economic power configurations shape gender relations. Girls' agency is therefore constrained and needs to be understood in relation to the value of obedience and enactment of norms. My analysis of Karen girls' life in the high school dormitory illustrates their ability to negotiate through migration experiences localised gendered behaviour patterns without challenging local exceptions of gender norms, both in the village and the lowlands.

Geographic locations themselves are imbued with symbolic value. Rural poverty causes feelings of shame among Karen people in the lowlands. Karen children find strategies to save face. My analysis revealed how Karen children strategically indicate distance or belonging to places. I argued that they are doing so in appropriating or rejecting locally valued symbols and products. Concealing their rural highland identities is probably the most immediate and defensive reaction in settings dominated by lowland Thai people. Methods of concealment include feigning shyness of speech, falling completely silent and being secretive about one's place of origin.

I analysed how Karen and Thai people negotiate economic resources with international donors. My data evidence how Thai and Karen children collectively adopt lower status vis-à-vis foreign guests who are treated as political patrons. In addition, my findings illustrate how Thai and Karen children and adults instrumentalise 'ethnicity' in order to access economic resources. Karen children play an active role in these negotiations through dances and song performances. They accentuate their rural poverty, through ethnicised symbols such as clothes and rituals, in order to gain economic benefits. Yet, children's agency in these processes remains constrained. Despite some attempts of resistance, my data suggest that children generally manifest agency through obedience and compliance with existing norms.

This chapter showed how Karen children's status changes as they migrate between different geographic and institutional sites for work and education. I evidenced their attempt to adapt their identities to local cultural values, social morality and political economic constraints. As children negotiate dominant values, they develop flexible identities. Mastery of flexible identities, therefore, seems a necessary skill to negotiate socio-cultural dissonances during childhood transitions in a multicultural setting shaped by political economic inequality.

## CONCLUSION

### Introduction

This thesis set out to explore the research question: How are changing modes and sites of production and learning affecting childhood transitions in northern Thailand? I explored the hypothesis that childhood transitions are not linear, universally experienced developments, but political economic and socio-culturally embedded processes. In my thesis, Karen childhood transitions emerge as learning processes towards mastery of ‘translocal identities’. Learning takes place as children migrate between regional, national, and international contexts of changing modes and sites of production and learning, as well as traditional and modern institutions. According to my data, mastery of ‘translocal identities’ is a culturally valued skill that enables migrating children to negotiate effective transitions to adulthood and participate as structurally constrained agents in the reshaping of the political economy of northern Thailand.

Existing social analysis of childhood transitions conceptualises ‘childhood’ as a socio-cultural construct (James and Prout 1997; Mayall and Zeiher 2003; Rogoff 1990), whilst largely neglecting the political economic contexts of childhood experiences. Ideas of children as cultural, but not political economic, persons are reflected in most social science research on childhood transitions (e.g. Corsaro and Molinari 2005; Rogoff et al. 2007). Moreover, sociological theories largely problematise childhood transitions in settings of social dissonance associated with the global market economy, modern institutions and formal education, in relation to which young people today are said to struggle in coping with social change during their transition experiences (e.g. Beck 1992; Giddens 1991). However, children’s



capacity to negotiate dissonances and participate in the shaping of their wider socio-cultural and political economic environment has been largely ignored by researchers.

My study fills this research gap and challenges assumptions in the prevailing literature on childhood transitions in settings of social dissonance. My thesis makes three major contributions to the field. Firstly, my data highlights how children develop flexible and dynamic identities through their migration between different locations of learning and work. I call these ‘translocal identities’. Secondly, my findings suggest that in northern Thailand today, childhood transitions are learning processes towards the mastery of ‘translocal identities’, in which children acquire the culturally valued skill to modify, adapt and change their social status between different geographic and institutional locations. Thirdly, I argue that ‘translocal identities’ reveal children’s constrained agency in shaping their political economic environment. Together with their peers as well as their Thai and Karen seniors, Karen children shape the local workings of the expanding market economy and formal Thai education. They do this by appropriating local, national and international power configurations at various places. By introducing the concept ‘translocal identities’, my study fills a gap in previous research, and challenges some of the existing assumptions, analyses and theories, as outlined below.

### **Translocal identities**

The notion of ‘translocality’ (Apparadurai 1995: 216) is useful for conceptualising the processes of Karen children’s migrations for education, and their emergent and flexible social identities within the political economy of northern Thailand. As explained in Chapter 1, ‘translocal processes’ refer to social mobility between

institutional and geographical settings and indicate a shift in the relationship between territory, identity and political affiliation (Appadurai 1996: 178).

Migration is an essential ingredient in translocal processes, and the concept of ‘translocality’ highlights the role of geographical and institutional localities in shaping people’s social identities. (e.g. Aranya 2008; Peleikis 2003; Tan Eik Lye 2008). Karen children do not make their transitions in isolation. Migration during childhood transitions is always context-bound and its dynamics are regulated by children’s households and village communities. As discussed in Chapter 7, everyday politics within local institutions are also interwoven with the operations of international organisations. Local communities and households are themselves connected to wider national and international institutions, such as the Thai government, the Catholic Church or Japanese NGOs. Despite the increasing presence of modern national and international (non-)governmental institutions, however, local power configurations based on kinship and patron-client relations have not lost their importance. My data thus confirms the importance of ‘the local’ amidst national and international influences and power configurations.

If ‘translocal processes’ define social mobility between different institutional and geographic settings, in northern Thailand migration is an essential ingredient to children’s working and learning transition experiences. My study revealed that the major motives for young Karen peoples’ migration are their desire and need to access school systems and labour markets. My fieldwork, conducted with Karen children of different social status showed the multilayered nature of Karen youth’s migration. In Chapter 8, I illustrated how they shift their political economic status during these processes in the various locations of the highlands and lowlands of northern Thailand. My data suggests that translocal processes engender ‘flexible identities’ (Ong 2006: 3)

as Karen children's emergent identities are highly dynamic and adaptable to cultural values and political economic forces shaping their environments.

My empirical findings also establish that Karen children's social identities are largely defined by their political economic status. In this respect, my research challenges conventional socio-cultural childhood studies where political and socio-economic inequalities between children often remain ignored (e.g. James and Prout 1997). My analysis of Karen children's working and learning activities reveals the importance of economic and political status in shaping their lives. My data evidence that status is never static but flexible, always depending on institutional and/or geographical location. During their translocal processes, Karen children change their affiliations and thus their political economic status. It is, therefore, important to understand their social status in the location of origin in order to evaluate the impact migration has on individual and collective experiences of location shifts. For instance, my analysis provides evidence that children's peer relations are also status relations. Children change their alliances – and status relationships – according to the power configurations at different institutional and/or geographic sites. This was revealed in my discussion in Chapter 8 about how their friendships change between different institutional sites in Huay Tong and between the highland villages and lowland schools. I argue that children's status shifts, in turn, impact on their social identities. In moving between locations, they learn to adapt their identities to local, national and international power configurations and socio-cultural values. Their emergent identities are hence 'translocal identities'.

### **Mastering translocal identities as a culturally valued skill**

Throughout this thesis, I have shown that in an expanding cash economy and with increasing participation in modern state education, mastery of ‘translocal identities’ is a culturally relevant skill for children, enabling them to negotiate political economic power forces and socio-cultural values in different places. Karen childhood transitions are therefore largely processes of learning the mastery of ‘translocal identities’.

Learning how to manage their ‘translocal identities’ occurs as children move between localities. In Chapters 5 and 6, my empirical data provide evidence of how Karen children’s working and learning activities have become diversified and increasingly related to modern institutions, markets and wider political economic processes. At home as well as at school, they continue learning chores that are important for a subsistence economy, such as weaving, gardening, and cooking. At the same time, they spend increasing amounts of time in Thai state schools, taking part in formal education and becoming familiar with the socio-cultural values of the Thai majority. Mastery of these latter skills and values, in turn, facilitates their access to paid jobs in the national labour market.

Karen children thus develop ‘translocal skills’ through their learning and working activities at traditional and modern institutions in their immediate and wider environments. In this respect, my findings challenge research on socio-cultural transitions that focuses on how children learn from their immediate environment, but fails to consider the impact of national and international power relations on childhood transitions. My research seeks to redress this imbalance. For example, the school is often singled out as the legitimate institution of learning, and parents and teachers as the legitimate regulators of children’s transitions (Fabian and Dunlop 2002: 3). As a consequence, schools and households are rarely examined as settings of political

economic dissonance (e.g. Corsaro and Molinari 2005; Rogoff 1984). Yet, institutions of social reproduction – such as households and schools – are shaped by political economic forces, and mediate between these global forces and the lives of local children (Hart 2008a: 22-23). Therefore, a focus on local ‘politics of the everyday’ (Bargetz 2009) allows discerning the political economic shaping of the settings of children’s daily lives, such as classrooms, households and work places.

My thesis explores the practical workings of national and international power relations in Karen childhood transitions through their working and learning activities at different geographic and institutional sites. In addition, I have been mindful of the wider historical dimensions of my research context. I explored historical changes through interviews with Thai and Karen adults, ongoing exchanges with local Thai anthropologists, as well as careful reading of the context literature, outlined in Chapters 3 and 4. Then, during an ongoing process of data analysis I related my ethnographic data on local childhood experiences to the literature on historical macro process.

Mastery of ‘translocal identities’ is not an innate talent, but the result of a long learning process. Learning the skill to master ‘translocal identities’ takes place as Karen children appropriate the dominant Thai socio-cultural values and negotiate political economic forces in their everyday lives. Learning can be difficult, painful and awkward. This is demonstrated, for instance, in Chapter 6 in my analysis of Karen children’s failed attempts to imitate Thai hierarchical body language, where Karen students’ clumsy performances upset their Thai teachers who thought the children were mocking the Thai nation, royalty and Buddhist religion. Importantly, the teachers’ resentments, in turn, reinforce their tendency to essentialise the students’ political economic marginality vis-à-vis their ethnic minority status.

Mastery of 'translocal identities' is a culturally and translocally valued skill among the Karen. According to my data, Karen children and adults place a high social and moral value on children's 'translocal identities', which are hence considered more a 'skill' than a 'burden'. In Chapter 5, I highlighted the general importance of the social and moral value of children's activities and skills. My data reveals that children enjoy activities when these are valued by adults and peers. Moreover, through their work assistance to others, children demonstrate the moral values of diligence and responsibility, of 'being good' (Heissler 2009; Mann 2008), which underline the important interdependence between children's and adults' economic activities. In this respect, my research also adds to the ethnographic research that explores the morality of children's working activities.

Children in my study do not worry about their status shifts because of its perceived benefits. As discussed in Chapter 8, Karen children find their flexible identities advantageous. For example, their Thai names give them anonymity in the lowlands and protect them from the visits of unwelcome Karen suitors from the highland villages. My research in this area thus adds to the existing anthropological analysis of northern Thai highlanders' generally flexible attitude towards modern political constructions of 'ethnicity' (e.g. Hayami 2003; Kunstadter 1979; Marlowe 1979).

In addition, Karen children and their households place a high economic value on the mastery of 'translocal identities'. My analysis reveals young peoples' awareness of the political economic constraints that mark their households and the labour markets. They are acutely aware that more than achieving high school grades or certificates, their paid and unpaid working activities are the most valued contributions that children can make to their households. In Chapters 5 and 8, I

showed how teenagers – in their weekly commutes between the highland villages and lowland high schools – invest in their education/occupational aspirations through attending formal Thai education while continuing to contribute to their rural household economies with (un)paid work on the weekends. Remaining in economic interdependence with their households, in turn, confirms the moral value of the ‘interdependence’ between juniors and seniors through ‘work assistance’ – and affirms children’s ability to master their ‘translocal identities’.

### **Translocal identities and children’s constrained agency**

My findings on ‘translocal identities’ suggest that social dissonances associated with modern institutions and the market economy are not a source of concern among Karen children in northern Thailand. My research thus challenges sociological work that argues that the inability of keeping fixed identities in modern societies has negative impacts on childhood transitions (e.g. Giddens 1991). Instead, my thesis supports those studies that view processes of growing up in settings of political economic and cultural dissonances as opportunities for growth and healthy development (e.g. Boyden and de Berry 2004; Jeffrey and Dyson 2008). My research suggests that children participate creatively in vertical and horizontal processes of human development and social change. At the same time, political economic structures and cultural norms constrain children’s lives. As a consequence, Karen children’s ‘agency’ cannot merely be understood in terms of ‘rebellion’ and ‘resistance’. Instead, as outlined in Chapter 1, it needs to be related to different modes of social enactment and obedience.

My research reveals children’s constrained agency in vertical processes of human development. For example, my data suggests that former children migrants can

become adult participants in processes of social change. During the 1960s and 1970s, the first groups of Karen children started attending Thai state schools in different locations in the highlands and lowlands, and they developed their own ‘translocal’ youth and adult identities. As adults, they now hold important social positions within Karen highland society, working as local entrepreneurs, Thai government employees, Catholic priests and sisters, etc. They use their social positions to act as cultural intermediaries between rural Karen people of lower status and national and international institutions.

Moreover, in addition to vertical dynamics, my research evidences horizontal dimensions of Karen children’s constrained agency in shaping their environment. In drawing attention to the horizontal dynamics of children’s constrained agency, my study challenges existing socio-cultural transition research which argues that children’s participation in social change emerges only at the end of a vertical learning process (e.g. Wood, Bruner and Ross 1976; Rogoff 1990). In these studies, children develop over time the ability to shape their environment. For example, Rogoff’s (1990) concept of ‘guided participation’ describes development as a vertical, one-way route between adults and children, where children are dependent on adults. Only when children turned into adults themselves, they are thought to use their skills for participation to the shaping of their social environment. My own dissertation shows that there is a mutual horizontal shaping between children and adults at different geographical and institutional locations. I argue that ‘translocal identities’ reveal Karen children’s constrained agency to impact on their immediate and wider environments through their negotiations of dominant cultural values and political economic forces. As explained in Chapter 1, the concept of ‘local appropriations’ highlights people’s capacity to integrate different institutional power configurations



and socio-cultural values into their local lives (e.g. Aranya 2008; Gaonkar 1999; Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery 2008; Ong 2006).

My study provides empirical evidence how, in interdependence with others, children negotiate the workings of everyday political economic forces of their environments. According to my findings, Karen children's 'translocal identities' are shaped by the political economic forces mediated by local, national and international institutions. Yet, by mastering 'translocal identities' children also to some extent participate in the moulding of their political economic environment through their working and learning activities.

Migrating children act as constrained agents by negotiating their unequal political economic status in Karen villages and households. On the local level, children negotiate their household relations. My analysis in Chapter 7 of the everyday politics of the foster home illustrates how the use of household spaces marks status differences among foster children and in relation to their hosts. However, intra-household inequalities are negotiated through children's attempts to transgress spatial boundaries, where they literally appropriate the space reserved for their hosts. Intra-household power relations are also challenged during their weekly commutes to high school dormitories in the plains. In the absence of their vigilant households, Karen girls at lowland high schools experiment with beauty products and make-up, travel on motorbikes and meet their male friends after sunset. Migration to the lowlands, therefore, allows Karen youth to experiment with their gendered and generational identities beyond their rigid village moralities. Importantly, their transgression remains discreet, and it is not always immediately observable how their actions shape their environment. Yet, through their transition experiences they gather new values and sets of behaviour that contribute and confirm the ongoing socio-economic

changes of their environment, such as their increasing consumption of market products and popular Thai culture.

On the regional level, my findings suggest that through their relocation for work and school, foster children contribute to the economic development of their host region Mae Wang and their remote home district Mae Chaem. As an active workforce in their foster homes, children participate in the regional agricultural economy in and around Huay Tong in general, and in their foster household in particular. If formal education at Huay Tong school and their acquaintance with powerful regional persons (such as their Thai teachers or Karen foster mother) helps them access higher education and/or employment opportunities, children in my study in turn planned to support their rural households with their future incomes. At the same time, their increasing out-migration for work and education impacts on village demographics. In this way, young Karen people participate through constrained agency to the reshaping of the northern Thai political economy.

Concerning the national level, Karen people manipulate ‘ethnicity’ to signal their sense of belonging to or their distance from the Thai nation. My research supports the argument of conceptual research on ‘ethnicity’ as a marker of ‘inclusion’, of ‘belonging’ or of ‘distance’ (e.g. Anthias 2002a; Fenton 1999, 2003). In urban lowland settings, Karen students tend to conceal their geographic origins; for example, they avoid speaking Thai as it would reveal their accent and Karen mother tongue. At the same time, however, they also draw on a repertoire of politicised symbols, such as clothes, in order to enhance their ‘Thai-ness’. Conversely, in the highlands, commuting Karen students signal their political belonging to their village, and thus their distance from Thai mainstream culture, by wearing their traditional Karen garments and using their Karen names and mother tongue during their weekend

returns from the lowlands to Huay Tong.

In relation to the international level, Karen children modestly act in collaboration with Thai and Karen adults as constrained agents. For instance, my findings evidence how children assist their Thai and Karen seniors in negotiating funding from international institutions. I illustrated this with the examples of the Catholic Church and a Japanese private foundation, and the visits of Spanish and Japanese donor delegations in Huay Tong. On these occasions, local children, parents and teachers feel the need to construct and display 'ethnicity' in an exotic way to outside visitors and donors who represent international institutions and are generally treated as political patrons. For instance, while Karen girls' white dress, the *hse wa*, is mostly used in Huay Tong for religious ceremonies and celebrations, during children's performances for representatives from Thai national and foreign (non-)governmental institutions, the clothes become symbols of 'ethnicity', which, in turn, represent the children's rural poverty and political marginality. However, Karen children wear these clothes strategically in order to negotiate international funding and economic benefits for their local institutions, including households and state schools. In this way, together with local Karen and Thai adults, children are involved in economic negotiations with international hosts. This way, they contribute to supporting the political economic development of their village and the wider province.

Throughout my thesis, I asked how changing modes of production and learning impact on childhood transitions. My conclusion rests on the fact that Karen children emerge in my study as socio-economic and politically conscious persons who participate in the shaping of their political economic environment. They are aware of their economic and political marginality within Thai society and find ways to

negotiate this through their working and learning activities at different institutional and geographical locations. In particular, they learn to change, modify and adapt their social status at different sites of learning and work, and develop the culturally valued skill to master 'translocal identities'. Mastery of 'translocal identities', in turn, enables children to engage creatively in both horizontal and vertical processes of shaping the political economic and socio-cultural dimensions of their environment. Yet, children's creative agency remains constrained. According to my findings, agency does not always indicate innovation, resistance and rebellion. Instead, it often means reproduction of political-economic inequalities and/or compliance with existing cultural values and social morality. Therefore, while mastery of 'translocal identities' enables Karen children to negotiate their effective transitions to adulthood in reshaping their environments, their agency remains constrained by political-economic forces and socio-cultural norms.

## APPENDIX A. Script for obtaining informed consent

As explained in Chapter 2, my informed consent forms have been approved by the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC). In Thailand, Thai colleagues at Chiang Mai University as well as a Thai teacher in Huay Tong village kindly translated the form into formal and informal Thai language<sup>269</sup>.

*Script for obtaining informed consent, English original and formal Thai translation*

### Script for Obtaining Informed Consent

For verbal delivery with children (in the presence of a guardian)

My name is Pia Vogler and I am a university student researcher. I am doing a study about what it means to be young in and around Huay Tong. I am interested in young people's culture and their activities, what they like doing and what they dislike. I would like to have you tell me what you and your friends like or dislike doing. If you don't want to talk, that is okay and no problem. You are free to choose what you do and you can tell me when it is enough.

I am not a teacher. I do not report to any teacher. I will write a final report that tells what young people like and dislike doing in this town/village. This final report will not tell people's names so if you tell me something I will include it in my report but I will not write that it was you in particular who told it to me. This final report may be read by other people in Thailand and outside of Thailand. I hope that when these different people read the report they will learn more about how young people are doing in and around Huay Tong.

You can choose to talk to me alone or with your family members or friends. Again, you can choose what to say and you can ask me questions too. And when you want to stop, we will stop.

Do you understand what I have explained?

Do you have any questions?

Do you want to participate with me?

May I take some notes/recording?

ฉันชื่อ                      เปีย                      โวชเลอร์                      (Pia                      Vogler)                      ค่ะ  
ฉันเป็นนักวิจัยและเป็นนักศึกษามาจากมหาวิทยาลัยออกฟอร์ด (Oxford University)  
ประเทศอังกฤษ

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<sup>269</sup> Many thanks to Aranya Siriphon, Kulthida Phiphatanasukmongkhol, Krittika Inta, and Kru Rak for their generosity and patience in helping me with all Thai-English translations included in the appendices of the thesis.

ฉันกำลังศึกษาเกี่ยวกับเรื่องของวัยรุ่นและความหมายของหนุ่มสาวทั้งในและรอบๆ  
หมู่บ้านห้วยตองแห่งนี้  
ฉันกำลังสนใจในวัฒนธรรมของวัยรุ่นและกิจกรรมของคนหนุ่มสาว  
ฉันสนใจในสิ่งที่พวกเขาชอบทำและอะไรบางอย่างที่พวกเขาไม่ชอบทำ และเหตุผลว่า  
ทำไมคนหนุ่มสาวสมัยนี้ชอบทำหรือไม่ชอบทำในสิ่งเหล่านี้

ฉันจึงอยากจะพูดคุยกับพวกคุณ เกี่ยวกับสิ่งที่พวกคุณกำลังทำอยู่  
ทั้งสิ่งที่พวกคุณชอบทำ และไม่ชอบทำ  
กิจกรรมต่างๆ ที่พวกคุณรู้สึกว่ามี ความหมาย มีความสุข  
แล้วอะไรที่พวกคุณคิดว่าเป็นปัญหา อยากจะแก้ไข หรืออยากจะทำให้มันดีขึ้น

แต่ถ้าหากคุณไม่ต้องการจะพูดคุยด้วย หรืออยากจะพูดคุยในบางเรื่องเท่านั้น ฉันก็ยินดี  
ไม่มีปัญหาว่า จะต้องถูกบังคับให้พูดคะ  
แต่ถ้าหากอยากจะเล่าอะไรให้ฉันฟังในเรื่องเกี่ยวกับพวกคุณ  
ดิฉันจะยินดีเป็นอย่างมากคะ

ดิฉันไม่ใช่ครู และเรื่องที่พวกคุณพูดจะไม่ถูกรายงานต่อครูหรือใครๆ ก็ตาม ข้อมูลต่างๆ  
ในสิ่งที่พวกคุณเล่า ฉันจะเขียนเป็นรายงานบอกเล่าในสิ่งที่วัยรุ่นทั่วๆ ไป  
วัยรุ่นเมืองไทยชอบหรือไม่ชอบอะไรบางอย่างในเมือง/ในหมู่บ้าน ฉันจะเล่าเรื่องทั่วๆ  
ไปจากสิ่งที่พวกคุณเล่า แต่ฉันจะไม่บอกชื่อของคนที่เราเล่า หรือเรื่องความลับใดๆ  
หากพวกคุณไม่ต้องการ ผู้อ่านจะไม่รู้ว่าเรื่องที่ฉันเขียนเหล่านี้มาจากใคร

รายงานที่ฉันเขียนอาจจะมีคนอ่านทั่วๆ ไป ไม่ว่าจะเป็นคนในเมืองไทย  
หรือจากต่างประเทศ ฉันหวังว่า เมื่อคนเหล่านี้ได้อ่านสิ่งที่พวกคุณเล่าให้ดิฉันฟังแล้ว  
ผู้อ่านจะเรียนรู้มากขึ้นเกี่ยวกับเรื่องราวของวัยรุ่นที่ห้วยตอง  
ว่าวัยรุ่นที่ห้วยตองทำอะไรบ้างที่เป็นชีวิตของพวกคุณ

คุณสามารถที่จะคุยกับฉันเป็นการส่วนตัว คุยคนเดียวกับฉัน หรือว่าจะมีครอบครัว  
หรือเพื่อนมาร่วมพูดคุยด้วยก็ได้ นอกจากนี้  
คุณก็สามารถเลือกที่จะตอบหรือไม่ตอบคำถามที่ฉันถามก็ได้ ดิฉันยินดี ไม่มีปัญหาคะ  
หรือ ถ้าคุณต้องการจะหยุดพูดกับฉันหรือไม่อยากคุยกับฉันอีกต่อไป  
ดิฉันก็ยินดีที่จะปฏิบัติตามนั้นคะ

คุณเข้าใจในสิ่งที่ฉันเพิ่งอธิบายไปหรือไม่คะ  
คุณมีคำถามเพิ่มเติมไหมคะ  
คุณต้องการจะมีส่วนร่วมในสิ่งที่กำลังจะทำอยู่นี้ไหม  
หากฉันจะถามคุณเกี่ยวกับเรื่องของพวกคุณ  
คุณจะอนุญาตให้ ฉันจดบันทึก หรือบันทึกเทปในสิ่งที่พวกคุณพูดให้ฟังได้ไหม

## APPENDIX B. Questions for Ban Kad Survey

Fifty-eight students between 15 and 17 years of age shared with me their feelings on friendship and work. I conducted small, open surveys in the Thai language at a local high school in Ban Kad with the help of the students' English teacher, Belle. We made a first round of questionnaires on 10 August 2009, followed by a second round on 17 August 2009. The simple rationale for doing two rounds with a one-week lag was my organization of fieldwork schedule in which I had to accommodate research activities at different locations in the lowlands and highlands. The exercises were conducted spontaneously once I realised that students enjoy writing about their feelings. I subsequently translated and analysed the data myself with the help of research assistants. Following are the original Thai questions students were asked to respond to, followed by the English translation.

### *Questions for Ban Kad Survey*

#### *Thai original version (as handed to students)*

คำถามสำหรับการสำรวจบ้านกาด

|                                        |
|----------------------------------------|
| a. เพศ                                 |
| b. สถานที่เกิด/ถิ่นเดิม                |
| 1. เมื่อไหร่ที่คุณรู้สึกมีความสุข      |
| 2. เมื่อไหร่ที่คุณรู้สึกเหนื่อย        |
| 3. เมื่อไหร่ที่คุณรู้สึกเครียด         |
| 4. เมื่อไหร่ที่คุณรู้สึกสนุกสนาน       |
| 5. คุณกลัวอะไร                         |
| 6. อะไรที่ทำให้คุณรู้สึกแย่            |
| 7. คุณทำงานนอกโรงเรียนไหม? คุณทำอะไร ? |
| 8. คุณทำอะไร? คุณหาเงินได้เท่าไหร่?    |
| 9. คุณใช้เงินที่ได้มาอย่างไร           |

10. ทำไมคุณถึงชอบ หรือ ไม่ชอบงานของคุณ

*English translation*

a. Gender

b. Place of origin

1. When are you feeling happy?

2. When are you feeling tired?

3. When are you feeling stressed?

4. When are you having fun?

5. What are you afraid of?

6. What makes you feel bad?

7. Are you working outside school? What are you doing?

8. What are you doing? How much are you earning?

9. How do you spend your income?

10. Why do you like/dislike your work?



## APPENDIX C. Protocol for participatory research exercises

During preparation process for participatory research exercises with children in Huay Tong, I shared the protocol below with my academic supervisor in Oxford. Based on her comments I improved the document so to use during my workshop with Karen research assistants in Chiang Mai (1-3 May 2008). As explained in Chapter 2, this workshop offered research assistants a theoretical introduction as well as practical training of participatory research with children. Two thirds of the workshop was spent on practicing the three research tools we were going to employ with children in Huay Tong (mobility maps, seasonal calenders, and life course lines). The protocol served as basis for our pratices and research assistants kept a copy for rehearsal and later orientation in Huay Tong village.

### *Protocol for participatory research exercises (original document)*

#### **Aims**

With the employment of participatory research methods, I hope to learn more about differences of daily, seasonal and life course transition experiences of Karen children between the ages 11 and 15. I am planning to conduct collective exercises in two sessions separated by gender. There should be no more than 16 participants per session, so that we can form a maximum of four groups of four children (eight girls and eight boys) per session.

The information will be used to contextualise individual case studies with the experiences and perspectives of other children as well as to quantify findings from individual children by aggregation.

#### **Objectives**

The objectives of the employment of participatory exercises are to help yielding data which informs the key questions of this research:

##### 1. Producing data which informs key issues of this research:

| Research tool/informs on: | Daily use of time and space | Impact of seasonal changes | Life course transitions | Power relations and values in children's lives |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Life course time line     |                             |                            | X                       | X                                              |

|                   |   |   |   |   |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Seasonal calendar |   | X |   | X |
| Mobility map      | X | X | X | X |

2. The information thus yielded will help contrasting and contextualising the experiences of individual case study children with a wider group of peers. Furthermore, participatory exercises are expected to add information on the impact of various power relations on childhood experiences. In particular, I expect collective methods to shed light on dominant opinions among children and how through peer interaction in group-based work, consensus among children is constructed, represented and challenged.

### **Respondent group**

Roughly two weeks before the exercise, Pia will identify with a trusted local Thai teacher children in lower secondary school, between ages 11 and 15. Most children will be residents of Huay Tong village.

I shall explain my study to the children and ask them whether they are interested in participating to this study.

These ages have been chosen, because participant observation so far allowed for socializing particularly with girls of this age group. Also, I found that it is around the age of 10 that children start having more working responsibilities both inside and outside of school. Finally, this group is also gradually moving towards the transition from childhood to youth – a life transition I am exploring in this research.

Gender is an important factor in structuring children's activities. Yet, for cultural reasons, it is impossible for me to study closely individual biographies of boys. Since case study children will be mostly female, there is a serious necessity to gather data from their male peers also.

Places of residence are important, since many children who are attending Huay Tong school come from another village. I am planning to include children from different villages in all exercises except for the community and mobility map. The community and mobility map will only be drawn by children who are living during school days in Huay Tong. A group of children from other villages will be equipped with disposable cameras and asked to record important places of their daily lives for later discussion.

The children's mother tongue is Skaw Karen (Pgaganyaw), their secondary language Thai. However, very few of them are literate in their mother tongue (formal schooling is only in Thai). Apart from the worksheets, no exercise requires written expression and we will conduct the sessions in languages the children feel comfortable with. The worksheet has been translated in Thai, the language children feel comfortable to read and write.

### **Research site**

Research as well as research manuals suggest that it is wise to conduct participatory exercises with places children use to gather.

There are two spaces in Huay Tong village, which fulfill this purpose: the school and the church compound.

After thorough consideration, I propose the school compound. While the church compound is a very popular place for children to play after school and youth to hang out at night, it is mostly young persons who are living in Huay Tong who use this space. Other children are returning after school to their home villages. Therefore, in order to allow participation from children who are living outside the village, I propose the school compound for all exercises.

### **Research methods**

| <b>Community and Mobility Mapping</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Date: Fieldtrip 1, 29-31 May</p> <p>Persons: Pia, 2 facilitators, 3 note takers</p> <p>Duration:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>for children: one school day.</li> <li>Day one: leave at noon together from Chiang Mai to Huay Tong, spend the night there. Day two: Start activities in the morning in school and work throughout the day with discussion among research assistants in the evening. Day three: return to Chiang Mai with the early morning post bus and continue in the afternoon discussion there.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <p><u>Objectives, what do I want to learn through Community and Mobility Mapping?</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children's perception and knowledge about Huay Tong village and the surrounding area. Reasons for liking/disliking places. Differences in space use according to gender, birth order as well as place of origin (i.e. whether children's one families live in Huay Tong or not)</li> <li>Different patterns of children's spatial mobility within Huay Tong village and the surrounding area, including frequency of commuting, reasons for commuting and means of transport.</li> <li>Comparison of the maps will shed light on mobility differences due to gender or different locations of households and/or other living arrangements (e.g. dormitories on school compound). Furthermore this map can be used to ask</li> </ol> |

questions about children's daily time use, how it changes with the annual seasons and larger life phase transitions (e.g. moving from the hills to the plain for higher education etc.)

Step One: Selection of research participants

There should be no more than 16 participants (8 boys and girls between the ages 11 and 15).

Step Two: Opening conversation

Pia and facilitators explain to children why we are doing this activity, what it involves, and roughly how long it will take. We will ensure that the children understand and feel comfortable with the objectives of the activity.

Step Three: Village walk through Huay Tong

Start a village walk with smaller groups of children through Huay Tong village. Ask the children where they are living, where they are going through the day etc. Ask them about important places within the community

Duration: allow one hour

Step Four: Drawing of collective maps

After the children have spent time walking through and brainstorming about their community, lay out a large sheet of paper for groups to gather around.

Ask sub-groups (2 groups of boys and 2 groups of girls) to fill this in to represent places in Huay Tong they are going to. This can either be done as one huge collective map per group. It is important to keep in mind, that the scale of the map does not have to reflect real conditions.

After several images have been drawn (try to keep drawing to 45 minutes), begin discussion, encouraging the children to continue drawing while discussing throughout the session.

During all this, the facilitator should be available to answer children's questions and encourage them to continue drawing. The two note-takers should record as thoroughly as possible the process of drawing the map, the discussions among children, their body language etc.

Step Four: Discussing purposes of mobility

Ask each group in turn for the purpose or the activity for which they are moving inside and outside their village. Ask them how they are moving (on feet, by motorcycle, car etc.) and with whom. Ask them to represent the activities either with lines or by noting them at the margin.

Step Five: Discussing the frequency of mobility

Ask groups of children how often and with whom they undertake the activities depicted. Try to find out whether some activities are only taking place during weekdays or only during certain seasons. Ask them also for the means of transport for certain activities, especially if these are located in remote areas or in the plain.

Ask children to indicate the frequency of their spatial movements. These can be marked

in any way, like very thick lines for very frequent journeys, thinner lines for weekly movements, dots for seasonal visits etc. However, in order to ease later comparisons of the maps, groups and individuals should consent in using the same symbols in their respective maps.

#### Step Six: Discussing safe and unsafe places

Ask children groups to identify places they like/dislike.

Ask children to speak about the places they identified as safe/unsafe. Encourage them to explain their feelings about these places.

#### Step Seven: Concluding conversation

At the end, thank the children for their participation and ask them if they have any questions or comments they would like to add. Make sure they understand how the community and mobility map will be used in Pia's research. Ask them whether they want to keep their community and mobility maps. If they want to keep them, ask them if it is okay for them that we borrow them for a while, to copy them and return them later. If they should disagree, use the digital camera to make detailed photographs of the maps. If the children agree with us keeping the map, thank them again.

#### Step Eight: Debriefing discussion among research team

At the end of the day, the research team will go through the different maps, exchanging on and writing down our own observations. We will go back to Chiang Mai early the next morning where we will continue exchanging on the session.

**Items Needed:** Large piece of manila paper, assorted markers, camera to take pictures of maps in case children do not want to share them with us, lots of sweets to snack in between

### **Drawing of seasonal calendars with group interviews**

Date: Fieldtrip 2, 5–7 June

Persons: Pia, 2 facilitators, 3 note-takers

Duration:

a. for children: one school day

b. for the research team: three days

Day one: leave at noon together from Chiang Mai to Huay Tong, spend the night there. Day two: Start activities in the morning in school and work throughout the day (two sessions, one in the morning, 8.30–10.00 and one in the afternoon 13.00–15.30) with discussion in the evening. Day three: return to Chiang Mai with the early morning post bus and continue in the afternoon discussion there.

#### Objectives, what do I want to learn through drawings of seasonal calendars?

- a. Children's experiences of seasonal changes, and markers of seasonal transitions (temperature changes, movements of animals, religious festivities, different working activities etc.) they identify as important.
- b. Changes in children's time use throughout the yearly seasons

#### Step One: Selection of research participants

There should be no more than 16 participants (8 boys and girls between the ages 11 and

15).

#### Step Two: Ice breaker

Game or role play of rainy season

#### Step Two: Opening conversation

Pia and facilitators explain to children why we are doing this activity, what it involves, and roughly how long it will take. We will ensure that the children understand and feel comfortable with the objectives of the activity.

#### Step Three: Drawing seasonal calendars

Providing groups of children with a pen or marker and a piece of manila paper for drawing. The papers are prepared with a pre-drawn circle. Explain the children that this circle represents one year.

Ask children to think about their life during one year in their village and the region. Ask them to think about important events marking the change from one season to another.

Ask children to fill in their ideas in the pre-drawn circle on the paper. Encourage them to do this in whatever way suits them, drawing or writing, Thai or Karen language.

#### Step Four: Group interviews

Start the group interview by asking groups of children to present their calendars.

Use the seasonal calendar to generate discussion, asking children what they like best and least about different seasons. Ask them to note or draw this outside the circle.

Seasonal activities: Ask children what they are doing during different seasons. What activities they are enjoying and which less.

The note-taker should take notes of children's responses since the paper might not have enough space to note all the suggestions. Ensure that each child is expressing his or her opinion.

If time allows, start an open discussion about the yearly circle in Thailand and in the mountains. Ask children about different calendars they know to use (e.g. Thai Buddhist calendar, Gregorian calendar etc.). Ask them which are important for their daily lives. Ask them about the seasons of the year. Ask for important events happening in these seasons.

Duration: Allow one hour

#### Step Five: Concluding conversation

At the end, thank the children for their participation and ask them if they have any questions or comments they would like to add. Make sure they understand how the seasonal calendars will be used in Pia's research. Ask them whether they want to keep the calendars. If they want to keep them, ask them if it is okay for them that we borrow them for a while, to copy them and return them later. If they should disagree, use the digital camera to make detailed photographs of the maps.

If the children agree with us keeping the map, thank them again.

#### Step Eight: Debriefing discussion among research team

At the end of the day, the research team (Pia, facilitator and at least one note-taker) will go through the different calendars, exchanging on and writing down our own observations. We will go back to Chiang Mai early the next morning where we will continue exchanging on the session.

**Items Needed:** Large piece of manila paper, assorted markers, camera to take pictures of maps in case children do not want to share them with us, lots of sweets to snack in between

#### **Community and Individual Life-course Time Lines**

Date: Fieldtrip 3, 12-14 June

Persons: Pia, 2 facilitators and 3 note-takers

Duration:

a. for children: one school day

b. for the research team: three days

Day one: leave at noon together from Chiang Mai to Huay Tong, spend the night there.  
Day two: Start activities in the morning in school and work throughout the day with discussion in the evening. Day three: return to Chiang Mai with the early morning post bus and continue in the afternoon discussion there.

#### Objectives, what do I want to learn through community and individual life course time lines?

- a. Community time line will provide collective markers against which individual life trajectories can be set
- b. What children remember as the important moments of their past, how they feel about their current situation and, their expectations of the future.
- c. The life course time line will allow gaining more insight in children's perspectives on life transitions beyond the daily and seasonal dimension.

#### Step One: Selection of research participants

Research participants are hopefully the same as in the previous group exercises. This means, that there should be no more than 16 participants (maximum 8 boys and 8 girls).

#### Step Two: Opening conversation

On the day of the exercises.

Pia and at least four facilitators explain to children why we are doing this activity, what it involves, and roughly how long it will take. We will ensure that the children understand and feel comfortable with the objectives of the activity.

#### Step Three: Village walk

Walk with small groups of children through the village, asking them what has changed in the last years (e.g. are there places they used to go but now no longer do?)

#### Step Three: Drawing of community life course time line

Start an open discussion about the life course of Karen people, asking them about questions like how long one is a baby, when children start to help their mothers etc. Encourage children to represent this visually.

It will be particularly important here, that research assistants know local languages and denominations. Likewise it is the opportunity to gather children's ideas on ethno concepts of ageing.

Duration: Allow 40 minutes

#### Step Four: Group discussion of collective time line

Group presentations and discussions of timelines of the life course in their community.

#### Step Five: Drawing of individual life-course time line

After the initial discussion, provide each child with a pen or marker and a piece of paper for drawing.

On the paper provide a pre-drawn timeline with a baby drawn on the left end and an old person on the far right. Indicate age-increments up until around 30 years old.

Once the basic structure of the timeline is explained, ask the children to mark their current age.

Explain that everything before that point is the past and everything after it is the future.

Ask the children to think about the past, when they were very young (for example, have them close their eyes and think for a minute).

Then, ask them to fill in the 'past'-part of their personal timeline with important and memorable events. Ask them also to note/draw persons and/or institutions that mattered to them in the past.

Next, ask children to think about the future. Ask the children to fill in the major changes they think will happen in the future, with drawings and/or written notes as before. Encourage them equally to think about persons and/or institutions that will help them in the future.

The facilitator should be available to encourage children and answer their questions. Children will probably work in pairs and this should not be interrupted. I know from class room observations that children almost always work on assignments in pairs and that teachers never insist on them working by themselves. Since it is their usual way of doing desk-based tasks we should let them!

Facilitators will have to go through the rows of children and make sure they understand what they are drawing or writing, maybe asking questions.

Duration: Allow 60 minutes

#### Step Six: Introducing group interview on the life course time line

After children have drawn their lines, tell them, that we would be happy if they could explain us better their drawings. Explain them also, that we do not want them to explain their individual drawings in front of everyone. Instead we want to invite them to present their drawings in a group and speak about their life trajectories in a group interview where everyone can or cannot contribute to the discussion.

#### Step Seven: Group interview of the life course time line



For the group interview use the timeline to generate discussion, using the following question ideas and adding information to the timeline if necessary.

*Past-questions*

Look at the past events marked by children and ask them which of these events is a good memory and how old they have been at that time. Also ask what or who made it special? Ask them about important persons and/or institutions indicated on the line. Also ask children about past challenges and who helped them.

*Present-questions*

Ask the children to indicate where they are now on the timeline. Ask the children how their life is now different from when they were much younger. Ask them who is important for them now.

*Future-questions*

Point at the key moments of change children marked on their future timeline. Ask children what they want to do in the next years. Why they want to do this? Who can help them doing this? Whether or not they have friends doing the same thing?

Ask them also about their families and how many older/younger brothers and sisters they have. Ask the children if the brothers and sisters are doing the same thing or whether they are doing something else. Ask them if their family is happy with their future ideas or whether they have different expectations.

At the end, thank the children for their participation to the ‘mini-interview’ and ask if they have any comments or questions to add.

Step Eight: Debriefing discussion among research team

At the end of the day, the research team will think through the day, checking how each one felt during work, whether there have been any problems or issues of concern and record all points raised. We will go back to Chiang Mai early the next morning where we will continue exchanging on the session.

**Items Needed:** Paper sheets for individual time lines, assorted markers, camera to take pictures of time lines in case children do not want to share them with us, lots of sweets to snack in between. Sufficient notebooks and pencils for facilitators.

## APPENDIX D. Activity plan and script for obtaining informed consent from guardians and teachers in Huay Tong village

As thoroughly explained in Chapter 2, I prepared participatory research exercises with children in Huay Tong in consultation with my academic supervisors in Oxford as well as with local Thai and Karen adults. Local Thai school teachers felt that it would be helpful simplifying the script for obtaining informed consent for delivery to parents in Huay Tong who are less familiar with formal Thai language of a previous translation (Appendix A). Moreover, they suggested adding an activity plan that summarized participatory research exercises for guardians' information. A Thai teacher helped me preparing these documents and an academic colleague provided the back translation into English. Below I first present the Thai original activity plan as well as the simplified form for obtaining informed consent. Both documents have been used for negotiating local Karen guardians' and Thai teachers' consent for participatory research exercises in Huay Tong village. This is followed by an English translation of the Thai documents.

*Activity plan and script for obtaining informed consent, adapted from Appendix A for participatory research in Huay Tong village (Thai original)*

### ตารางการจัดกิจกรรมของ ( Pia )

| ที่ | กิจกรรม / รายการ                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | วัน / เดือน / ปี                                                                  |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | <p><b><u>ตอนเช้า</u></b></p> <p>- นักเรียนชั้นประถมศึกษาปีที่ 6 จำนวน 8 คนร่วมทำกิจกรรมที่ห้องสมุด โดยในการทำกิจกรรมครั้งนี้คือ ให้นักเรียนทั้ง 8 คน ได้วาดแผนที่หมู่บ้านห้วยตองทั้งหมู่บ้านและช่วยกันลงสีให้สวยงาม พร้อมทั้งอธิบายว่าที่ตนเองวาดภาพลงไปนั้นวาดเกี่ยวกับอะไร</p> <p><b><u>ตอนบ่าย</u></b></p> <p>- นักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษา จำนวน 8 คน ร่วมทำกิจกรรมที่ห้องสมุด โดยในการทำกิจกรรมครั้งนี้คือ ให้นักเรียนทั้ง 8 คน ได้วาดแผนที่หมู่บ้านห้วยตองทั้งหมู่บ้านและช่วยกันลงสีให้สวยงาม</p> | วันศุกร์ที่ 30 / พ.ค. / 51<br>โดยในการทำกิจกรรมแต่ละช่วงจะใช้เวลาประมาณ 2 ชั่วโมง |

|   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                    |
|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|   | พร้อมทั้งอธิบายว่าที่ตนเองวาดภาพลงไปนั้นวาดเกี่ยวกับอะไร                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                    |
| 2 | <p><b>ตอนเช้า</b></p> <p>- นักเรียนชั้นประถมศึกษาปีที่ 6 จำนวน 8 คนร่วมทำกิจกรรมที่ห้องสมุด โดยในการทำกิจกรรมครั้งนี้คือให้นักเรียนทั้ง 8 คน ได้วาดเกี่ยวกับแผนที่ฤดูกาลแล้วให้นักเรียนเขียนลงในแผนที่ว่าในแต่ละฤดูนักเรียนทำอะไรบ้างอภิปรายร่วมกันพร้อมกับระบายสีให้สวยงาม</p> <p><b>ตอนบ่าย</b></p> <p>- นักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษา จำนวน 8 คน ร่วมทำกิจกรรมที่ห้องสมุด โดยในการทำกิจกรรมครั้งนี้คือ ให้นักเรียนทั้ง 8 คน ได้วาดเกี่ยวกับแผนที่ฤดูกาลแล้วให้นักเรียนเขียนลงในแผนที่ว่าในแต่ละฤดูนักเรียนทำอะไรบ้างอภิปรายร่วมกันพร้อมกับระบายสีให้สวยงาม</p>                                                                     | วันศุกร์ที่ 6 / มิ.ย. / 51<br>โดยในการทำกิจกรรมแต่ละช่วงจะใช้เวลาประมาณ 2 ชั่วโมง  |
| 3 | <p><b>ตอนเช้า</b></p> <p>- นักเรียนชั้นประถมศึกษาปีที่ 6 จำนวน 8 คนร่วมทำกิจกรรมที่ห้องสมุด โดยในการทำกิจกรรมครั้งนี้คือให้นักเรียนทั้ง 8 คน ได้วาดเกี่ยวกับช่วงเวลาที่ผ่านมานักเรียนได้ทำอะไรบ้างและในอนาคตอยากจะทำอะไร มีใครได้ช่วยเหลือในการทำกิจกรรมต่าง ๆ บ้าง และมีเหตุการณ์ที่สำคัญอะไรบ้างที่เกิดขึ้น</p> <p><b>ตอนบ่าย</b></p> <p>- นักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษา จำนวน 8 คน ร่วมทำกิจกรรมที่ห้องสมุด โดยในการทำกิจกรรมครั้งนี้คือ ให้นักเรียนทั้ง 8 คน ได้วาดเกี่ยวกับช่วงเวลาที่ผ่านมานักเรียนได้ทำอะไรบ้างและในอนาคตอยากจะทำอะไร มีใครได้ช่วยเหลือในการทำกิจกรรมต่าง ๆ บ้าง และมีเหตุการณ์ที่สำคัญอะไรบ้างที่เกิดขึ้น</p> | วันศุกร์ที่ 13 / มิ.ย. / 51<br>โดยในการทำกิจกรรมแต่ละช่วงจะใช้เวลาประมาณ 2 ชั่วโมง |

ฉันชื่อ เปีย โวซเลอร์ ค่ะ ฉันเป็นนักวิจัยและเป็นนักศึกษา มาจากมหาวิทยาลัยออกฟอร์ด ( Oxford University ) ประเทศอังกฤษฉันกำลังศึกษาเกี่ยวกับเรื่องราวของวัยรุ่นและเด็ก ๆ ภายในหมู่บ้านห้วยตองแห่งนี้

ฉันกำลังสนใจในวัฒนธรรมของวัยรุ่นและกิจกรรมของคนหนุ่มสาว ฉันสนใจในสิ่งที่พวกเขาชอบทำและอะไรบางอย่างที่พวกเขาไม่ชอบทำ และทำไมเขาถึงชอบหรือไม่ชอบทำอะไรบ้าง

ฉันจึงอยากคุยกับพวกคุณ เกี่ยวกับสิ่งที่พวกคุณกำลังทำอยู่ ทั้งสิ่งที่พวกคุณชอบทำและไม่ชอบทำ กิจกรรมต่าง ๆ ที่พวกคุณรู้สึกว่ามีคามหมายมีความสุข

แล้วอะไรที่พวกคุณคิดว่าเป็นปัญหาอยากที่จะแก้ไขหรืออยากให้มันดีขึ้น แต่ถ้าหากคุณไม่ต้องการที่จะพูดคุยด้วย หรืออยากจะพูดแค่บางเรื่องเท่านั้น

ฉันก็ยินดีไม่มีปัญหาว่าจะต้องพูดในทุกเรื่อง แต่ถ้าหากอยากเล่าอะไรให้ฉันฟังในเรื่องที่เกี่ยวกับพวกคุณ ดิฉันจะยินดีเป็นอย่างมากค่ะ

ดิฉันไม่ได้เป็นครู

และเรื่องที่พวกคุณเล่าจะไม่ถูกรายงานต่อครูหรือใคร ๆ ก็ตาม ข้อมูลต่าง ๆ

ที่พวกคุณเล่าฉันจะเขียนเป็นรายงานบอกเล่าในสิ่งที่วัยรุ่นทั่ว ๆ ไป วัยรุ่นในเมืองไทยชอบหรือไม่ชอบ อะไรบ้างในเมือง /

ในหมู่บ้าน ฉันจะเล่าเรื่องทั่ว ๆ ไปจากสิ่งที่คุณเล่า แต่ฉันจะไม่บอกชื่อของคนที่คุณเล่า หรือเรื่องความลับใด ๆ

หากพวกคุณไม่ต้องการ

ผู้อ่านจะไม่รู้ว่าเรื่องที่ฉันเขียนเหล่านี้มาจากใคร

แล้วรายงานที่ฉันเขียนอาจจะมีคนอ่านทั่ว ๆ ไป

ไม่ว่าจะเป็นคนในเมืองไทย หรือจากต่างประเทศ

ฉันหวังว่าเมื่อคนเหล่านี้ได้อ่านสิ่งที่พวกคุณเล่าให้ดิฉันฟังแล้ว

ผู้อ่านจะเรียนรู้มากขึ้นเกี่ยวกับเรื่องราวของวัยรุ่นที่ห่วยตอง

ว่าวันรุ่นที่ห่วยตองทำอะไรบ้างที่เป็นชีวิตประจำวันของพวกคุณ

โดยคุณสามารถที่จะคุยกับฉันเป็นการส่วนตัว

หรือว่าจะมีครอบครัวหรือเพื่อนมาร่วมพูดคุยด้วยกันก็ได้

นอกจากนี้คุณสามารถเลือกที่จะตอบหรือไม่ตอบคำถามที่ฉันถาม

ก็ได้ ดิฉันยินดี ไม่มีปัญหาค่ะ

หรือถ้าคุณต้องการจะหยุดพูดกับฉันหรือไม่อยากคุยกับฉันอีกต่อไป

ดิฉันก็ยินดีที่จะปฏิบัติตามนั้นค่ะ

**\*\* คุณเข้าใจในสิ่งที่ฉันเพิ่งอธิบายไปหรือไม่ค่ะ**

**คุณมีคำถามเพิ่มเติมไหมค่ะ**

**คุณต้องการที่จะมีส่วนร่วมกับสิ่งที่กำลังจะทำอยู่นี้ไหมค่ะ**

**หากฉันถามคุณเกี่ยวกับเรื่องของพวกคุณ**

**คุณจะอนุญาต**

**ให้ฉันจดบันทึกหรือบันทึกเทปในสิ่งที่พวกคุณพูดให้ฟังได้ไหมค่ะ**

**\*\* ขอขอบคุณค่ะที่ให้ข้อมูลกับฉัน \*\***

*Activity plan and script for obtaining informed consent, adapted from Appendix A for participatory research in Huay Tong village (English back translation)*

Activity plan of (Pia)

| No. | Activity list                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | date / month /year                                                      |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | <p>Morning</p> <p>- 8 students (6th grade) do activities at the library drawing Huay Tong village maps, including colouring the map and explaining their drawings</p> <p>Afternoon</p> <p>- 8 students (12th grade) do activities at the library drawing Huay Tong village maps, including colouring the map and explaining their drawings</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <p>Friday 30 / May/ 2008</p> <p>Each session takes around 2 hours</p>   |
| 2   | <p>Morning</p> <p>- 8 students (6th grade) do activities at the library drawing seasonal maps and writing down what they do in each season. Students will also colour and discuss their drawings</p> <p>Afternoon</p> <p>- 8 students (12th grade) do activities at the library drawing seasonal maps and writing down what they do in each season. Students will also colour and discuss their drawings</p>                                                                                                                                                                   | <p>Friday 6 / June / 2008</p> <p>Each session takes around 2 hours</p>  |
| 3   | <p>Morning</p> <p>- 8 students (6th grade) do activities at the library drawing about the past, what they have done, and about the future, what they want to do; they will also say if anyone helped in their activities; and what are the important incidents that have happened</p> <p>Afternoon</p> <p>- 8 students (12th grade) do activities at the library drawing about the past, what they have done, and about the future, what they want to do; they will also say if anyone helped in their activities; and what are the important incidents that have happened</p> | <p>Friday 13 / June / 2008</p> <p>Each session takes around 2 hours</p> |

My name is Pia Vogler I'm a researcher and a student from Oxford University, England. I'm studying about teenager and children in Huay Tong Village. I'm interested in teenagers' culture and their activities. I'm interested in what they like to do and what they don't like to do and why they like or dislike those things.

That's why I would like to talk to you about the things that you do; both things you like and dislike; activities that you feel meaningful/happy and whether there are

things that you think are a problem, or that you would like to fix or make better. But if you don't want to talk to me or only want to talk about some topics, you're welcome, no problem. You don't have to talk about everything. But if you would like to tell me anything about you, I'd be very glad.

I'm not a teacher and what you tell me will not be reported to teachers or anyone. The data you tell me, I will write it as a report that tells about what teenagers in Thailand like or dislike in this town/in the village. I will tell a broad story from what you tell me and will not tell the name of those giving me their information. Or any secret that you don't want, the reader will not know where the story came from or from whom.

Even though my report may be read by many people, Thai or foreigners, I hope that once they read what you tell me they will learn more about the story of Huay Tong's teenagers and what you do in your daily life. You can talk to me in private or with your family or friends. Besides, you can choose to answer or not answer my questions. There's no problem. Or if you would like to stop talking to me or no longer talk to me, I'm happy to follow your wish.

Do you understand what I explained?

Do you have any questions?

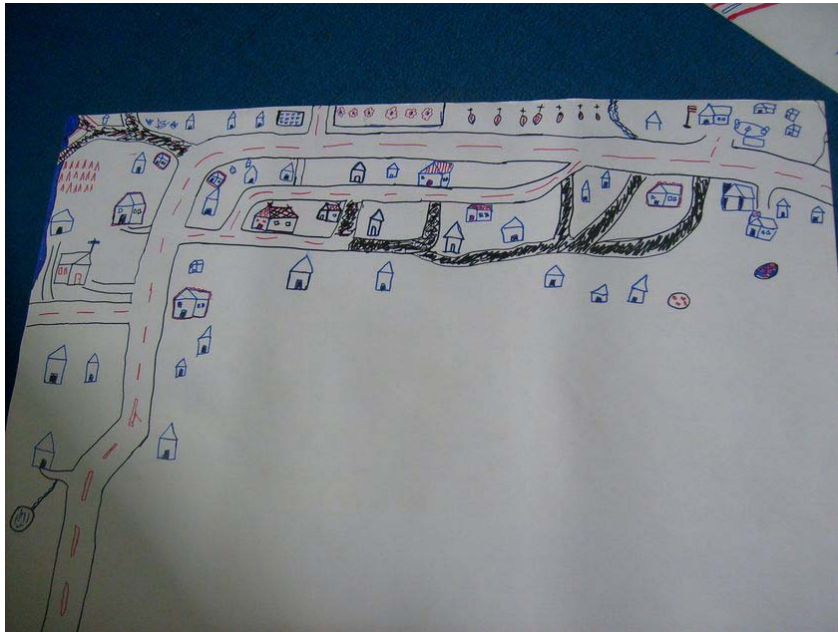
If you would like to be part of this activity? If I ask you about your story

Will you allow me to write down or record what you say?

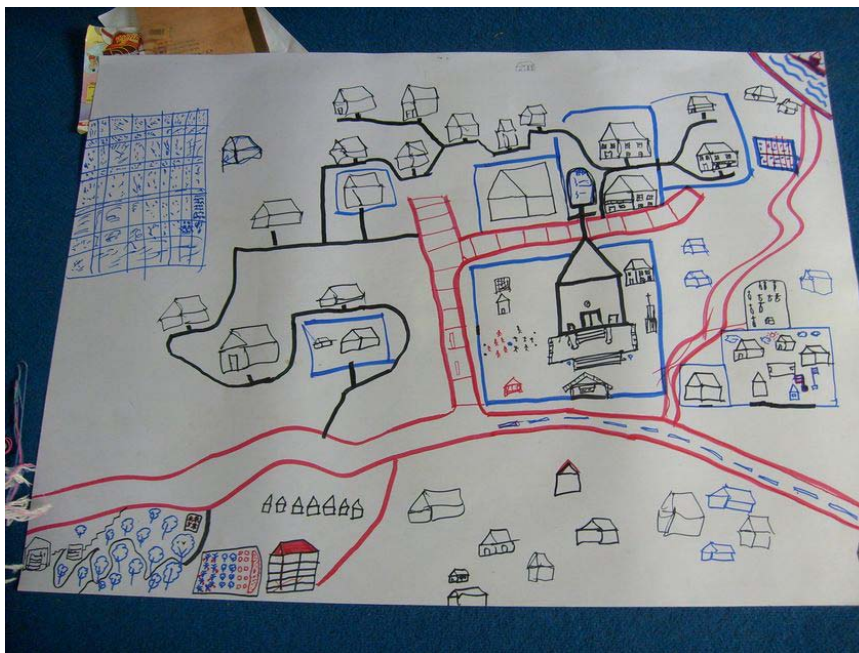
Thank you for the information you give me

## **APPENDIX E. Children's illustrations from participatory research exercises**

As explained in Chapter 2, I conducted participatory research exercises with children in Huay Tong. Following the research protocol (Appendix C) children produced mobility maps on 30 May 2008, seasonal calendars on 6 June 2008 and life course time lines on 13 June 2008. Following are the photographs of children's illustrations numbered as they are referred to throughout the thesis.

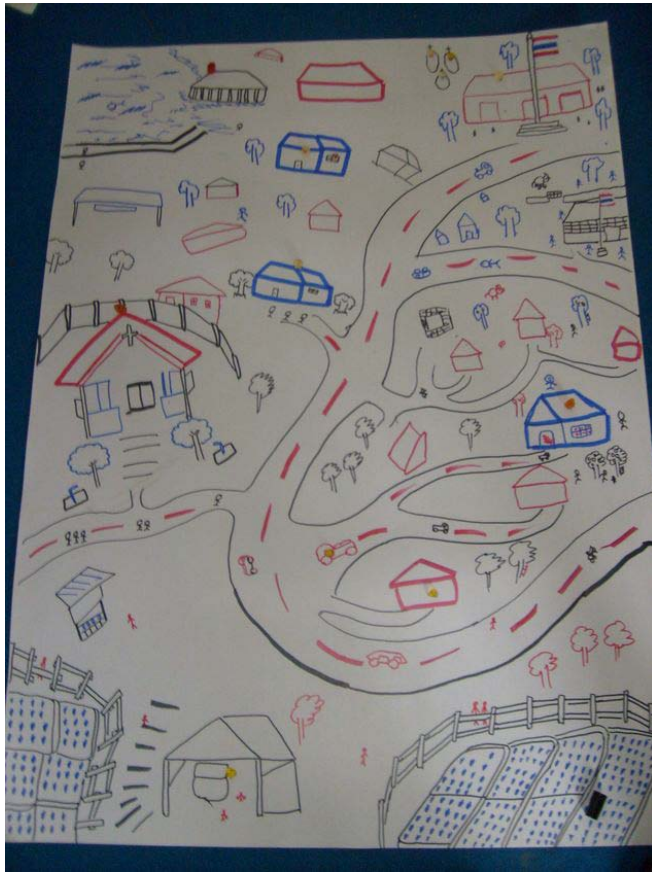


**PRE 1 Mobility map drawn by 11 and 12-year-old boys (30.05.08)**

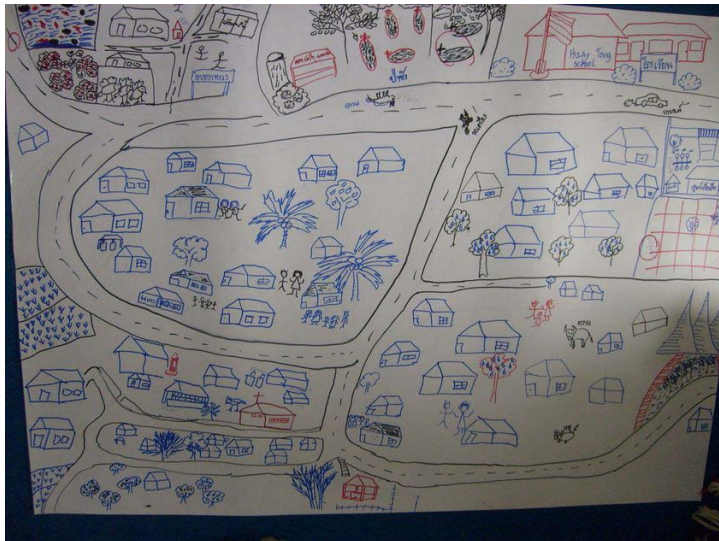


**PRE 2 Mobility map drawn by 11 and 12-year-old boys (30.05.08)**





**PRE 3 Mobility map drawn by 12-years old girls (30.05.08)**

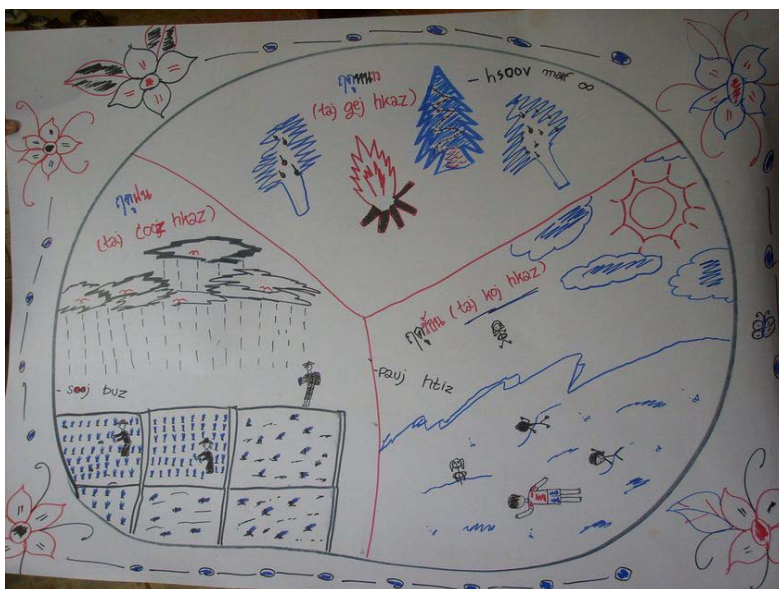


**PRE 4 Mobility map drawn by 14-years old girls (30.05.08)**





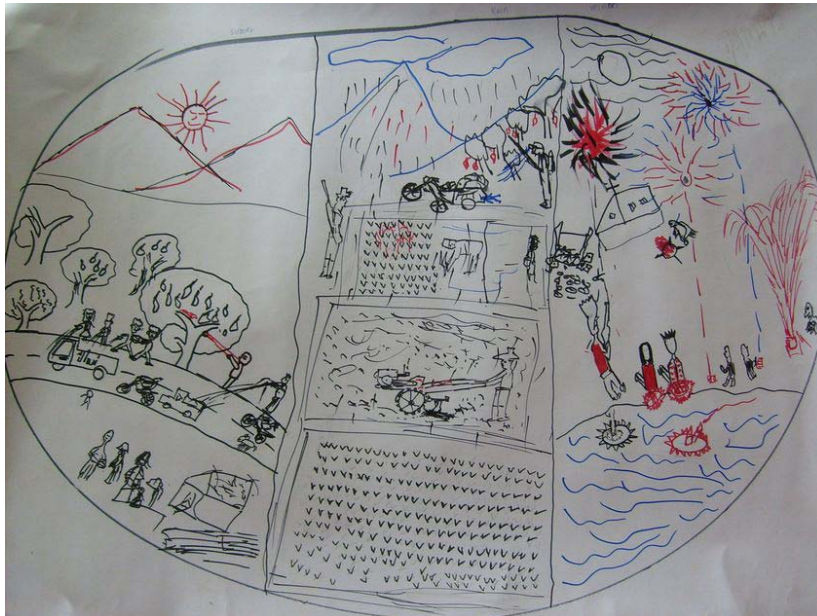
**PRE 5 Mobility map drawn by 14-years old boys (30.05.08)**



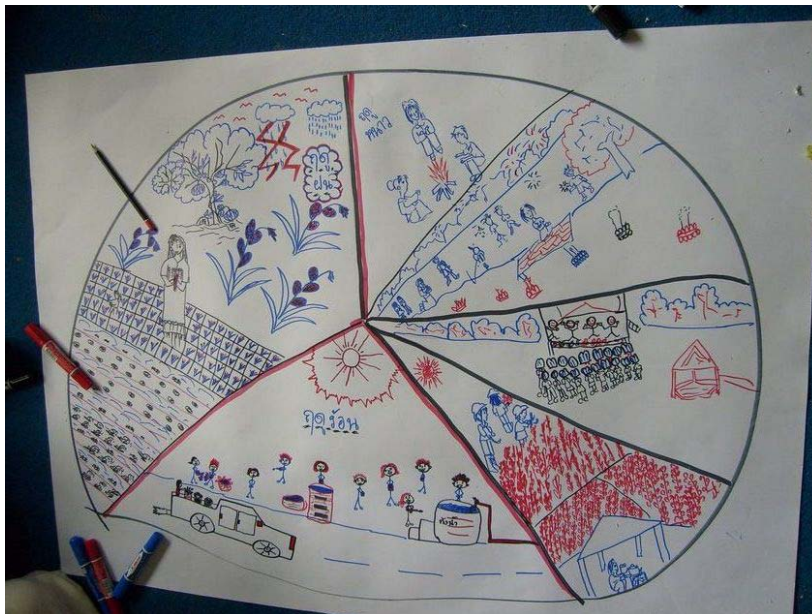
**PRE 6 Seasonal calendar drawn by 12-year-old girls (06.06.08)**



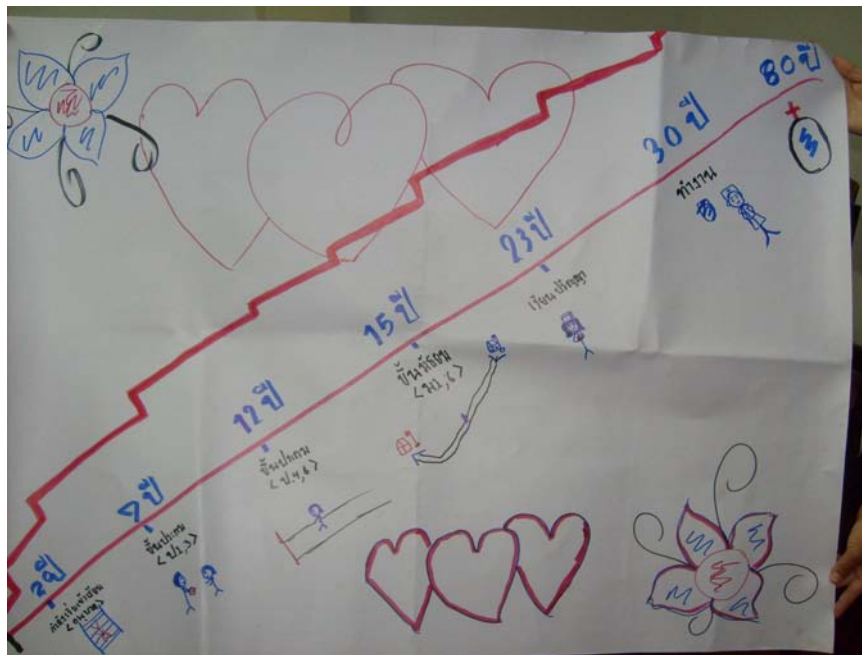




PRE 9 Seasonal calendar drawn by 14-year-old boys (06.06.08)



PRE 10 Seasonal calendar drawn by 14-year-old girls (06.06.08)



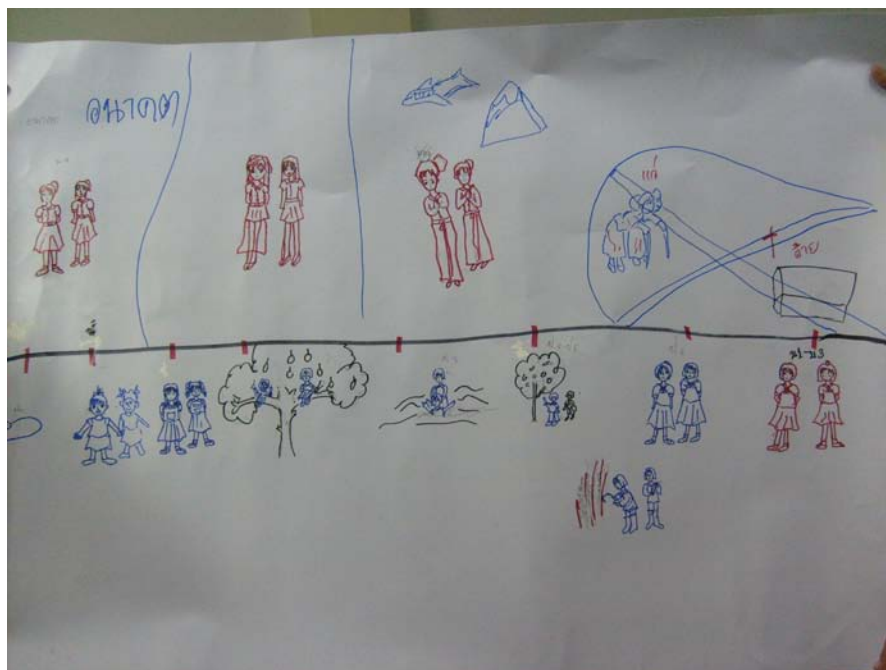
PRE 11 Life course line drawn by 12-year-old girl (13.06.08)



PRE 12 Life course line drawn by 11 and 12-year-old boys (13.06.08)

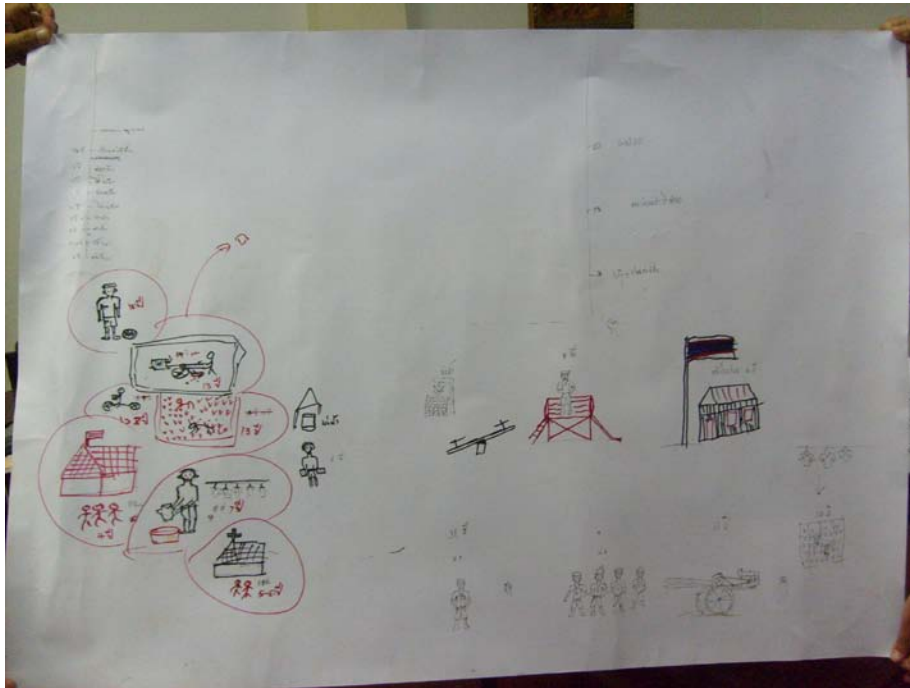


**PRE 13 Life course line drawn by 14-year-old girls (13.06.08)**



**PRE 14 Life course line drawn by 14-year-old girls (13.06.08)**





PRE 15 Life course line drawn by 14-year-old boys (13.06.08)



PRE 16 Life course drawn by 14-year-old boys (13.06.08)

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