

Chapter 2

Theoretical Relevance and Literature Review

This chapter presents a review of relevant concepts and literature about refugee studies. In this chapter, I will discuss three concepts: space of identity, agency, and community. The three concepts are narrowed down to apply within the context of a refugee camp, which is a physically confined space. Also, a review of the literature about refugee studies will be examined to identify what concepts and topics have been applied or discussed in previous studies which illuminate the process of displacement and emplacement. In this respect, existing literature reviews about refugee studies have given some direction toward what can be studied in regard to refugees' emplacement experiences from a new aspect, that of focusing on the notion of identity.

2.1 Review of Theories and Concepts

This study connects Karenni refugee studies to broader concepts in social science. The three concepts are space of identity, agency, and community as a process. The three concepts will be used to analyze how Karenni refugees engage as active actors in the reconstruction of their collective identity through three communal events within the context of confinement. In this section, I will discuss the three concepts and related concepts. The discussion will provide insights as to how the concepts can be applied within the context of a refugee camp.

2.1.1 Space of Identity

The concept of production of space was initially introduced by Lefebvre. In the review of Lefebvre's theory, Schmid (2008) mentions that space is socially produced through human relations and practices, and space is associated with time. This means that space is produced and reproduced across time and place. To an extent, Lefebvre's idea emphasizes social space, produced through social practices and activities (Schmid, 2008: 29). Therefore, I adopt Lefebvre's concept of social space to study how social space has created social practices and activities among a certain group of people in the displacement context.

Claval (1984), in his study of the morphology of Eskimos society, written by Mauss 1904-1905, explained that Mauss used the term of social relation to explain social space. Also, Mauss' study pointed out that differences in spatial morphology are reflected by differences in social relation and religious activities. This study illustrates that a group of people, who are dispersed, always create social relations and activities to accommodate themselves to the difference of the spatiality and times they occupy.

In traditional conceptions of space in anthropological studies, Tooker (2012) discusses the study of Low and Lawrance-Zuniga about tribal and village society. She comments that Low and Lawrance-Zuniga applied the concept of space to space in the natural landscape and the material condition of everyday life. Furthermore, she explains that this later traditional concept of space in anthropological studies has been remarkably shifted to space in culture. This emphasizes that space of culture leads to a process of identity. Definitely, identity in cultural space is constructed as collective identity. "Social identity can be produced through place, not a particular place" (Bedford cited in Duncan et al., 2001). This means that social identity can be produced by any group that share the same cultural characteristics, a common purpose, common practice, and situation of life in any place and territory. In this regard, I

will apply the notion of social identity to understand how ethnic identity is always maintained and reconstructed in the absence of territorial and national basis, such as the persistence of Karenni identity in the refugee camp.

Moreover, I want to focus on ethnic identity as social identity. It is actually difficult to define an ethnic group, comprise of sub-ethnic groups, to a seemingly more correct term of tribe or ethnicity. In his study of Kachin social structure, Leach (1954) observes that the Kachin ethnic group, with different sub-ethnic groups, speaking dialects, and customs, have come together to construct themselves as Kachin and use Kachin identity as a political identity in Burma. Simultaneously, he argues that ethnic identity does not fix because it depends upon interactions between ethnic groups. He clearly explains that Kachin identity is always reshaped because Kachins become Shans when they interact with Shan people. From his notion of ethnic identity, it encourages me to look at the process of ethnic identity reconstruction among diverse ethnicities. From my observations, I see that Karenni refugees, with different backgrounds of ethnicities collaboratively involve themselves in common practices of three communal events despite being within confined space. The common practice of the three communal events has created social relations and interactions among the diversity of Karenni refugees. Consequently, interactions with other ethnic groups have reshaped identity among those who are involved in common practices. For instance, some Kayan, Kayaw, Paku, Pa-O, and Shan redefine or re-identify themselves as Karenni when they share a common sense of community and interact with the dominant Kayah ethnic group who consider and identify themselves as Karenni.

In contrast, Keyes (1993) studied ethnic identity and remarkably points out that ethnic identity is socially constructed by a group of people who share the same characteristics of culture and practices. He studied the

Lue ethnic group in Thailand, China, and Laos. His study clearly shows that the Lue construct their ethnic identity to fit within the context they reside. In a political context, ethnic identity has been reconstructed differently under a nation-state. Actually, his study of ethnic identity is applicable to explain the ethnic identity in the context of the Karenni refugee camp because Karenni refugees have reconstructed their ethnic identity through reinventing or recreating their cultural practices with different meanings from their former context inside the Karenni State.

Furthermore, the argument of Leach and Keyes provides a clear explanation of ethnic identity. Leach (1954) emphasizes that ethnic identity is always reshaped through interactions between ethnic groups while Keyes (1993) stresses that ethnic identity is differently constructed and reconstructed under the nation-state. Focusing on the Karenni ethnic group, Karenni people in Myanmar and Thailand are the same ethnic group, but Karenni ethnic identity is reconstructed and reshaped with different meaning and purpose among those Karenni people who have forcibly migrated and become displaced.

Tooker (2012) used the concept of spatial practices to study the Akha ethnic group. Her study shows that spatial practices in traditions and rituals have contribute to the construction of Akha identity. She argues that the most recent studies in social theory show space is affected by globalization and nationalism. She also sees space as a process of socialization and enculturation. In her ethnographic study, she has used the concept of space to study space as a powerful and political device - a device that is a process of identity construction associated with place and social position in a non-Western context. She argues that spatial practice has allowed the Akha to maintain their identity in the globalization era. Moreover, she has highlighted that spatial practice has allowed the Akha to resist outside powers and maintain their self-autonomy. Thus, ritual

and traditional practices take active roles in the construction of Akha identity.

In this thesis, I define a space in the camp as physically confined space that had been controlled by a state power or hosting state. Sack (1993) has used the concept of space in the notion of power of space and place. He explains that space and place affect everyone's lives, and in a space or place, there are social relations and power. Space as territory has its own rules and control over the people who live in that space. From my understanding about space in the notion of Sack, territorial control is about power that is exerted by people, and people are always in place or space controlled by a powerful regime.

From the above discussions about the concept of space, Tooker (2012) and Sack (1993) see space as spatial practices; yet they see power in space differently. For Tooker, she argues that space is affected by outsiders' power, yet people can fend off this power and produce their space of identity. By contrast, Sack argues that people live in space that has its own rules and is controlled by the power of a state, so it is difficult for people to resist and produce their own space. From these two arguments, I feel that Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp is placed into the kind of space as power. Space in the camp is definitely affected by the power of the hosting state and humanitarian regime. However, people in the camp resist this power in space and produce their space of identity. Therefore in the camp, space can be seen as the power of rule and space that allows people to resist.

In respect to the identity issue, Malkki (1995) argues that people, who are displaced, always reinvent homes and homelands in the absence of territorial and national basis. She states that people reinvent their homeland through maintaining their ethnic identity and cultural process.

However, she does not focus on the relation of cultural process to space making of identity.

Tooker (2012) and Malkki (1995) have viewed identity construction and the process of culture differently. For Tooker, she sees identity construction and culture involved in spatial practice, but Malkki just sees identity and culture as just a process of adaption in the displacement. In this sense, I agree with Tooker's concept of spatial practice, and see that space of culture has taken an active role in the reconstruction of Karenni identity in the displacement. The concept of space will therefore be applied to analyze the relation of cultural practices and Karenni refugees' collective identity.

2.1.2 Agency

In the modern era, many scholars have paid attention to the concept of agency to explain the current phenomena of social system. It is well known that the concept of agency cannot be apart from structure, and there is interplay between agency and structure in society. In the earlier years of Structuration Theory, many sociologists saw structure as an integral aspect of a society with structure determining individuals' actions and choices. In this sense, they concentrated on structure as it influences individuals and how social forces have impacted upon individuals' choices and decision making (Ritzer and Stepnisky, 2013). Therefore, sociologists, at that time, concluded that structure has much more influence on individuals than individuals can influence structure in a society. In a later era, the dialectical thinking of Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1977) observed human agency in social practices of individuals in a society. Certainly, their perspectives about human agency have given encouragement to other dialectical thinkers to study the relationship between agency and structure.

Based on these perspectives, I understand the concept of agency as the capacity of individuals to act independently and escape from determinism, ability to make their own decisions in a society, and overall, the free will of individuals. Social structure, on the other hand, refers to the institutions, rules, social norms, social classes, organizations, and political institutions which constrain individual activities and limit what an individual can do. Although the structure has a significant influence on the actor or individual, structure cannot be explained in Structuration Theory without agency. Here, agency is the individual's capacity to produce activities across time and space, and these activities are reflexive to structure. Before going to a new perspective of the relation between agency and structure, I will use the following discussion to explain a conventional theory of structuralism in Marxist theory.

It is well-known that Marx had initially developed Structural Theory. He described capitalism as a mode of production and the relation of production was the main driving force of social structure in society. Thus, he saw the relationship between people and structure, and argued that the large scale of structure fulfilled people's needs. Notably, his theory of structuration attracted the attention of dialectical thinkers in the modern era. Many sociologists and thinkers have come to study the relationship of the individual and structure in society, and they defined them as agency and structure. They refer agency to the micro level and structure to the macro level. Furthermore, many sociologists have integrated the concept of agency and structure into structural theory (Ritzer and Stepnisky, 2013). From the concept of human agency and structure, I want to understand how individuals can act independently from the limits in structure and how structure enables individuals to act independently from constraints, that is, how individuals influence structure.

The well-known structuralism theorist, Giddens, unlike previous structuralism theorists, focuses on social practice to study the relationship between agency and structure. Actually, he does not argue that structure does not have an influence on the individual. Rather, he argues that while structure, such as rules and resources, have constrained and influenced individuals, individuals have produced routine activities and social practices in structure and this means that structure cannot exist without the activities

of agents. Giddens defines agent as an actor who rationalizes their world, is motivated to act according to their wants and desires, and makes differences in the social world. He points out that an agent must have power to act, and without the ability to make differences, the actor cannot be an agent. However, Giddens argues that an actor can appear to be an agent because being in constraint does not mean they have no choice or they cannot make differences (Ritzer and Stepnisky, 2013). From his concept of agent and agency, he realizes that an actor who can make differences and is motivated to act on their desires and wants through their activities in a social system can transform them to be agents, and their practice is best described as human action and agency that creates structure. Moreover through social practices, actors can still be agents under constraints.

Prominently, Giddens has rejected the concept of structure that always constrained individual action, and he argues that “structure is always both constraining and enabling” (Giddens, 1984:25). From his argument, he attempts to explain that structure does not always constrain an individual’s action, but often it allows agents to act independently from what they have been limited. In this sense, I agree with him since people can break rules under structure and thus, structure loses its power to constrain those actions.

It appears that Karenni refugees in Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp have been able to resist the power of authority in the camp, and the authority in structure has sometimes lost its power to constrain their actions. I want to use the case of this camp to explain agency. In the camp, Karenni refugees still maintain and develop their knowledge of practices under constraints. For example, they are prohibited from deforesting in the camp, yet they still cut trees to erect the E-Lue as a process in traditional practices. This specifically violates the camp rule. Fortunately, the camp authority seems to ignore that refugees have deforested for this purpose and eventually allows them to cut the trees annually for a traditional purpose. Thus, this case illustrates that structure has allowed individuals resist the rule.

Also, I want to apply the concept of agency and agent from Giddens to Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp since Karenni refugees are motivated to act on their desires and wants, and they can make differences in the constraint situation. Indeed, cultural practices in the camp can be described as social practices that refugees produce in a structure which limits their action. From my perspective, refugees should be reconsidered as agents whose agencies are developed through social practices.

Bourdieu (1977) is also one who views practices as part of the relationship between structure and agency. For him, he focuses on objectivism and subjectivism, or in other words, society and individual. He acknowledges that there are constraints on individuals, and structure constrains people's practices. In structure, people always construct their social reality, and he sees habitus as the way people occupy their position and create their social world. Therefore, he defines habitus as agent's practices, and this is collective practices. Structure does not always impose upon all actors that they practice according to the particular position they occupy in social space, but people can make difference in their habitus and create their own social world (Bourdieu, 1990). For

Bourdieu, habitus allows people to think about what they choose to do, so people can engage in decision making that provide them with the sense of how they should make choices and choose strategies in their social world.

Although Bourdieu does not stress the sense of how structure determines individuals or individuals influence structure. He still sees that structure constrains human action, while human action, as collective practices in habitus, creates structure. Considering this, I want to apply his concept of habitus to illustrate that Karenni refugees have recreated their social world by making differences in their habitus. Clearly, Karenni refugees are abided to a position of being stateless and humanitarian recipients who only must act like refugees.

However in reality, refugees' habitus are changes based upon cultural practices carried on by them. They have adjusted their position in the social world as they have become cultural agents who are able to materialize their culture in exile (Dudley, 2010). Thus, it can be said that structure itself has allowed refugees to resist and enabled refugees to continue their social practices. Refugees actively maintain and carry on their cultural practices and ethnic identity as agents whose agency is compatible with the constraint structure. Interestingly, the concept of agency would be applicable to how some refugee leaders act as agents who actively lead, organize, and negotiate for the continuity of cultural events and practices under constraints.

2.1.3 Community as a Process

The definition of community is too abstract, and its meaning has been discussed in various manners. In the earlier period of community theory, Aristotle, Hegel, and Marx viewed community as social interactions among human beings, and community was the basic social requirement for human beings (Wood and Judikis, 2002). In this regard, community

is a specific geographic location where people reside together and share common interests, norms, beliefs, and reciprocity. Thus, community, at that time, was widely defined as structure.

In a later era, the conventional concept of community was replaced by the concept of community in the context of structural anthropology. Scholars began to perceive community as a process. Cohen (1985) argues that community as a process is a social process and has cultural meaning in modern societies. He comments that community is symbolically constructed by bounded members who intend to share common values, norms, and symbolic meanings of culture, and form identity. Importantly, he sees a

community as the construction of boundary, and boundary is constructed with symbolic meaning. For him, boundary is created by people who share the same symbolic meanings, such as culture, linguistics, and values. Individuals, within a community, create their consciousness of identity. From his concept of community in the modern era, he attempts to argue that community is symbolically constructed with boundary by those who share sameness, and this form of community does not allow others who are different from them to join. In this sense, I argue that community is not always constructed with boundary: people with different cultures can become members through interactions and social relations within a community.

Based upon cultural differences, each ethnic group has come to identify themselves as a particular group and differentiate themselves from other ethnic groups by constructing boundaries predicated on a cultural bearing unit. In ethnic boundaries, members tend to define themselves as “us” and others as “them”, and this creates the process of determining membership and exclusion. Moreover, members in the boundary tend to cope with different situations in interacting with other ethnic groups. In

this regard, community is socially construed and based upon cultural differences that are created by the members of a community (Barth, 1965).

In the modern era, different ethnic groups tend to reside in the same locality and community in nation-states. Consequently, it is interesting to observe ethnic boundaries in the community and social relations that create community in either sense of community as symbolic boundaries and imagination. Thus, it is necessary to study Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp as a community involved in a social process in which ethnic boundaries are consolidated in the community or the community is created as space for people to imagine themselves and recreate a sense of belonging through the process of social relations rather than sharing symbolic meaning.

Differently, Delanty (2003) has focused on community as a process rather than structure, values and meaning. He argues that community is more than symbolic meaning because community is constructed based upon cultural forms, cultural differences, and social relations. Here he attempts to further argue that community is the imagination and capacity of groups of people to recreate themselves. To some extent, he states that community provides a form of belonging and cultural codes. In this regard, he sees cultural struggle and conflict of belonging emerge in a community, and this leads minority groups of people to form a community to protect against majorities. In fact, minorities tend to assert their identity, solidarity, belonging, and roots, and this process, in a community, allows them to construct a shared public culture. The community, in this sense, has also allows everyone to be a part of a minority. Thus, his concept of community as a process is essentially defined as a process involved in social relations and culture transformation, and community, from this perspective, is constructed beyond symbolic boundaries.

I agree with Delanty's argument and see that community as a process is constructed by individuals whose imagination is the same and who recreate their new community to identify themselves as a distinctive group. Based upon his concept of community, I want to apply the concept of community as a process which is created by the social relations in Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp. I consider this as such since the community in the camp has been constructed by members, from different backgrounds of ethnicities, who intend to sustain their sense of belonging and communality.

Recently, community as a process has become associated with the notion of imagination. Anderson (1991) initially came up with the concept of imagined community. He mentions that people, in the era of print capitalism, tended to imagine themselves as members of a nation with their fellow members, whom they never met, known, and heard, residing in the same nation. Precisely, he defined nationalism as an imagination of people and pointed out that nationalism has brought homogeneity to a nation-state. The imagined community in his concept does not include people at the margin, but rather homogeneity in national discourse causes people at the margin, such as ethnic minorities, to lose their identity and have difficulty in identifying themselves in the nation-state. Therefore, a community, not of imagination, should pay attention to the marginalized group's movement at the locality. Alternatively, an imagined community would be the best way to describe the movement of people at the margin (Tanabe, 2008). Based on this, I agree that the concept of a community as imagining should pay attention to people at the margin and people who become displaced along the border.

Regarding on the notion of locality, Appadurai (1995) has defined locality as the regular practices and routine activities of people in a community, and these practices are conducted again and again. The rituals are a vital process of regular practices, and this ritual produces

local identity. Through this process, local people have maintained their knowledge through material forms of culture, and cultural practices or common practices have created relationships and interactions among the members within the community. From his concept, I see that a refugee community can be perceived as locality and refugees always reproduce their locality in the displacement. For instance, Karenni refugees, in the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp, have maintained their traditional knowledge and practices through material forms.

Also from the foregoing, I perceive Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp as a locality and an imagining community. In the study of imagining communities in Thailand, Tanabe (2008) has defined an imagining community as the way people imagine and create their own sense of community, knowledge, and identity. In this sense, his imagining community is described as the movement of people who intend to become involve in common practices

and form their identity under the circumstance of being affected by state policy, development, and outside power. In his book about imagining community, he discusses newly emerging communities and uses case studies of various communities, such as Buddhist communities in Thailand and along the Thai-Myanmar border, to describe imagining communities that have mobilize to create a new sense of community.

Kwanchewan (2008) discussed her ethnographic study about the Ta-La-Ku community along the Thai-Myanmar border. The Ta-La-Ku community is referred to as a group of Karen who engage in Buddhist religious cult practices. She describes that the number of members in Ta-La-Ku villages seemed to have decreased because some members converted to Christianity and assimilated into a national identity. Therefore, many Ta-La-Ku communities have increasing difficulty in finding prophets to lead their religious practices. While many Ta-La-Ku

communities have lost their identity, the Ta-La-Ku community at Letawkho has continued to maintain its substantial rituals, restrictions or rules, and religious structures despite modernity and being under national authority. Moreover, this community has developed its relationships and networks with other Ta-La-Ku communities to maintain their religious practices and withstand the power of the state and missionaries.

The case study of the Ta-La-Ku community is similar to the context in Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp since Karenni refugees have maintained their religious identity and mobilized networks with other Karenni communities in Mae Hong Son Province. Thus, the concept of community as a process will be applied to analyze how Karenni refugees recreate their community as process through the three communal events. These events help Karenni refugees to become involve in common practices and re-identify their collective identity as Karenni within the context of the displacement.

2.2 Review of Related Studies

This research has reviewed literature on refugee studies within African and Thai contexts. The two contexts are different because refugees' rights in Thailand are not entitled or recognized by the Royal Thai Government as in the African context. This literally means that the Thai Government has not ratified the term of refugee or recognized those ethnic minorities, who have become displaced in camps along the Thai-Myanmar border, as refugees. Rather it considers them as displaced persons. The reason behind this is that the Thai Government has not signed the United Nations' 1951 Refugee Convention. As a result, refugees' rights in Thailand are not entitled as in other countries (Premjai et al., 2011). As a consequence of being unrecognized by Thai government, refugees in Thailand live in highly restricted and regulated camps, and their access to refugee rights are limited comparing with refugee camps in the African context. It can be said that they are struggling more with life in the confined camps in Thailand.

In reviewing refugee studies within the two contexts, I observed that recent refugee studies entail processes of displacement and emplacement. Apparently, the notion of rootedness, identity, and displacement was initially discussed in refugee studies in the African context. However in the Thai context, previous refugee studies focus on how refugees emplace themselves to new settlements, recreate a sense of belonging, and seek security through a sense of continuity with their home or a recreating of familiar practices in traditional rituals or religions and a mobilization of religion networks. Refugee studies in the Thai context have inadequately touch upon the topic of refugee identity: the studies only focus upon how refugees seek to create a sense of place or home in the area of displacement. In the following section, I will discuss the related studies that I reviewed in the two contexts.

2.2.1 The Linkage of Refugees to Identity and Place

In studying two groups of refugees in a Tanzanian town camp and a remote camp, Malkki (1995) demonstrated the linkage between refugees to a place and identity. From her study, she shows that Hutu refugees, in the setting of the town camp, transformed their identity into multi-identities, assimilating themselves to be urban people as Tanzanians and also as Hutu refugees. In this regard, these Hutu refugees do not engage in the sense of reconstruction of their history as people and claim their original homeland.

In contrast, her study, in the remote camp, showed that Hutu refugees continually deterritorialize homeland in the area of displacement or reconstruct their history as a people with national identity through claims and memories of their homeland. For this study of Hutu refugees in a remote camp, Malkki borrowed the concept of nation and community from Anderson. She presented that “the true nation was imagined as a moral community”, being formed centrally by the native in exile. This shows that Hutu refugees, in the remote camp, reconstruct the sense of belonging and claim the right to their original home or nation where they no longer belong physically. In fact, the homeland they claim is not

necessarily territory and a moral destination. Also, the idea of returning to a homeland is not a matter for travelling, but a real return that can be culminated in exile. Malkki's studies in the Tanzania refugee camps encourage recent scholars and others to reconsider refugees, or mobile displaced people, as a group that continually engages itself in the process of reconstructing their identity and inventing homeland in the area of displacement. Actually, the study of identity focuses on refugees reconstructing their identity through the claims and memories of homeland, not on the cultural process. Thus, this research will touch more upon the reconstructing of identity through the continuity of cultural practices.

2.2.2 Emplacement through Maintaining the Practice of Buddhism

In the study of Pwo Karen self-settled refugees and their Buddhist religious practices, Prasert (2013) shows that the continuity of religion and ritual practices enabled Pwo Karen refugees to create a sense of belonging or emplace themselves to a new home in the displacement. The study explores how Pwo Karen Buddhist followers work strongly to recreate their familiar Buddhist practices, ritual practices, religion ceremonies, and monastery, and mobilize religious networks with other monasteries. Prominently, his study argued that the continuity of Karen Pwo Buddhist practices is understood as part of a process of reproducing locality in a new home, rather than a process of reconstructing ethnic identity or a sense of belonging to a homeland. This study clearly shows how the continuity of religion practices helps refugees to reproduce a sense of locality and recreate a sense of belonging to the religious group that they were part of in the past. Actually, the sense of belonging, which created through the familiar practices in the Buddhist religion, resembles the Kay Htoe Boe Festival. Thus, in my research, I will focus on how the familiar practices in two annual ritual festivals play a crucial role in the emplacement process or recreating a sense of belonging to a group that they were part of in the past.

2.2.3 Karen Refugee as Agent in Mobilizing Christian Networks

In his research of the Karen Christian community, Horstmann (2011) studied how Karen Baptists used their cultural capital to mobilize networks with their relatives, friends, and the imagined community of Christians. Thus, they were not only humanitarian aid receivers. Yet, they were also very important agents of proselytizing. A church in the Karen refugees' camp enters into humanitarian space and creates networks with American Christians or other international Christians, and eases the mobility of its members on both sides of the Thai-Myanmar border. The important agent that Horstmann defined is rather seen as collective agency when the Karens, as a Christian group, act to strengthen their group networks, and expand their future and strengthen their collective identity. Thus, his study provides a good example to foster further studies about collective agency among refugees.

2.2.4 A Sense of Continuity with Home through Materializing Culture

In studying a group of Karenni refugees living in a refugee camp in Thailand's Mae Hong Son Province, Dudley (2010) considers Karenni refugees as active agents who actively engage in daily lives through the continuity of a sense of home in the displacement. In her ethnography study, she explains that Karenni refugees seek to make the camp more familiar like home and deal with the boredom in the camp through the recreating of material forms, physical objects, sensory perceptions, ritual practices, and festivals. She observes how Karenni refugees recreate a sense of home in the displacement.

From my critical view of her study, Dudley has inadequately examined the sacred space and its relation to the notion of identity. Rather, her study of place making simply focuses upon how Karenni refugees seek to feel as like as at home or deal with boredom of life in the displacement. Yet from her study, I will borrow her concept of continuity with home. Significantly, the concept of continuity with home in my

research will illuminate the process which refugees seek to recreate their pre-displacement life and sense of belonging.

2.2.5 Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp as a Diaspora Community

Grivijitr (2006) studied Karenni refugees as a group of people who create a sense of belonging and have a nationalist mindset in a displacement when they cannot return, integrate, or move forward. From his study, there are three dilemmas that Karenni refugees face: Firstly, they imagine the home where they belong, but they cannot return due to the ongoing conflict in Myanmar. Secondly, they reconstruct their identity, in the displacement and existence, as temporary. Thirdly, they consider their lives in the refugee camp as a diaspora community which is just temporary, and they have to continually move elsewhere, but they do not know where that is.

In regard to collective identity reconstruction in the camp, Grivijitr's study revealed that some Karenni refugees reconstruct their collective identity through sharing social and pre-exile memories - memories of losing and suffering from ethnic conflict and fighting in a homeland. Thus, they have a sense of togetherness and construct a collective identity as being Karenni nationalists while they also learn to process life in a refugee camp. However, his study also found that not all Karenni refugees, in the camp, share a sense of togetherness and collectively identified themselves as Karenni associated with the KNPP's nationalism aspiration. In this respect, he describes that the reason behind this is that some people in the camp come from different background of ethnicities and some did not experience seeing, or suffering from, the fighting or war in the conflict areas before fleeing to Thailand. As a result, these people have little or no sense of belonging to a collective identity as Karenni who share the nationalism aspiration with the KNPP.

Actually, this study illustrates that the mindset of Karenni nationalism, among some groups of Karenni refugees in the camp, is constructed as a

part of an imagined community and as the way to comfort people's feeling about the sense of home where they cannot physically reach or return. Consequently from his study, I can see through the Karenni National Day event, how collective identity is reconstructed among those who are aware or shared the same dream of homeland with the KNPP nationalism aspiration.

In summation, most previous studies focus upon the narratives of refugees' experiences of emplacement, and highlight how refugees adapt and deal with lives in the protracted situation of refugee camps. These previous studies also contribute to a reflection of refugees' cultural experiences, focusing on religious and ritual practices. In his research in the Karenni refugee camps, Dudley only studied the materializing of Karenni culture in exile among the Karenni refugees; whereas the research of Grivijitr does not clearly provide explanations about the Karenni collective identity. Therefore, my research should differ from previous studies by examining the space of identity which is created through the continuity of traditional rituals and practices through the three communal events.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

This research will apply three concepts to analyze how refugees have created space of identities through the three communal events. The three concepts will be used to analyze each of three communal events.

The first concept is space of identity. In examine space of identity, the study will explore how space of identity is produced or reproduced through symbolic meanings, physical space, and social interaction in the three communal events.

The next concept is agency. The concept of agency will examine how key community actors: Camp Committee, Karen National Day Committee, Ban Mai Nai Soi Cultural

Committee, and traditional religion practitioners - actively engage in the process of organizing the three communal events and create connections with the outside world.

The final concept is that of community as process. The refugee community is perceived as only being involved in the process of depending or being reliance upon external existence. In fact, the refugee community is a community busily involved in the process of people re-identifying themselves through the recreating or reproducing of traditions and cultural elements. Thus, the concept of community as a process will be applied to analyze how Karenni refugees recreated their community as a process in defining their collective identity and articulating this identify to connect with the wider world.

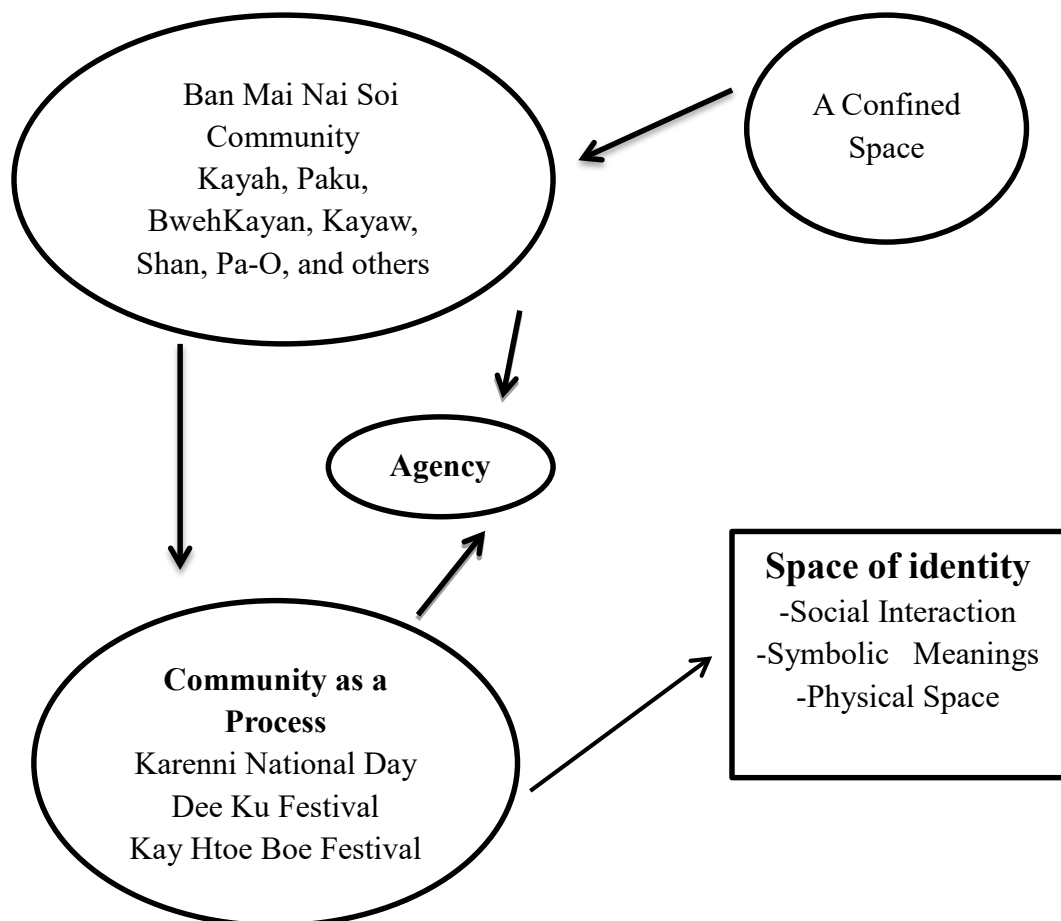


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed relevant concepts and a literature review of refugee studies. The discussion of previous studies provided an understanding about how key relevant concepts can be applied within the context of refugee camp. In the next chapter, I will provide an understanding about the contextual background of Karenni refugees and their identities.