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Social Anthropology
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**Resettlement of Karen Refugees; the Creation of
Karen Transnationalism and its' Limitations-
a Minor Field Study May-July 2007**

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Abstract

The thesis is investigating creation of Karen transnationality as a result of mass-resettlement of Karen refugees to third countries focusing on transnational identity and political, social and economic activism towards the territory of origin. The methodology used for the purpose of the study is ethnographic fieldwork, field observations, semi-structured interviews and statistical data. The potential and limitation of Karen transnational identity including aspects as networks, organisation, communication, the current situation in the territory of origin and the socio-economic situation of Karen refugees in host countries are presented and discussed. Furthermore, the prospect of Karen diasporas to become political, social and economic actors is investigated, as well as possibilities and obstacles on political, social and economic activity towards society of origin are illustrated.

Key words: Karen refugees, resettlement, transnationalism, diaspora, identity and political, social and economic activity.

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Abbreviations

CBO Community Based Organisation

CC Camp Community

CSSDPT Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand

MOI Ministry of Interior

IDP Internally Displaced People

KNLA Karen National Liberation Army

KNU Karen National Union

KSC Karen Swedish Community

KRC Karen Refugee Committee

KWO Karen Women Organisation

KYO Karen Youth Organisation

MFS Minor Field Study

MLO Mae La Oon camp

MRML Mae La Ma Luang camp

NGO Non Governmental Organisation

RTG Royal Thai Government

SIDA Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

SPDC State Peace and Development Council (Myanmar)

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

1. Introduction

The Karen people are the largest ethnic minority group in Burma engaged in an armed struggle for self-determination against the military dictatorship of Myanmar for the past 60 years. Karen civilian population have suffered significantly throughout the conflict, subjected to countless human rights abuses including compulsory relocation, forced labor, land confiscation, murder, torture, rape and cultural rights deprivation.

The first Karen refugees fled across the border and took shelter in Thailand as early as in mid 1970's; the majority of refugees have been in sanctuary of camps under Thai authority over twenty years (TBBC, 2004: 1-ff). At the present approximately 108,000 Karen refugees are taking shelter in mainly seven camps along the Thai-Burma border, see Appendix 1 (UNHCR, 2007a). Thailand is not a signatory of the United Nations Geneva Convention on refugees, hence, the country is not under an obligation to accept refugees and grant asylum. The presence of United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) at the border was established in late 1998 and granted displaced Karen people in the "temporary shelters" refugee status. In spite of their refugee status, the vast majority of Karen refugees found themselves in a prolonged limbo of the camps, with no prospect of repatriation, assimilation or resettlement. Nevertheless, in 2005 approval was given by the Royal Thai Government (RTG) to third countries to offer registered refugees in the camps resettlement, before long Australia, Canada, Finland, Great Britain, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the US began sending resettlement missions to the border (TBBC, 2006b). At the time of my fieldwork 5,991 Karen refugees had resettled to third countries, the majority to the US, Australia and Canada, see Appendix 2 (UNHCR, 2007b). According to UNHCR Mission Planning for 2007 quotas, another 15,040 refugees will resettle year 2007, most of them; 10,000 to the US, see Appendix 3 (UNHCR, 2007c). The latest UNHCR statement declares that a total of 20,878 refugees have departed as of December the 10th, with a further 3,471 approved waiting for resettlement under the world's largest refugee resettlement programme and the number is expected to rise even further (UNHCR, 2007d). Nevertheless, I must express some reservations towards the statistical material as the data varies; the numbers are not always appropriately updated as well as confusion and difficulty existing on the ground regarding precise numbers.

Undoubtedly such rapid move of a large part of the Karen refugee population will have significant impact on Karen identity and social structure. It was not my initial intention to focus the resettlement project; however, as all key actors at the border brought up the matter, resettlement became a captivating topic. Resettlement was the main topic of coordinating meetings and private discussions, creating personal antagonism and tearing apart an already disintegrated humanitarian society at the border. Non- Karen third parties and stakeholders were disputing what is best for the Karen population, Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) worrying about a rapid lost of skilled and experienced workforce and quick turnover of staff in services delivered to the refugees. Several CBOs were in planning stages of information and discussion workshops in camps on resettlement, community based magazines and newsletters were featuring resettlement stories and community based projects kept records on resettling population and their origin as part of cultural preservation of the Karen. It is in such mood that I decided to devote my study to the matter of resettlement, intrigued by the question; what does all this mean for the Karen? The thesis will investigate creation of Karen transnationalism as a result of the resettlement project and the potential of Karen resettled population to act as social, political and economic actors in their territory of origin.

1.1 Purpose of study

There was a wide range of interesting approaches that could have been taken towards the question; what resettlement means for the Karen? Nevertheless, due to the restricted size of the dissertation, a necessity to narrow down the research inquiry to one aspect existed. The thesis investigates the aspect of transnationalism within the circumstances of mass-resettlement of the Karen refugees. The purpose of the dissertation is to explore the capacity of transnational Karen identity, focusing on Karen diaspora as political, social and economic resource for the society of origin.

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- Does resettlement create Karen transnationalism
- Are there limitations to Karen transnationalism?

- What potential has the Karen diaspora as political, social and economic actor in their society of origin?
- What obstacles exist to the contribution of Karen diaspora to the society of origin?

1.2 Disposition of the thesis

Chapter 1 gives an introduction to the topic and the setting, as well as outlines the purpose of the study. The methodology, methodological limitations, moreover problems and dilemmas experienced during the fieldwork are described in chapter 2. To be able to answer the questions posed in the purpose of study; who the Karen people are, why resettlement is occurring and in what context it is taking place needs to be acknowledged. Thus, chapter 3 illustrates Karen identity, the struggle, the current situation in the camps and inside Karen state, who is resettling and motivations behind resettlement. Followed by presentation of concepts, literature and authors relevant to the thesis in chapter 4. Karen transnationalism is investigated in chapter 5; looking at Karen culture, identity, transnational organisation, networks and links. In chapter 6, the limitations of Karen transnationalism are presented, examining restrictions in communication and networking, taking identity into consideration. Chapter 7 looks at Karen diasporic communities' capacity as political, social and economic actors in the society of origin, investigating various ways of involvement as well as factors contributing to capacity improvement. Limitations and restrictions on political, social and economic contribution of Karen diasporas to their home territory are outlined in chapter 8, followed by conclusions in chapter 9.

2. Methodology

Within the framework of Minor Field Study (MFS) scholarship from Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), I carried out an ethnographic field study for the limited period of three months at the Thai-Burmese border during spring and summer 2007. The focus of the thesis is an outcome of material collected during the field study consisting of participant observation, informal conversations, semi-structured interviews as well as statistical and other printed data collected. Professor Holy points out in *Ethnographic Research: A Guide to General Conduct* that participant observation as main data collection should be complemented with the use of other research methods as the participant observer is experiencing through senses and thought processes, observation can not be the sole data sample (Holy, 1969:25-ff). The focus of the study was not evident till all data from the field was drawn together, as sociologist Clammer points out, fieldwork is the main source of knowledge; philosophical and theoretical elaboration often comes later (Clammer, 1969:64-ff). Moreover, anthropologist Agar is criticising a necessity of hypotheses in *Speaking of Ethnography*, measurement and instruments claiming that “[...] you need to learn about a world you don’t understand by encountering it first hand and making some sense out of it” (Agar, 1986:12).

Ethnography as method was selected, as to gain an in-depth understanding of others, one need to experience their reality, as social researcher Bryman stresses “we cannot understand the behavior of member of a social group other than in terms of the specific environment in which they operate” (Bryman, 2004:28). Taking on the qualitative approach that truth is subjective in nature, I make no claim on objectivity, as my background and perception have an impact on both study results and conclusions. Agar stress that ethnography is interpretive rather than objective or subjective, and it is not illustrating an objective reality, which can be measured with use of the right methods (Agar, 1986:19). Holy describes “a fact” as a product of interpretation, claiming there is no such thing as “pure experience” or “facts”, a fact only exists within a framework (Holy, 1969:28-ff).

As the stay in camps was time imitated due to severe mobility restrictions on the camps, I needed to use other methods complementing restricted participatory observation, as anthropologist Powdermaker who was unable to participate in or even observe groups studied in Hollywood, the informants would only talk to her at formal

arranged appointments (Holy, 1996:24-ff). I carried out semi- structured interviews with refugees in two camps under Thai authority, Mae Ra Ma Luang (MRML) and Mae La Oon (MLO), and representatives and staff of Karen National Union (KNU), CBOs as Karen Women's Organisation (KWO) and Karen Youth Organisation (KYO), NGOs and UNHCR outside the camps. In total I interviewed 30 refugees in the camps, and 10 informants Mae Sariang and Mae Sot. I essentially and primary interviewed Karen, all though non- Karen staff made interesting contributions to my material. I spent five days in each camp, which gave me an opportunity to seize a glimpse of life and daily routines in the camps. I conveyed the interviews with help of interpreters, as a vast majority of refugees did not speak English and those with little knowledge of English would not be able to express themselves freely.

I used what social researcher Burgess refers to as "judgment" and "opportunistic" sampling (Burgess, 2000:55), in judgment sampling I used a wide range of informants within the refugee community in the camps according to criteria as occupation and age. The following categories by equal gender distribution were included; "camp leaders", "section leaders", "teachers", "medics", "persons holding no profession in the camp", "students", "elderly", "CBO staff". The extensive interview-sample was chosen with the purpose to gain an inclusive account and reveal broad social aspects of the resettlement project. I used a sample of the same questions that I asked every informant and another sample of questions were developed for each group category interviewed. (See Study Statement in Appendix 4 for the document used to inform the camp leadership of the purpose of my visit and the list of questions used for interviews). Opportunistic sampling is "the process whereby field researcher finds informants who provide them with their data." (Burgess, 2000:55), here I was dependant on individuals who were accessible and willing to provide information as CBO, NGO and KNU representatives in Thai border towns.

Further data collection included observations and informal conversations at dinner tables and in cars, which were useful, giving an opportunity to see beyond the obvious, people's talk, their actions and their real views. On my return, I contacted the Karen Swedish Community (KSC) and interviewed 3 Karen families in Nässjö town, Sweden. Additionally, I used secondary data as academic writings, reports, statistics and other printed material obtained through CBOs, NGOs and the UNHCR.

All though the majority of the interviewed did not require anonymity or did not understand the purpose of it, a few did express a wish to remain anonymous. To avoid

discomfort or any harmful consequences for the individuals involved in the study as well as the organisations they represent, I do not use peoples names, however when essential for analysis and comprehension , I reveal names of organisations.

2.1 Difficulties and dilemmas in the field

I arrived unaware of the well-trodden path of students, academics and researchers coming to carry out a study in the area, not mentioning the array of journalists, filmmakers and missionaries. Which with time created reluctance if not direct hostility towards researchers, mainly among western aid-workers, seeing them as a waste of their time. In fact, CBO and NGO staff are extremely busy, travelling from camp to camp, from town to town, attending meetings and workshops, not mentioning arduous office work, as a result it is difficult to get hold of informants. Anthropologist Ardener mentions the following phases of stress that the field worker goes through; “a primary stress of involvement, of establishing rapport with strangers, of participation and reciprocity; a secondary stress of commitment, when intense involvement with “my people” varying from a warm emotional relationship to mutual hate” (Ardener, 1969:91). In my case, a dilemma considering my role as researcher, responsibility and contribution was awaked; it was at times difficult to justify my presence, as I was taking time without contributing to staff efforts, but rather increasing their workload. Furthermore, a view of the new academic on the block as someone ignorantly exploiting refugees for own academic recognition exists among the western humanitarian workers. Most Karen however, believe that giving their time and sharing their experience with a foreigner is worthwhile, foreigners are seen as messengers that will deliver the message of the disastrous humanitarian and political situation of the Karen people to the outside world. The large amount of researchers and journalists in the region have in all probability made the refugees tired of answering questions, rarely seeing any constructive or direct results of the articles, reports and thesis being written. None of them however, openly expressed their dissatisfaction or discomfort with my presence and query, perhaps solely due to the endless Karen politeness and humbleness.

Due to severe restrictions on mobility in and out the camps, obtaining access was a complex and hard process, further dilemma was the issue of informed consent and confidentiality emphasized by ethic guidelines based on western values not taking

into account reality and context of a field situation. Refugees whom I interviewed were chosen by camp leadership, refugees to be interviewed did not know who I was and why they were asked to speak to me. My interpreter and I informed individuals to be interviewed about the purpose of the study at the beginning of each interview and asked for their approval. Although, nobody declined an interview, the possibility exists that the refugees felt obliged to speak to me since they were encouraged to do so by the camp leadership. In addition, the concept of confidentiality is rather alien in a community where privacy and integrity is not highly valued; people were announced to come and see me through loud speakers in one camp, in a few cases other people were present in the interview room listening. Moreover, confusion arose about my role and intention of the study in one camp, and I was announced as a member of the Swedish Government coming to interview relatives of those who already resettled to Sweden. Vast puzzlement was created and false hopes for those who wished to join their families in Sweden. Misinterpretation of the researcher role are however not uncommon features of fieldwork, anthropologist Köbben when conducting his field work in Himalayas was initially suspected of being a missionary, when avoiding questions on religion, he became suspected of being an governmental official assessing land for tax purposes (Ardener, 1969:113-ff). Though the purpose and intention of my study was later clarified, several families wanting to resettle to Sweden came and asked for me, as well as I heard of individuals who refused to talk to me because they did not want to resettle. It is very difficult to assess to what extent the misinformation affected the outcome of the interviews, however, the answers to my questions did not differ much from the answers I received in the other camp where no confusion occurred. However, the main difficulty in the study was the severe time limitation on the field study, allowing only scraping on the surface of an iceberg, it is difficult to get significant insight in a very complex socio-political situation during the course of three months.

3. Background

Essentially, to be able to answer questions posed in the thesis; who the Karen people are, why resettlement is occurring and in what context it is taking place needs will be acknowledged. The chapter illustrates Karen identity, the Karen struggle and the current situation in the camps and the Karen state. Furthermore, management and community in the camps, as well as who is resettling and motivations behind resettlement are described.

3.1 The Karen, the struggle and the current situation inside Karen state

The Karen population is estimated to approximately 7 million, however, some sources claim up to 14 million, a vast majority of Karen inhabit eastern mountain areas in Burma along the Thai border, a smaller number reside in the Burmese delta region and in Thailand (Smith, 1991: 30). Anthropologist Hinton illustrates a difficulty in classifying Karen as a homogenous ethnic group due to a variation in religion, dialect, custom and materialistic characteristic (Hinton, 1983:157-ff). Nevertheless, the Karen are united through a history of oppression by the hands of the majority Burmans, and a present armed struggle for self-determination against the authoritarian state of Myanmar. Karen nationalism, the united distinctiveness referred to as Pan-Karen identity or umbrella identity by scholars is uniting regional, social, cultural, linguistic, religious and occupational differences among people referring to themselves as the Karen. Researcher Brown describes Karen minority-consciousness as based on a reality of displacement and a sense of communal vulnerability and ethnic distinctiveness as defined by culture and history in a home territory “Kawthoolei” (Brown, 1988: 51-ff).

When Burma gained independence in 1948 and the Karen failed to achieve autonomy they sought, an armed struggle erupted, ever since the Karen are fighting for self-determination and against Myanmar’s totalitarian politics of repression, cultural homogenisation and power centralisation. The main and widely supported political organisation representing the Karen is the Karen National Union (KNU), often referred to as the Karen exile government (Anonymous 1, 2004: 1-ff). KNU together with the military body Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) demand a sovereign Karen state “Kawthoolei” within a democratic Burmese federation (Anonymous 3,

2007). Although significant and strategic territory under Karen control have been gradually lost to the State Peace and Development Counsel (SPDC) and the Karen military resources drenched out throughout the struggle, the KNU have succeeded to sustain some level of state institutions and manage the Karen population (TBBC, 2004: 19-ff).

The Karen population is continuously suffering from a counter insurgency strategy targeting civilian population as military attacks, summary executions, use of landmines, and confiscation of land and food supplies. Surveys conveyed by CBOs and NGOs estimate that approximately 99,300 Karen are currently internally displaced due to human rights abuses and military attacks (see Appendix 5 for map) (TBBC, 2006a:17-ff). In addition, there is a public health emergency in the Karen state, due to none or very limited access to healthcare; high mortality rates, malaria deaths and mine related injuries and deaths (TBBC, 2006a:110- ff). Schools and clinics are frequently attacked and destroyed, school and medical supplies confiscated or destroyed and international aid organisations refused entrance (KHRG, 2007:76-ff). Planned large-scale hydro dams might involve mass-relocation, destruction of villages, large scale flooding, and more significantly isolate Karen from Thailand, cutting off humanitarian aid smuggled from Thailand and make any future repatriation from the camps impossible in the future (KHRG, 2007: 5-ff).

3.2 The Camps, camp community and camp self-management

Camps are enclosed outposts spread along the border in remote areas, entirely dependent on humanitarian assistance from the outside, food rations, medicine and other necessities as well as sustenance of education and medical services is provided by international humanitarian society (TBBC, 2006b:11-ff). Camps are significant resource-centres, as health and education services provided in the camps are also used by Karen residing in Burma and in isolated Thai Karen villages. Moreover, camps are personnel recruiting centres, teachers, medics, management and security staff is recruited by predominantly CBOs for work in the camps and inside the Karen state. The educational system in the camps comprises of primary, middle, secondary education and post secondary “post-10 school”, in addition there are religious schools and vocational training (ZOA Refugee Care, 2005: 1-ff). Income possibilities for refugees are very limited, as they are not permitted to leave the camps, 44% of camp

population have no income at all, others earn merely 1 to 100 Bath a month (ZOA Refugee Care, 2005:60-ff). The only employment options for graduate students is to work as camp-based staff with minimal payment or work illegally outside the camps, risking imprisonment, deportation and subjection to severe crime. The two main concerns of the camps are security risk, as the camps are under threat of attack and trouble meeting the needs of new arrivals continually arriving into the camps.

The camps are divided into smaller sections reflecting villages and communities in Karen state, distinguishing by internal integrity, autonomy and strong family and community values. The Karen community and Karen social and governing structures have been persevered inside the camps in contrast to other refugee situations where whole communities have been eroded. Karen leadership has managed to keep a level of self-administration, a sense of community and developed strategies to improve the welfare of their people in the camps. Karen Refugee Committee (KRC) is the main official representation of the Karen refugees in Thailand, and Camp Committees (CCs) and Karen CBOs look after the needs of youth, women, health, education, defence, law and order, as well as religion and morality. Particularly, the work of CBOs is exceptionally significant in social welfare of camp residents, women, youth and religious organisations are well organised and represent the needs, views and aims of their target groups (TBBC, 2006b: 56- ff). CBOs are strengthening socio-political awareness, carrying out research, documentation and publication but more importantly they represent a strong Karen civil society and community capacity.

3.3 Who is leaving the camps?

Recently, a report on the impact of resettlement on the remaining camp population came out; the study was carried out as concerns increased regarding skilled and experienced staff and community leaders resettling. The report confirms that the educated members of the refugee community resettle in a disproportionately high percentage comparing to the overall camp population, which also reflects my observations and material gathered. The report states that only 2.4% of refugees with no education while 11.5 % of refugees with post-10 education have departed for resettlement, 62.2 % of the entire post-10 population have expressed interest in resettlement while only 27.7 % of the entire population and 19.6% of the post-10

while only 4.4 % of the population with no education have been accepted for resettlement. The report points out that it is not only the educated camp members who are departing, but individuals with long-standing, experience, authority and status in the community (Banki and Lang, 2007: 4-ff). Difficulty in finding replacement within the existing population, departure of second-liners, fast turnover, short or inadequate training results in decline in overall quality of services provided in the camps as education and health (Banki and Lang, 2007: 8-ff). Nevertheless, this will have significant consequences not solely on the remaining population in the camps, but also the remaining population in Burma as humanitarian assets and human resources are drawn from the camps.

The report suggests the following explanations to the high proportion of educated people resettling, educated residents are more confident, less frightened by the outside world, have greater access to information on third countries and daily contact with the outside world through the international humanitarian society. Furthermore, some resettlement countries emphasize the importance of integration potential in candidate selection for resettlement, and accept the educated in higher proportion (Banki and Lang, 2007: 5-ff). Interviews conducted in camps reflect some of the observations stated in the report, the educated camp residents, were significantly better informed on the resettlement process and the resettlement countries, refugees with no or little education stated lack of information, education and experience in learning as main reason not to resettle.

3.4. Why do refugees decide to resettle?

While the vast majority of refugees would prefer to return to their homes in Karen state, in lack of the option, those who applied for resettlement or decided to apply state the following main motivations; freedom, safety, self-sufficiency, dignity and opportunity. Most Karen refugees referred to resettlement as an opportunity to “start their life” and to “rely on themselves”, however, the single core motive to resettle among the refugees was the opportunity to obtain higher education, and many described lack of opportunity for higher education after post-10 school as “the end”. Furthermore, education is strongly associated with democracy and progress, western educational system is considered superior, the Karen system as underdeveloped

comparing to the international standards and the opportunity for education as a future investment for the entire Karen community.

[...] as knowledge, like globalisation, like development, like technology development time, so I really expect that my children will be able to compare themselves to the democratic people... (Interview, MLO camp, 070612).

[...] if we are all educated people, our army will be developed, our vision will be developed, that is why we are not backward people anymore, that is why you have educated people, we have better government and better leaders. (Interview, MLO camp 070612).

4. Theoretical Framework

A wide range of anthropologists and social scientists have dealt with the concept of transnationalism and formation of diasporic communities, in terms of identity and political, social and economic activities beyond geographic boundaries. Anthropologist Appadurai (1992) describes a rise of deterritorialization of identity and political projects, researcher Wahlbeck (2002) illustrates a geographic displacement of identity and the transnational orientation towards the society of origin in political activism and social scholar Shami (1999) writes on discourses produced by diaspora sparking transnational ethno-nationalism. Furthermore, scholars as Christie and Kwok Bun (1995) and Malkki (1997) describe the identity aspect of transnationalism, identity transformation and creation of hybrid identities and dual community membership while Ong (1999) claims that cultures are not disappearing but are adjusting in very complex ways to global processes. Appadurai (2003) stress the importance of the process of globalisation in creation of transnational communities, deterritorization of culture and maintenance of social relationships at a distance. Moreover, scholars stress the role of diasporas in the international political arena as well as economic development in their country of origin, anthropologist Vetovec (2005) discusses different ways diasporas can engage in their society of origin as lobbying, political and financial support, remittances, global diasporic networks, hometown associations and transfer of knowledge. Researcher Van Hear (2003) and professor Koslowski (2005) stress the importance of technology in the capacity of diaspora to contribute to the country of origin and became significant economic and political actors. A range of scholars are concerned with the political and economic potential of diasporas as (Lucas 2005, Newland 2004 and Ionescu 2006, Koser 2003 and Østergaard Nielsen 2003). Researcher Koser (2003) looks into the impact of forced migration and remittances on post-conflict reconstruction and development, anthropologist Østergaard Nielsen (2003) explores transnational links of diasporas focusing on the relationship between the countries of origin and the diasporic groups. Works of authors on transnationalism, diasporas and globalisation stated above form the theoretical framework for this thesis and analyses lined out.

5. Karen and transnationalism

Vertovec defines transnationalism as widening of networks, increase in activities across distances and speedier communication including “individual orientation, fundamental political frameworks, and integral process of economic development” (Vertovec, 2004: 973). According to anthropologist Ong transnationalism “denotes moving through space or cross lines, as well as a changing nature of something (Ong, 1999:4). Wahlbeck describes transnationalism as a process in which “... immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their society of origin and settlement...” (Wahlbeck, 2002: 223), Østergaard-Nielsen stress the social, political and economic engagement in the territory of origin while residing somewhere else (Østergaard- Nielsen, 2003:7-ff). Researcher Ionescu identifies the term diaspora as “[...]members of ethnic and national communities, who have left, but maintain links with, their homeland [...] being both here and there” (Ionescu, 2006:13).

5.1 Transnationalism, identity and culture

As resettlement scatters the Karen population around the world, the Karen family unit, Karen community and Karen as a group undergoes a process of fragmentation and transformation. Severe fears concerning the resettlement project have been expressed by a congregation of CBOs; resettlement was seen as driving attention away from other important community issues, evoking fear for the future in the remaining population, and resulting a loss of cohesion of the Karen society, Karen indigenous culture and the Karen language. Though a fear of loss of Karen culture and Karen unity was expressed by refugees I interviewed, this was not a mainstream view, for most Karen deprived cultural rights for several decades, resettlement did not represent an obstacle to perform their culture, but rather the opposite. Generally refugees when asked about cultural preservation in the third country answered in the following manner:

[...] they have equal opportunities, no discrimination, they are not prohibited, they are not banned to study their own language, they do not wear your dress, they allow you to do, the situation is a little bit different from Burma, so at least some people will keep some culture and tradition (Interview, MLO camp, 070714).

[...] even if we are in a small community, we can teach survival, our culture, definitely no problem, if only we have the privilege or the right to (Interview, MRML, 070530).

Resettlement countries are not seen as an obstacle in maintenance of Karen culture, the majority of refugees did not believe that culture would automatically disappear as opportunity for cultural expression is given in host countries, moreover cultural preservation was seen as a personal choice and individual responsibility. Refugees stressed the importance of maintaining Karen language, use of Karen traditional clothing and celebration of Karen cultural event abroad after resettlement. Furthermore, unity of Karen people and to stay together was seen as crucial, and many stressed the importance of awareness building and education on cultural preservation to those resettling before their departure.

If my, if I go to third country, I keep my culture, I will train people, if my friends left the culture, I will tell, I will train the Karen culture and keep Karen alive, my mother, my father is Karen! (Interview, MLO camp, 070613).

A man resettling to Australia the following day when asked how he will persevere Karen culture answered as follows:

I will bring Karen traditional clothes and wear them on special days, big days, like festivals, in Australia, show this dress and then tell my neighbours or my friends that are different to Karen, Karen dress is like this, at home I will tell my children how to tell other people by wearing the traditional clothes (Interview, MLO camp, 070614).

Anthropologist Malkki (1997) stresses that identity is a socio-political construction of time and space and criticises the notion of culture as rooted, she points out that displacement often shapes the social construction of history, identity and nationhood rather than eroding collective identity (Malkki, 1997: 53-ff). Karen identity and struggle is not merely disappearing as the population is being scattered around the globe, rather it is transforming and re-shaping within the new context of displacement. Ong criticises diaspora studies looking at diasporas in terms of victimisation and the way “non-western” cultures and human agency are viewed by post-colonial elite driven discourse as passive or ineffectual, he argues that “non-western cultures are not

disappearing but are in complex ways adjusting to global processes and creating their own modernities (Ong, 1999:12-ff, 240-ff).

5.2 The Karen Swedish Community

Currently about 550 Karen live in Sweden, spread out in fourteen towns and villages, the Karen Swedish Community (KSC) was found 2005, only a few months after the first Karen arrived to Sweden, the main objective of the organisation is to “unite Karen people in Sweden in solidarity”, other aims are “to persevere culture and language, represent Karen affairs, build a secure foundation to support the efforts of Karen who are striving to uplift their people, strive for the Karen people to achieve Equality, Peace, Freedom, and Justice and support educational activities for youth and children” (KSC, 2007). Other Karen communities and organisations have been set up in a range of host countries as Australia, Canada, the US, Netherlands, England, Korea and Japan, the majority of Karen organisations are town or city based, moreover specific Karen youth and women groups have been formed to provide social support to the local Karen community. Furthermore translational links between Karen communities and organisations exist; newly formed Karen women and youth organisations are in contact and support women and youth organisations on the Thai-Burma border, also irregular and infrequent exchange visits and activities are arranged. Exchange of information on resettlement process and host countries between remaining and resettled student and CBO groups play a big part in formation of transnational networks.

Vertovec stress that “Identity is upheld, reproduced and reinforced through a system of narratives, public rituals, institutions, education, informal social relations, and behaviour” (Vertovec, 2003: 975). The Karen residing in Nässjö town, Sweden are all members of Nässjö KSC, they meet on daily basis, adults visit each others houses, children play together and once a week everyone meet at the church (including the non-Christian community members). The Swedish diasporic community reproduces the organisational structure in Karen refugee community on Thai-Burma border, include establishment of specific CBOs dealing with explicit social welfare issues considering women, youth, religious and cultural issues. The KSC has already set up a KYO in one town with the purpose to deal with youth activities, and foundation of a

KWO is planned in the near future. One of the Karen living in Nässjö described the community interaction as following:

We meet every day, we know everybody here, all the 62 Karen in Nässjö, most of them live in the same area, we, the boys fish, play music together. We will celebrate the Karen Martyrs day soon, we celebrated Karen New Year together, we celebrate all the Karen days, so that children don't forget their culture. Every Sunday we meet in Baptist church. I am the Karen Youth Leader for youth organisation we are planning, I am responsible for music activities. Once a year we have a conference where all Karen meet together (Interview, Nässjö, 0708060).

The Karen community in Nässjö celebrated the Karen martyr and wrist-tying day in an organised collective form for the first time this year. In terms of cultural preservation, the local KSC applied for Karen language teaching provision in the local Swedish school, developed a Karen-Swedish dictionary and plans activities as traditional weaving and traditional dancing workshops, in Sandviken town the local KSC already runs traditional dance classes. Aspirations for the near future are to establish a Karen shop in Nässjö town providing Karen traditional clothes, handicraft and food, and to bring together all Karen residing in Sweden in the celebration of the Karen New Year. Furthermore, the Karen Swedish diaspora is in the process of starting up various educational and cultural activities, predominantly with the aim to remind the younger generation of their cultural background and heritage through support of language education, religious services, exchange programmes and cultural events as music and dance.

5.3 Sustaining transnational links- the role of sending authority

Østergaard- Nielsen point out that the homeland, referring to the sending authorities are essential in sustaining translational links and relations and to create a sense of duty and belonging towards the homeland. A variety of activities such as celebration of national day, education, services and religious performance serve to connect diaspora to the place of origin (Østergaard- Nielsen, 2003:3-ff). KNU encourage formation of Karen Communities at arrival in host countries, tries to stay in contact with KNU and community servants who resettled and update them on the current situation in the Karen state through electronic news-letters and statements. Moreover the authority aims to identify key contact persons in host countries with the purpose to engage

diasporas. The optimistic Karen leaders see resettlement as a “preparation period” or “investment for the future”; however, they stress a necessity for better communication and a need to involve Karen diasporas in the Karen cause. Nevertheless, the most important role in culture and heritage preservation is played by Karen CBOs, especially the women’s organisation. CBOs promote and encourage Karen unity beyond borders, organisation of Karen communities overseas, networking and active cultural preservation. These activities are encouraged at information and discussion workshops and meetings on resettlement. CBOs encourage communication through their offices in Thailand, provide information on communication possibilities and collect contact data on those who resettle; moreover they support cultural activities and celebration of memorial days in host countries. A student who attended a workshop on resettlement in the camp states the following:

The Karen leaders said that any student in here who want to resettle, yes, they can, they can, but the most important is to stay in touch with each other (Interview, MRML camp, 070601).

A CBO worker explained:

We encourage people who are resettling to keep the culture, we educated about remaining the culture, how to keep the culture, keep the mother tongue, teach the children mother language even in the other country. To stay in touch, to stay united, and we stay in touch with they (MLO camp, 070601).

A CBO is also planning in the future to send representatives from the camps abroad to the resettled communities to attend exchange workshops and help the communities to maintain Karen culture and identity. Another CBO project in MLO camp is recording the family history of each family and individual resettling with the purpose of preventing children and grandchildren of the resettled generation forgetting their origin.

5.4 Identity transformation and hybridity

The fact that a large number educated and skilled Karen refugees are resettling might contribute to a reproduction of Karen identity discourse in third countries, as intellectuals are often key actors in creation of transnational identities and duties

(Appadurai, 2003: 161-ff). Even if relocalisation of culture is occurring, the Karen identity continues to have a strongly territorialized existence, the connection to Karen State and the discourse of displacement exile and dream of repatriation is crucial in the shaping of Karen transnational identity. However, as Vertovec stress that transnationalism brings about deep-rooted change of cultural and identity patterns and structures, affecting the identities of the coming post-migration generations and awaking dual identity (Vertovec, 2003: 970-ff). Dualism of diaspora creates identity options on offer and generates hybrid cultures by nature multi-layered, heterogeneous, shifting and fragmented, within this hybrid identity refugees are negotiating past, present and future, homeland, and country of resettlement (Christie and Kwok Bun, 1995: 80-ff). The majority of Karen interviewed believe that some of Karen culture will be persevered, however get mixed up with other cultures while the Karen population is being scattered around the world, creating Australian Karen, Canadian Karen, Swedish Karen etc. As Karen in the camps reflect when asked about culture and identity:

[...] we will organise Karen group as in Karen way, Karen culture, but mix the Karen culture we will (Interview, MLO camp, 070613).

If you want to change yourself totally to be English, you can be English, if you want to be Karen in some situation, you can be Karen (Interview, MLO camp, 070613).

We cannot be English, but only sometime we have to, and those who stay here have to copy some of the Thai culture, some of the western culture, they can still be like a Karen and maintain their own tradition...they have to be flexible according to the situation (Interview, MLO camp, 070615).

6. Karen transnationalism and limitations

In this chapter, the limitations to Karen transnationalism are presented, investigating restrictions in communication and networking, as well as looking at the aspect of identity. Severe restrictions on access to communication technology exist both in the camps and in the Karen state, as well as lacking networks linking Karen diasporas and the remaining Karen population will have serious implication on creation and sustenance of Karen transnationalism.

6.1 Communication limitations

Koslowski stress the key role of technology in identity formation and alternative transnational identity maintenance (Koslowski, 2005:24). In the case of the Karen population residing in isolated, remote jungle covered war stricken hills under military dictatorship of Myanmar, access to communication technology is impossible or under severe restriction. Phones and internet connection are non-existent inside the Karen state, public phones are extremely expensive for a population living under the poverty level, and in villages under SPDC control all form of communication is under strict restriction. Karen refugees inside the camps under Thai authority face similar difficulty with no access to telephone, postal services and internet connection, the lack of access to communication technology is further aggravated by a severe restriction on all movement in and out the camps. Regular communication with resettled kin and friends through phone and internet is possible for the privileged few refugees working for Thai town based CBOs and NGOs as well as community and CBO servants inside the camps for whom the opportunity to leave the camps is greater. As for the remaining camp population, to travel to a Thai border town to access communication facilities is not possible, some of the Karen interviewed had never been outside the camps, a few would risk arrest to access a phone in nearest Thai village, however phone facilities are very expensive for a population with none or minimal income.

Nevertheless, communication takes place through informal links and channels; through the word of mouth; individuals who successfully accessed communication facilities pass news of relatives and friends further. CBOs and in some cases NGOs play a crucial role as links between diasporas and the remaining camp population, Karen resettled to third countries can send a letter or money through an organisation's

office in Thailand, from where the CBO staff deliver the letters to the camps. Nevertheless, refugees with lack of information and lack of social links had no idea how letters arrived to the camps and how to send a letter back. The informal channels were mainly used by educated community members, community servants and those with strong social links to community staff members, creating an unequal and inconsistent use of these channels. Lack of access to modern technology results in severe difficulty maintaining substantial commitments and links with kin and friends abroad, moreover creates a gap between those with access to these communication and those without.

6.2 Insufficient networks and co-ordination

Furthermore, there is a lack of efficient network and co-ordination, the KSC have no direct contact with CBOs based in Thailand/Burma or the KNU, however they have taken an initiative to build a networks with Karen communities in the US and Canada. Limitations and deficiency in communication is not restricted to communication between Karen remaining in the camps and those who have resettled, there is a serious lack of networking between the spread out diasporic communities on a local and global level. The Karen population in Sweden is spread out across a large geographic area in Sweden, which means that the community groups are unable to get together more often than once a year, lack of time and economic resources makes systematic, frequent communication between the Swedish Karen town-based community groups impossible. Moreover, similar difficulties lead to a lack of efficient and systematic networking and communication between Karen communities residing in third countries. As a Karen community leader points out:

So many Karen organisations, in Australia, even in United States, there are 3 or 4, in Canada, in United States, but they go their own way, they are not organised, in the United States they go their own way, in Australia they go their own way, I have relatives in Australia, I have relatives in England, relatives in United States, and those 3 groups never contact each other (Interview, Mae Sot, 070627).

Nevertheless, some communication and collaboration between Karen diasporic groups and CBOs at home take place, however almost solely at central level, there is an absence of contact and cooperation with CBOs on camp level, and moreover this

communication rather takes place on an individual level than on an organisational level.

6.3 Disintegration of Karen identity

Anthropologist Ong stress that resettlement of the Chinese in different places led to a “pluralization” of Chinese identities, division by class, politics, class, spatial and social location and nationality, as well as creation of a tension between the different diasporic groups (Ong, 1999: 24-ff). Anthropologist Vertovec points out that transnationalism can change meanings, attitudes and experiences both “here” and “there” (Vertovec, 2003:975). An outcome of resettlement project might be disintegration of Karen identity and creation of parallel diverse Karen identities. As the Karen intelligentsia have historically played a crucial role in creation and maintenance of the pan-Karen identity (Brown, 1988: 53-ff), resettlement of a high proportion Karen intellectuals combined with isolation of the remaining population due to lack of communication possibilities might result in a loss of pan-Karen identity on local level and formation of a localized Karen identity differing significantly from a transnational Karen identity. Moreover, there is a risk of unequal distribution of resources provided to population remaining, deepening the gap between the remaining and the resettled Karen population. Professor in Economy, Robert, points out that remittance can contribute to inequality within the remaining community, claiming that resettlement can not only leave pockets of poverty but deepen absolute poverty (Robert, 2005:17). As skilled, educated members of community that resettle in a high proportion are a little better off as they can work for a CBO or NGO in and outside the camps, in turn send remittances to their better-off relatives.

7. Karen diaspora as social, political and economic resource

Political Scientist Koslowski argues that even relatively new diasporas possess a capacity to become significant economic and political actors, and contribute to globalisation of domestic and international politics (Koslowski, 2005:3-ff). There are various ways in which diasporas can engage in their territory of origin, through lobbying in the host country for a change in the country of origin, political and financial support to groups back home and awareness raising about homeland related issues (Vertovec, 2005:1-ff). Furthermore, remittances are crucial for survival during conflict, to sustain communities in crises, and for post-conflict development in the country of origin (Koser and Van Hear, 2003: 4-ff). Moreover, diasporic associations can play a part in poverty reduction and development in the territory of origin through individual remittances, investment, charitable initiatives, hometown associations, humanitarian responses and reduction of brain-drain through transfer of knowledge and return (Vertovec, 2005:1-ff).

7.1 Characteristics of refugees and movement

The scale of movement, the characteristics of refugees, where they go and the length of time in exile are factors that have significant impact on diaspora's social, political and economic capacity (Newland, 2004:15-ff). The resettlement of Karen refugees is taking place on a mass-scale, the population is being distributed on a wide global scale, the host country are western capitalist democracies, and as quota refugees, the Karen in Sweden receive citizenship on arrival, which is the case in most countries. Considering these features of the resettlement project, the Karen diasporic communities have a potential to build up capacity required to play a role in home territory related issues. Koslowski points out that migration is significant contributor to democratisation in the territory of origin, and the democratic host countries provide a forum for political activity (Koslowski, 2005:3-10). Østergaard- Nielsen, stresses that support for lobbying in the host country is beneficial, if there is an interest in the immigrants in the country of resettlement, and if the country is influential in world politics (Østergaard- Nielsen, 2003: 220-ff). The majority of the Karen have resettled to the US, as many as 11, 000 and the number is likely to rise, the US have recently expressed support for democratisation in Burma, and is a powerful international actor,

which in the future might be beneficial for the Karen. Furthermore, social scientists Lyon and Ucare point out that disadvantaged groups might benefit from migration, increase their potential for mobilization, and rebellion by drawing on their kinship ties across borders and bringing their cause to international attention (Lyon and Ucare, 2005:64-ff). For a deprived population lacking resources under a military dictatorship, resettlement on a large scale might be shown to be favourable; a Karen community servant expresses the Karen situation as following:

[...] we have many brothers and sisters, many, many, many but the world did not hear about them, because they are totally suffocated, no noise, no future, no image, 5 million Karen still in Burma, but you don't hear them, you don't see them, and that is the future of extinction, and the Karen are not allowed to be Karen [...] (Interview, Mae Sot, 070627).

7.2 Political orientation towards society of origin

Social researcher Wahlbeck stress that refugees often have a distinctive relationship to both the territory they were forced to flee from and the territory they were forced to, often manifested in political activism towards the country of origin, as well as a collective memory of homeland and a wish to return to home territory (Wahlbeck, 2002: 224- ff). The Karen in Nässjö town express a strong link to the home territory and a desire to contribute and influence the situation back home, members of both the younger and older generation expressed a wish to return and help, the youth aspire to become doctors or politicians and return to the border to contribute. The Karen Swedish Community (KSC) is taking steps towards political activism turned to the territory of origin, the domestic politics and the humanitarian situation in Karen state. Minor activities such as a meeting with the local Swedish community in a church especially focusing on awareness creation on the situation in Burma have taken place. Karen political refugees in Sweden are absorbed with social and political changes in their country of origin, inhabiting a strong will to help, particularly through education and self-organization. Moreover, KSC is currently building up the organisation and networks with other Karen communities abroad, as Karen community members in Nässjö state:

We cannot do this alone, we need to cooperate, hopefully step by step, we need to make our own group strong, first we need to build up the organisation (Interview, Nässjö, 070806).

Is only the other countries that can help us, we have been fighting 60 years and nothing is getting better. Is good that Karen are spread out, the word about Karen situation can also be spread, I think that god is leading us, KNU wanted to end people for education, we need to take care of that..... we are organising ourselves, is a better land, better education, we will take care so that the culture will not disappear, we hope for a political change (Interview, Nässjö, 070807).

7.3 Economic contribution to society of origin

In terms of economic contribution to home territory, small individual remittances are occasionally send to kin and friends inside the camps, researcher Koser stress that remittances in conflict torn areas are invested in daily subsistence, housing, health, education, and social activities, and often a resource building up social capital (Koser and Van Hear, 2003:4-ff). However, the remittances are small, incidental and not received at all by many refugees inside the camps, minor individual donations from Karen diaspora for celebration of Karen New Year on the request from camp CC, and contribution to CBOs for celebration of their anniversary days have occurred. Furthermore, small donations to the church inside the camps are common, as well as same educational supplies as pens have been contributed by Karen communities in third countries to schools in the camps. Researcher Newland stress the role of home associations in socio-economic development through charitable contributions, investment in health and education projects, and income-generating activities, as well as how these associations help to persevere ties and identity of the migrants (Newland, 2004:19-ff). There are examples of Karen communities in third countries organised by home district affiliation; Karen community in San Francisco maintain close ties with the Thaton district in the Karen state, including making an effort to deliver economic and humanitarian help to the district. There is no sign of entrepreneurship or investment potential of the Karen diasporas, however import of cultural goods as Karen clothes and crafts for sale in countries of resettlement might in the future lead to micro investment creating micro income generation for a small number of Karen remaining in the camps.

7.4 Return and reduction of brain-drain

As a result of loss of skilled and educated camp community members, the Impact of Resettlement on the Remaining Camp Population Report suggests pursue of initiatives and programmes that will allow NGOs and CBOs to draw on resources of the resettled population. To employ members of resettled population as translators, develop a database of resettled refugees with specific skills and connections to the camp and encourage the possibility of a return system (Banki and Lang, 2007: 31-ff). Researcher Van Hear points out that return of refugees can be substantial for welfare and reconstruction in home territory, in terms of financial, human and social capital they can bring (Van Hear, 2003: 2-ff). Although the majority of refugees I spoke to wished to resettle for a better future of their children and the youth, an overwhelming majority of the refugees desired to resettle to acquire higher education. A great proportion of youth and students interviewed both inside the camps and in Nässjö town, Sweden wished to return with knowledge and education to help their people. Political orientation towards the Karen state and a strong belief in higher education, return and possibility to contribute was observed among the Karen youth.

I want to go to third country and learn more, I want to become a nurse in Karen state, I want to claim a good place for my Karen people (Interview, MLO camp, 070613).

I expect higher education and with the knowledge I can some day return and serve and share the knowledge learned in the third country (Interview, MRML camp, 070530).

Many young people have ambitious plans to study Politics, Development, Medicine, Computer Science and Economy, with the desire to return and contribute to the Karen cause, which leaves hope for future return of human capital, in terms of education, training and skills.

8. Limitations of Karen diaspora as social, political and economic resource

The role and potential of Karen diasporic communities cannot be overestimated, as there are severe limitations, and restrictions imposed on both the Karen in exile and the sending authority KNU. This chapter outlines existing boundaries and their implication on the capacity of Karen diasporas as political, social and economic actors in their society of origin.

8.1 Domestic resources and position in the global system

Anthropologist Østergaard-Nielsen points out that to what extent Diaspora will get involved in the place of origin and how successful their contribution will depend on “particular constellation of the country’s emigration trajectory, domestic resources and position in the global system” (Østergaard- Nielsen, 2003: 4). The Karen community has no control or impact on the emigration course, the Karen leadership is excluded from the resettlement process, the Karen authority is not appropriately consulted or informed on the resettlement project, which negatively affects the sovereignty of the Karen community. Furthermore, the resources held by the Karen authority are nominal and scarce, the Karen are in an armed struggle against the dictatorship of Myanmar and the humanitarian situation in the Karen state is alarming, leaving the Karen diasporas with limited prospective of successful contribution. The policies of homeland authorities and institutions towards diasporas are often crucial in the economic, political and social impact that diasporas can have. Researcher Newland stresses that all diaspora strategies depend to some extent on maintaining, creating or rebuilding bonds with migrant communities and encouraging patriotic sentiments (Newland, 2004:16). Østergaard-Nielsen identifies the following main interests in diaspora communities: “[...] (a) to secure continuous inflow of economic resources, (b) to mobilize political support and control subversive political dissidence and (c) to promote the upward social mobility of overseas nationals” (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003:4). KNU however have very limited resources to execute such policies towards diasporas, considering the status and context in which the authority exists and works. The Karen leaders express an urgent need to develop a strategy involving diasporas in the Karen cause. Currently the leadership is dealing with rapid lost of

educated members and brain-drain, no such strategy is in place and very little guidance or direction given to Karen resettling, moreover in the future further difficulties might face the leadership in recruiting the younger generation. Østergaard-Nielsen further stresses the importance of sustained dialogue and institutionalisation of relations between the diasporas and the territory of origin (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003: 22-ff). Such continuity of dialogue and level of institutionalization of transnationalism is yet not observable in the case of the Karen diaspora.

8.2 Lack of access to communication facilities

Among other writers on the subject area, Van Hear stresses the significance of communication technology in creation of capacity and influence on home countries (Van Hear, 2003:1). Koslowski emphasizes the importance of internet and electric bulletins in creation of transnational political organisation, network building, greater contact with homeland, and greater potential to form revolution, national independence and movements back home (Koslowski, 2005: 3-ff). Means of communication, print, visual media increases foundation and building of ethnic nationalism and resources, limitations in communication technology and transport affects exchange of political engagement, efficiency, network building, and the scope of involvement. Moreover, the channels through which remittance flow is under severe restriction as Karen reside in remote refugee camps or under control of Myanmar dictatorship inside the Karen state, advanced telecommunication and financial transfer methods are not available. Lack of access to communication technology in refugee camps and the Karen state, lack of networks and lack of institutionalisation have harsh implications on the capacity of diaspora to contribute to society of origin.

8.3 Socio-economic position in the host country

Furthermore, refugees face far greater obstacles in contribution to their country of origin and have little individual capacity to help then other migrants. Situation in the host country will have a major impact on potential to help, as economic, social and political factors will affect the capability (Koser and Van Hear, 2003: 12-ff). Most Karen refugees are still learning the language of host countries, and receive governmental support, those who found employment, work as un-skilled low wage

labour, moreover they are subjected to risk of exclusion, segregation, discrimination and racism. The Karen that I met in Sweden are former post-10 students, teachers, nurses and active community servants unable to use their knowledge and skills from back home, most of them residing in immigrant neighborhood with none of little contact with the Swedish community. Majority of the adult Karen in Nässjö town speak very little or no Swedish, they perceive language learning as very arduous, and the employment they received is low-paid, often part-time work, which is the case in other resettlement countries as the US. Limitations lie in diaspora's social position in the country of resettlement, communication difficulties, no knowledge of the system and general lack of economic and social capital. Although KSC might appear as a potential influential political organisation in the future, it has no capacity to act on transnational political level. With no staff working full time, inability to meet more often than once a year and very limited economic and organisational resources, the activities of the KCS are merely to keeping contact with each other, and providing advice services on problems Karen refugees face in Sweden.

Furthermore, although remittances can help individuals and families, and especially during conflicts, Østergaard- Nielsen points out that newly fled refugees have significantly less resources than the established diaspora and immigrant groups (Østergaard- Nielsen, 2003:9). The remittances are very small, since the majority are still learning the language, and other work as unskilled labour, they face social and economic obstacles to invest and send sufficient remittances and donations to the camps and the Karen state. Vertovec point out that only when the migrant communities are well-established in the host-country can a constant, organised flow of remittances begin, including transnational ethnic entrepreneur (Vertovec, 2003:992).

8.4 Limitations to return and reduction of brain-drain

In terms of reduction of brain-drain, professor in economy Robert stresses that there is a potential for knowledge transfer if the skilled community members do return, however research shows that in most cases relatively few return (Robert, 2005:8). Experience from the former wave of Karen exodus, show that very few indeed returned, furthermore in terms of knowledge transfer, the Karen might face difficulties acquiring higher education in most of the host countries and in particular

the US. Journalist Jirat stress that lack of language skills and other skills required forces Karen refugees into low-paid jobs, once they acquire work, they are cut of opportunity to learn the language, the limited period of 6 month that refugees receive governmental support further adds to this process (Jirat, 2007, 28-ff). Moreover as those over 18 are no longer qualified for free education in the US, and collage fees vary from \$5, 000 to \$90, 000 per year, financing higher education is a tough if manageable task with a low paid job.

9. Conclusions

Karen collective identity is not being eroded but reinterpreted into a new context of resettlement and modernity, taking on a transnational form. Karen identity is based on discourse of displacement and vulnerability, however strongly linked to the motherland “Kawthoolei”, this discourse is articulated and moved from the local displacement to the global displacement and plays a crucial role in reproduction of Karen identity in the third country. Resettlement to democratic third countries does not in itself represent an obstacle to perform Karen culture for refugees deprived cultural rights for decades, cultural preservation and maintenance of Karen unity lies within individual responsibility of those who resettle. Karen identity is sustained reproduced and strengthened through narratives, public rituals, organisation, education and informal social relations. Karen diasporic community in Sweden reproduces their organisational structure in the new geographical setting, and sustains profound attachment to home territory and political orientation towards society of origin through socio-cultural activities. Karen communities and organisations as the Karen Swedish Community (KSC) play a crucial role in the identity reproduction and sustenance through degree of institutionalisation of cultural, educational and political activities. Furthermore, the role of sending authority as the KNU and the Karen CBOs play an important role in reproduction of Karen identity by encouraging Karen unity beyond geographical borders. Moreover, the resettlement of a high proportion of intellectuals might strengthen Karen transnationalism as intellectuals often play a key role in creation of transnational identities.

Nevertheless as Karen identity undergoes a shift from the local to the global, there are severe limitations in the creation of Karen transnationality, serious restrictions on communication between Karen remaining and Karen diasporas result in significant difficulty maintaining substantial commitments and links with kin and friends abroad. Additionally, the unequal and inconsistent use of informal communication channels creates a gap between those with access to the modern facilities and those lacking education, information and adequate social networks. Insufficient networks and coordination, limited contact, lack of transnational institutionalisation and strategy on local level, global level, and cross-level is disintegrating the family unit, community and group cohesion, producing diversity in Karen identity in a disarray of Karen identities on offer. Furthermore, fragmentation of Karen identity is as an integral part

of the resettlement project as reproduction and transformation of Karen identity results in creation of parallel altered Karen identities and hybrid identities. Moreover, the situation in Burma, the disproportionately high percentage of Karen intellectuals resettling and the lack of access to modern communication technology in the camps and inside the Karen state might create and deepen identity disintegration between Karen diasporic communities and remaining Karen communities. As intellectuals upholding pan-Karen identity resettle in a disproportionately high percentage, and the planned hydro dams project risk to completely isolate the remaining Karen population in the Karen State from the outside world, the creation of Karen transnationalism is under severe threat, rather creating separate Karen identities. The political and humanitarian situation inside Burma creates a crucial obstacle to formation of a united Karen transnationalism, everyone has not equal benefit from mobility and modern technology, and transnationalism is not relevant for everyone in spatial, social, cultural and political sense.

Nevertheless, resettlement to third countries creates a profound shift in Karen identity, social, political and economic organisation from local to global, and the Karen diaspora can develop into a political, social and economic actor. The Karen can benefit substantially from mass-resettlement increasing their potential to mobilisation; the democratic host countries can provide a forum for political activity as well as humanitarian aid towards the society of origin. Furthermore, long tradition of Karen self-management and organisation as well as an active Karen civil society operating under displacement might contribute to creation of Karen transnational organisation. There are indications of such development in the future; Karen diaspora in Sweden shows strong attachment to home territory and political orientation towards the society of origin, and the KSC works towards political activism and improvement of Karen transnational links and coordination. In terms of economic activity, small remittances to kin, individual donations to organisations, schools and churches inside the camps are taking place. Looking at brain-drain reduction, education as the main core motive for resettlement and a strong belief among Karen youth in higher education, return and future contribution are encouraging signs.

Nevertheless, currently there is a significant gap between individuals' capacities and abilities and their desire and willingness to contribute to the place of origin, the limitations lie in Karen diaspora's socio-economic position in the host country, no knowledge of the national system and a general lack of economic and social capital.

Karen refugees face great obstacles in contribution to their territory of origin, resulting in inability to invest and send sufficient remittances, moreover the refugees might face difficulties acquiring higher education in host countries. Strict limitations and restrictions are imposed on both the Karen in exile and the Karen remaining; the Karen are deficient in modern means of communication, technology and transport which are crucial in capacity building of diasporic groups. In addition, the Karen lack efficient networks and coordination, which makes it difficult for the isolated Karen enclaves to become significant political, social and economic actors. Another aspect is the marginal position of the home territory and sending authority, there are severe limitations on how effective the translational activity and response can be, looking of the subsidiary position of the home territory and the refugees in the international system. The Karen leadership have no impact on the resettlement project, the humanitarian and political situation inside the Karen state is devastating, the KNU holds no resources to mobilise political support and secure inflow of economic resources and the socio-economic position of Karen refugees in the host countries is nominal.

Prospect capacity of Karen diasporic communities to influence the situation back home and to expand and sustain a coherent collective Karen transnationalism will depend on future development of the political and humanitarian situation inside the Karen state and the ability of the KNU and Karen CBOs to develop policies and strategies to channel this potential social and financial capital to the homeland of origin. Furthermore, an increase in access to communication facilities on all sides, improvement of the socio-economic status of Karen refugees in the host countries and organisational development of transnational establishment.

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