Chapter 3

Contextual Background: Understanding the Karenni Refugees

This chapter will explain the origins of the Karenni and the Karenni in the forced displacement. In actuality, displacement fundamentally affects individual perceptions of place and homeland as individuals come to perceive themselves in a new way and recreate a new kind of identity and set of social relations (Grundy–Warr and Wong, 2002).In particular, the Karenni, in the forced displacement areas, have come to perceive themselves in multiple ways in which they define themselves as sub-groups belonging to the Karenni while accept the term of being refugees.

This chapter is divided into five sections: 1) the origin of Karenni: who are Karenni; 2) pre-displacement life: living in Karenni state; 3) political conflicts and living at borders; 4) historical context and the profile of Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp; 5) life as refugees in Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp. In this chapter, I highlight that the shared experiences of forced displacement, particularly memories of suffering, moments of coming together or the journeying to the border camp, recreate new kinds of social relations which help Karenni refugees to construct a sense of togetherness and collectively identify themselves as Karenni. In this Chapter, I highlight that the shared experiences of forced displacement, particularly the memories of suffering, moments of coming together, or journeying to the border camp, recreate new kinds of social relations which help the Karenni refugees to construct a sense of togetherness and collectively identify themselves as Karenni.

3.1 The Origin of Karenni: Who Are Karenni?

The Karenni are rarely known in the wider world. Rather, people tend to assume that the Karenni are part of the same ethnic group with the Karens. Moreover, the rejection of using term "*Karenni*" in Myanmar has made the term less visible or known. Instead,

"*Kayah*", as a replacing term, is largely known. In order to understand the Karenni, this section will explain the origin of the Karenni; how the Karenni originated and how the term "*Karenni*" was used during the British colonization, and also the dispute over the two names of Karenni and Kayah. Furthermore, this section also explores how the Karenni have been continually used or reconstructed in the displacement context.

Karenni State is the smallest ethnic state in Myanmar with an area of 11,731.09 sq. km. It is located in eastern Myanmar, bordered on the north by Shan State, the south by Karen State, and the east by Thailand's Mae Hong Son Province. The population numbers 207,357 people (UNICEF Report, 2011). Karenni State is comprised of different ethno-linguistic groups: Kayah, Kayan, Kayaw, Karen-Paku, Manu-Manaw, GeKo-GeBa, Bre, Bwe, and other smaller ethno-linguistic groups. Thus, the term "*Karenni*" describes a group of people who share and live in the same territory.

Actually, the term "*Karenni*", which defines a territory, has the root origin from the Karen in English and the Kayin in Burmese. In other words, "*Karenni*" was originally adopted from the Karen, or Kayin, and used as an ethnic classification in Burma during the British colonization. The people in Karenni State are considered as close kin to the Karen or as a sub-group belonging to the Karen. Actually, they are defined as "*Red Karen*", but it is not clear whether the "*Red*" is classified by costume or the skin color of the group. In the Burmese language, the suffix "*ni*", meaning "*red*", was added to "*Kayin*", making the name "*Kayinni*". In English, the suffix "*ni*" was added to "*Karen*", making the name "*Karenni*". Thus, the term "*Karenni*", in both languages, literally means "*Red Karen*".

Apart from being called "*Karenni*", the word "*Kayah*", in the term "*Kayah State*", is also used to refer to Karenni State. The two terms of geographic designation, Karenni State and Kayah State, refer to the same state and territory. However, a dispute over the two names of "*Karenni*" and "*Kayah*" is ongoing. The two names are different in respect to their political implications: "*Karenni*" is used in the quest for independence, while "*Kayah*" is used for the integration into the Union of Myanmar (Kubo, 2014). Karenni describe a heterogeneous group inside Karenni/Kayah State. Conversely,

Kayah describes a certain ethnic group which is the major population in Karenni/Kayah State. Kayah literally means "*man*" in linguistic Kayah. According to the "*red*" termmentioned above, the Kayah also call themselves "*Kayahli*", which means "*Red Man*", from their red costumes (Lehman, 1996). Since the term "*Kayah*" is not historically linked to the recognition of independence and is the name of the majority ethnic group in the territory of the Karenni/Kayah State, the Burmese government chose to use this name and rejected using "*Karenni*". The term "*Karenni*" is sensitive in respect to Burmese politics because it provides a reminder of the independent Karenni States once recognized by the British government and Burmese kingdom. Thus, "*Karenni*" is continually used for political purposes to indicate the resistance movement against the Burmese government. Similar to the Karen insurgents, the term "*Karenni*" is related to the Karenni rebels who fought against the Burmese government in the quest for their own independence since 1948. This is the key reason why the term "*Karenni*" was dropped and the term "*Kayah*" was widely adopted and officially replaced by the Burmese government in 1951 (The Karenni National Revolutionary Council, 1974).

After replacing the name of the state, the term "*Karenni*", which once was seen as the collective identity among the sub-ethnic groups inside the state, was rarely used. Consequently, populations tended to identify themselves according to their own sub-ethnic identity. Several informants, who previously lived in the remote areas, related that back in their village life, they were not aware of a Karenni identity or even called themselves "*Karenni*". For example, Su Reh, a 65 year old man, a former villager in Shadaw Township, identified himself as "*Kayah*" when he lived in the village. He just came to know the term "*Karenni*" in the camp.

While the term "*Karenni*" has been dropped in Burma, it has been widely used among the Karenni political group in exile - the KNPP. In this sense, the term "*Karenni*" not only refers to an independent territory, but also extends into a political realm in the displacement context. It estimated that there are around 20,000 displaced Karenni in the Thai border camps. These displaced populations have become aware of, and identify, themselves as Karenni, with "*Karenni*" used as an umbrella term or referred to as an ethno-political umbrella (Dudley, 2010).

However, the population in the refugee camps identify themselves as Karenni to different degrees of political awareness. The first group of Karenni refugees was a social and political group which was politically aware of the Karenni nationalism aspiration and the dream of a homeland. They were dominated by the KNPP propagation of the history of Karenni independence and autonomy. Conversely, most of the subsequent Karenni refugees, who arrived in 1996 from the remote areas as the outcome of a forced relocation strategy (see Section 3.3), had little or no awareness of the KNPP's conception of nationalism through the use of the term "*Karenni*".

Several informants, to whom I talked, shared similar perceptions of how they perceived themselves after crossing the border. Mrs. L, an elder woman, who fled from the forced relocation zone, said that "Once after we crossed the border, we no longer belong to that side because Burmese soldiers considered us as rebels. This clearly shows that the Karenni refugees tended to perceive themselves as those who could no longer live in Karenni State. There were others who shared their memories of suffering, how they had been threatened, and the physical and emotional hardships which were endured during their journey to the border camps. These shared memories of suffering and forced displacement experiences helped to reconstruct the sense of "us" in the camp and allowed them to recreate their own meaning of the "*Karenni*" community in the camp.

The historical independence and autonomy of Karenni State is continually used by the Karenni resistance group, the KNPP, to articulate the Karenni identity in the displacement context. Thus, the Karenni identity is more related to politics and reshaped by the forced displacement. Although this study shows that once people arrived in the camp and came to identify themselves as Karenni, it did not mean that everyone in the camp shared the same dream of an independent homeland with the KNPP or the resistance movement. Rather, they come to identify themselves as having the shared experiences of forced displacement with their KNPP and Karenni companions in the refugee camp. Significantly, this section explores how the refugees see themselves as Karenni in the forced displacement context. The following section will trace back to the Karenni pre-displacement life to explore how their life was prior to the displacement.

3.2 Pre-Displacement Life: Living in Karenni State

The life in Karenni State was better than elsewhere for the refugees, particularly when compare with life in the displacement. At the home of origin, the Karenni people could find that life was more accessible for livelihood activities with subsistence farming and abundant available resources. However in the refugee camp, their life is totally changed because they cannot rely upon subsistence farming anymore or continue with what they had been practicing, economically and culturally, when living in the village. This section, through the narrated stories from several informants who still vividly remember their lives inside Karenni State, explores the Karenni refugees' pre-displacement life by explaining how their way of life, or how they lived in Karenni State, was different from their life in the camp

3.2.1 Livelihoods and a Way of Life

The majority of the Karenni refugee population was subsistence farmers. Most of the research informants described that their farms, specifically paddy fields, had been left behind in the villages. Mu Preh Law, 71 years old, former Karenni Cultural Committee chairman, was one of those informants who left his farm behind. He described that, in the village, most of the households had their own farms to grow vegetables and rice for both annual household consumption and the family's main income source. Needless to say, villagers did not have to worry about food shortages. He further mentioned that most of the children began to help their parents on the farm when they turned fourteen years old. Gardening, or cultivating rice and seasonal food crops, and raising livestock were the main daily activities of life in the villages. This subsistence farming was continually practiced from generation-to-generation. Apart from wet rice cultivation, villagers, who settled in the lowlands or higher hills, cultivated swidden agriculture and dry rice fields. This shows that agriculture was the main livelihood activity for Karenni villagers and contributed to the major economic activity in Karenni State. Many villages were located in the remote areas where there was a little or no access to education and healthcare services

(Lehman, 1967) Thus, a large number of these groups remained uneducated subsistence farmers.

3.2.2 Inaccessible Education

Karenni refugees had different educational backgrounds. A small number, from the political elites or social groups, were likely to have a more formal or better education than other members of the population. A larger number of the camp's middle and elderly aged population, who previously resided in villages in the remote areas, came from a lesser educational background. Most villages, in the remote areas, had no schools or teachers. In other situations, some villagers had only completed a basic education at the primary or middle school level. For the villages inside Karenni State, the main problem in the education sector was that these villages did not have enough school teachers. In this regard, Mu Preh Law explained that the schools were dependent upon the availability of teachers. In some years, the Burmese government sent school teachers to the villages from Loi Kaw or other larger townships to teach in the villages; but in other years, they completely ignored providing teachers to the villages in the remote areas. Therefore, large numbers of villagers could not access basic education and remained as illiterate people.

To access education services, children had to go to study at the district school or even go to a school in the urban areas. Speaking to the poor education services in the villages, Nay Reh, 28 years old man, who arrived in the camp in 1995, mentioned that the children could not attend school because there was no school or teacher in her village. Children had to move to the larger villages in the district if they wanted to attend school. However, these schools were very expensive and thus, most families could not afford to send their children to school. Nay Reh was one example of the children in the village who could not attend school. With his overwhelmed desire to attend school, he decided to come to the border camp in 1995.

Apart from attending school in the district or crossing the border to receive an education, religious groups also assumed a significant role in providing education. In particular, missionaries, who came to teach their religion, also taught villagers how to read and write. Many Karenni refugees, who previously received their education from missionaries, stated that they were very thankful to those missionaries, who were mostly local Karenni people. The missionaries did not only provide education to children, but also to adults. Mu Preh Law described that because Karenni villagers had less education, large population remained as backward people who were left behind in the economic development. Clearly, a large number of the Karenni population remained illiterate.

3.2.3 Lack of Healthcare Services and Dependency on Traditional Healing

Many villagers settled in villages in inaccessible areas with no access to public healthcare services, such as hospitals or clinics, because these services were located only in the urban areas that were far from the Karenni villages. Therefore, the villagers did not depend on modern medicines or treatment when they became sick or had a disease. Instead they relied on traditional treatments and healing which involved using natural herbs and conducting spiritual rites, such as an animal sacrifice. This traditional healing had been practicing since the time of their ancestors and continues to be practiced up to today. Because of these patterns of ritual practice in healing sicknesses, many villages were able to maintain their traditional society, especially in the Kayah villages and the villages of other sub-Karenni groups that practice the traditional religion[1]. This practice of healing was seen purposefully for calling souls or spirits back into the patient's body. According to Mu Preh Law, villagers believed that when a person became sick, it was because an evil spirit took their soul or that the soul was lost somewhere else.

[1] Traditional religion, refers to the Kay Htoe Boe religion, involves the practice of ritual and animal sacrifice. Most people perceived the Karenni traditional religion as animist. Thus, the terms traditional religion and animist, used in this research, mean the same.

Consequently, they believed that calling the soul back into the body would definitely heal the patient. To do this, it required spirit rites through the process of sacrificing an animal, conducting a divination, and using a feather to paint a chicken or pig's blood on the patient's body.

More importantly, the chicken bone divination was considered as a curative ritual. It was also used as the divination for the well-being of individuals and households. Many villagers, who practiced the traditional religion and lived in the remote areas, rarely went for modern medical treatment. Thus, most of them had no experience of receiving medical treatment at a hospital or clinic. Pleh Reh, male, 40 years old, described that his family had never been to hospital or clinic, and they have no knowledge about medical treatment. When he or his siblings became sick, his parents just asked the elders to conduct a chicken bone divination and they became better. Consequently, traditional healing was the primary choice made by the villagers. Villagers, who did not practice the traditional religion and lived in the remote areas, went to a hospital or clinic for medical treatment in a faraway town or an urban area. However, the practice of traditional healing was still practiced by some villagers who had converted to other religions, especially the Catholic followers. Thus, this demonstrated that traditional healing remained an important regular practice for most villages in Karenni State.

3.2.4 Social System: the Rule of Traditional Leader (Kay Jar)

Throughout Karenni State where traditional religion is practiced, the people in villages and districts alike maintained their traditional social system with the rule of the Kay Jar[2] or traditional leader. The Kay Jar position resembled that of the district governor. He administrated the village's affairs related to social and culture matters, and worked closely

[2] A Kay Jar is the influential leader in a village. One large village had one Kay Jar and small villages shared one Kay Jar. The Kay Jar was selected by the villagers and his appropriation to the position was determined by a chicken bone divination and the recommendation of elders.

with the village headman. Mu Preh Law explained that the Kay Jar was an influential leader.

Prominently, the Kay Jar acted as a mediator for disputes or minor wrong doings between individuals or households in the village. His judgment was seen as trustworthy and fair; so he became a respectful leader. Khu Poe Reh, a 47 years old man and the current BMN cultural chairman, described that, in the village, they did not need to have a judiciary or court system because the Kay Jar played that role in mediating and resolving the conflicts in the village. Khu Poe Reh also gave a clear example of how the Kay Jar mediated a small conflict among villagers. He said that if a villager's cow got into other person's yard, a kind of incidence which violated the rules in the village, the Kay Jar had to mediate it, even though it was just small conflict between individuals. It seemed in the rural village life, police or law enforcement was not necessary there. Moreover in cultural aspects, the Kay Jar led ritual practices and annual traditional festivals. Among other traditional healers, the Kay Jar was the most prominent one. Mu Preh Law described that Karenni traditional religious practitioners believe that when a certain number of community members became sick at the same time, this could mean that a bad spirit had entered into the village. It could also indicate that those ill people's souls were lost somewhere; so the souls needed to be called back. Also, when many villagers were ill at the same time, they would ask the Kay Jar to conduct a chicken bone divination or to make an animal sacrifice, usually with pigs, to expel the bad spirit and recall the villagers' souls back. This was a significant example of how the Kay Jar played his influential role in leading the spiritual rites or sacred space of the village. Furthermore, Kay Jar also led the annual ritual festivals. Obviously, the ruling system, at the village level, prominently depends upon the Kay Jar. Bo Sein Bui, a 55 years old and the former camp leader described that because the Kay Jar was

highly respected among the villagers, a former Kay Jar was asked to communicate with the refugee arrivals in 1996 to manage for their proper settling places or zone in the camp. Differentially from their pre-displacement, refugees now experience a new ruling system that shifted from the Kay Jar to camp administration.

3.2.5 Cultural System and Interaction between Karenni Sub-Groups

The cultural system inside Karenni State is well-preserved in a traditional manner as each respective sub-ethnic group is continually practicing their annual rituals. The villages' diversities of culture, religions, and traditions are distinctively seen. For example, each sub-ethnic group settled in villages according to their respective ethnic backgrounds, such as Kayah, Manu, Manaw, Paku-Karen, and Kayan villages. The Kayah villages are the most numerous villages in the Karenni State and most of these villages practice the traditional religion. On the other hand, the Paku-Karen, in Mawchi, practices Christianity, and the Shan group, which settled in Shadaw, maintains Buddhist practices.

In regard to the social interaction between sub-Karenni groups, Lung Mang, 51 years old, ethnic Shan, mentioned that, in the Shan village, only Shan people lived there. However, they had interrelationships with the Kayah villages through their attendance at the Kayah religious practices or festivals. In village life, the contact within the Karenni sub-ethnic groups was not on a regular daily basis, but rather through occasional social contact.

This section illustrates that the various sub-Karenni groups rarely came into contact or interacted. Each group tended to live separately in their own villages and identify themselves with their sub-ethnic group. But in the displacement, the Karenni sub-groups have come to contact, interacted together, and shared the displacement moment. Thus, the next section will explore what caused the Karenni to become displaced and

how they share the experiences of fleeing, spending life along the borders, and crossing the border to the refugee camp.

3.3 Political Conflicts and Life at the Borders

> "Burmese soldiers arrested most of adult males in our village, including me, and accused us of being KNPP insurgent supporters. During the investigation, they tied us, and beat and hit us badly. We were tortured for a week. They asked us what the information we gave to the Karenni soldiers. We told the Burmese soldiers that we only provided them with food. We further explained to them that our village was located by a roadside which both the Burmese soldiers and the Karenni soldiers passed by. Thus, the Karenni soldiers always came and stopped by our village to get food and then continued on the way with their patrolling. We were just villagers and did not have any weapons; so we could not refuse both sides whenever they asked us to do something". (Mr. A, 65 years old man, February, 2016)

This situation, narrated by Mr. A, former village headman in Bawlakae Township happened in 1994 prior to the forced relocation strategy implemented by the Burmese military government. He explained the situation and how the villagers were victimized by the conflict and fighting. The villagers preferred to live peacefully in their original village and did not want to support either side. Unfortunately, due to their ethnic link, the Burmese soldiers always accused villagers to be KNPP supporters or having an involvement with the KNPP. The villagers lived in fear amidst the fighting, not only because of the shelling and shooting, but also in fear of physical harm or even persecution if they were caught and accused of being KNPP supporters. Obviously, the villagers were directly affected by the fighting between the Burmese soldiers and the Karenni insurgents. The political conflict, which led to the armed confrontations, was the main cause of the forced displacement.

It is commonly known that Myanmar has a prolonged ethnic conflict which has caused large number of ethnic minorities to forcibly displace along the Thai-Myanmar border. Decades of political conflict in Karenni State arose when the then Karenni States' leaders continually insisted upon maintaining independence by refusing to join the accession to the Union of Burma. Yet, refusing to be part of newly-independent Burma did not bring the real self-autonomous to the Karenni States. Rather, the Burmese government continually intervened in Karenni internal affairs and launched an

aggressive oppression inside the Karenni States. The main purpose of Burmese government oppression was to secure control of the natural resources inside the Karenni States and bring them into their new Union of Burma under a central political control. To accomplish this, the Burmese government cracked down on the Karenni opposition groups by capturing and killing the key Karenni leader which later brought mass changes to Karenni politics. Subsequently, the oppression provoked the Karenni political groups, who had been insisting on the Karenni States' independent status since the British colonial era, to launch their armed oppositions against the Burmese military invasion, starting in 1948. The Karenni resistance groups began to form political and armed groups, and patrol along the Karenni States' frontier. Their political wing was called the Karenni Revolutionary National Council[3] (KRNC) and the armed wing was called the United Karenni States Independence Army. After four decades of fighting, the Karenni resistance groups eventually withdrew to the eastern bank of the Salween River and then to the Thai border. They were the first group taking refuge in Thailand and followed later by more waves of Karenni refugees fleeing to the Thai border camps.

The Karenni refugees fled to Thailand in waves/phases during three different time periods. The first border crossing movement to Thailand, by Karenni refugees, occurred in the late era of the Burmese dictator, General Ne Win, and his government, the so-called State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)[4]. The Karenni resistance members, KNPP, and their supporters were the major groups who were scattered along the border because of political or economic reasons. According to a former KNPP leader, from the 1950s to the early 1990s, the KNPP was able to exercise their armed activities and protect their civilian supporters, who were mostly their family members or relatives on the eastern bank of the Salween River. They were also able to control the border trade routes from Karenni State and Southern Shan State into Thailand. The KNPP's main source of income was the taxation of border traders. Civilians, who could not bear the SLORC oppression or sympathized with the KNPP's nationalist aspirations, joined the KNPP movement by crossing from the SLORC-controlled areas in the interior of Karenni State to reside in the KNPP-controlled areas. The KNPP

[3] The Karenni National Revolutionary Council was the former name of the KNPP and initially established by the people who formed the Karenni revolutionist groups after World War II.
[4] The State Law and Order Restoration Council refers to the former Burmese military government after the era of General Ne Win.

established villages for civilians near the Thai border and close to the KNPP's political headquarters, but far from Karenni Army (KA) bases. Two of these villages were Ban Huay Pulong and Thana Kwai, opposite from Thailand's Mae Hong Son Province. This setting protected civilians and KNPP's leaders from being attacked directly by the SLORC because they were patrolling the Salween River border with Thailand. At the same time, it made it easier to administer and manage the civilian population and movements. During the time of increased border trade in the late 1970s and 1980s, villagers, who were in the KNPP-controlled areas, frequently crossed back and forth to the Thai border villages and towns, like Ban Nai Soi and Mae Hong Son, on foot to buy clothes, food, medicine, and get healthcare service.

From 1985 to 1995, there was much political turMOIl in Burma with the human rights abuses and violations reaching a peak in the country. After the students' uprising in 1988, the KNPP welcomed the fleeing students who formed the All Burma Student Democratic Front (ABSDF)[5] in the KNPP-controlled areas. To destroy the ABSDF bases and KNPP headquarters in Ban Huay Pulong, the Burmese military launched a heavy attack. Consequently, the civilians and the KNPP leaders were forced to flee to Thailand at Ban Huay Pu Keng and Huay Mor in 1989. They were able to return after the KA (Karenni Army) regained the areas.

Immediately after the second Burmese military coup in 1992, there were further heavy and constant attacks against Ban Thana Kwai and Ban Na Ong in 1993. Large numbers of Karenni villagers, and KNPP and ABSDF members fled to Ban Pang Kwai on the Thai border. These Karenni people were allowed by the Thai government to take temporary refuge on the Thai border. During those years, they were not yet recognized as refugees by the UNHCR. The KNPP took the responsibility to take care of their people by providing food. The KNPP also requested a Christian missionary organization to provide food assistance to the people affected by the fighting. This

[5] ABSDF refers to the student groups who protested in 1988 against the Burmese dictatorship, fled to the border areas, and formed student armies in areas controlled by the ethnic armed resistance groups.

organization, later known as the Burma Border Consortium (BBC)[6], gave food rations to the Karenni people in those previous camps.

The affected population moved many times from the KNPP villages to the Thai border camps. It could be said they spent their lives on two borders, crossing back and forth many times during the fighting. When the Burmese soldiers did not attack, the villagers remained living in the villages. But when the Burmese soldiers approached or attacked, the villagers had to flee into the jungle on the Thai borderline. Even when on the borderline, they were still fleeing from the shelling and shooting which came onto the Thai side of the border. Their lives were fleeing again and again. Khu Ei Reh, a 64 years old man, the former Camp 3 leader, narrated about their lives at the two borders:

> "The first wave of refugees was mostly the families of the KNPP members, KA soldiers, and Karenni villages who lived in the KNPP-controlled areas. The KNPP villages and the headquarters' village were attacked by the Burmese soldiers numerous times. Many of us fled straight to the Thai territory and took refuge in the unofficial permitted areas. We lived in Saw
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> Yo Lae near the Ban Kwai zone in the Thai border camp. This camp was very near the border of Burma or the Burmese military-occupied area. We moved back and forth from Saw Yo Lae to the KNPP headquarters and villages. When the Burmese soldiers attacked, we moved to Saw Yo Lae. In 1991, Saw Yo Lae was not a safe place anymore; we were badly attacked. So, we moved to settle in the former Camp 3 and this camp was the first camp recognized as a temporary shelter for those who were affected by the fighting.
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> While fleeing, we could not bring any property with us. We left all our property in the jungle; we only brought rice and pots. More than that, the move from camp-to-camp really affected the lives of children, especially their education. The children could not receive a proper education since they had to move most of the time and the schools were rebuilt many times in a new camp. The children, in the camp, experienced constant fleeing with most of their childhood life spent in the jungle." (Khu Ei Reh, June, 2016)

From his narrative story, Khu Ei Reh clearly illustrated how life at the border was unsecured and uncertain. While feeing many times from the fighting, their status as displaced people or refugees was not clearly defined or accepted because they still crossed back to the KNPP villages. Because of the frequent and heavy attacks on the

[6] Burma Border Consortium (BBC) was the former name of the TBC. It initially provided food assistance to the Karen and Karenni people who fled or were otherwise affected by the fighting and had settled on the Thai border since 1985. It was established by Christian missionary groups.

Karenni civilians in the border camp, these affected people were forced to flee again to more secure camps, farther from the border on the Thai side. While in a camp on the Thai side, their existence of being affected by the fighting was clearly seen. It was not until 1994 that the UNHCR recognized these people as refugees while the Thai government considered them as displaced people who had temporarily fled from the fighting. The first wave of Karenni refugees were settled in the former Karenni Refugee Camps 1, 2, 3 and 4 in the Mueang District, and the Karenni Refugee Camp 5 in the Khunyuam District, both in Thailand's Mae Hong Son Province. The camps were

established according to the natural border routes where the refugees entered into Thailand. The Thai government later consolidated the initial five Karenni refugee camps into two camps. The Karenni refugee camps, during that time, were not as large as today and scattered along the border.

After the first groups were settled in the camps, the fighting in Karenni State continued and the conflict-affected population increased significantly from 1995-6 as a consequence of the forced relocation strategy. This resulted in the second wave of refugees, fleeing from conflicted-affected villages, who arrived in the camps beginning in 1996. In discussing about life during the conflict, many refugees from this second period, told about the oppression they endured from the Burmese soldiers in their village during the fighting against Karenni resistance soldiers since the 1970s. The oppression was in the form of forced labor such as being forced by Burmese soldiers to be a porter[7]. Some people were accused and investigated as KNPP supporters. Furthermore, the villagers' livestock and food were often confiscated, without compensation, by the Burmese soldiers, who patrolled around the village.Many villagers in the conflict areas did not make their journey to the Thai border camp before 1996 because they thought that they could bear the intolerant moments and that the oppression would be over soon. Actually, many of them felt strongly attached to their homeland and did not want leave their homeland. Furthermore, some of them thought positively about the situation after the signing of a ceasefire agreement in 1995 between the Burmese military government and the KNPP. Reasonably, they expected that there

[7] Porters refer to those villagers who were forced to carry ammunitions, cooking pots, food stuffs, and other heavy items by the Burmese soldiers to their army camps which were a long distance from their village and took many travel days.

would be no more fighting and they would no longer be oppressed by the Burmese soldiers during this ceasefire period. Consequently, they thought they could live normal lives and do their subsistence farming without being fearful of persecution. Unfortunately, the ceasefire agreement was just very brief because the Burmese military government broke the agreement. Villagers were able to enjoy the period of the ceasefire agreement for only four months.

After the ceasefire agreement was broken by the Burmese military government, the situation inside Karenni State became progressively worse. There were a series of intensified fighting between Burmese soldiers and KNPP soldiers in 1996. The Karenni villages in the KNPP-controlled areas, such as Shadaw, and Bawlakae Townships, were targeted and heavily attacked. Many villagers, in Shadaw and Bawlakae Townships who had been suspected as KNPP supporters, were detained and interrogated by the Burmese soldiers. Some were tortured and otherwise persecuted. At that time, the Burmese military implemented a forced relocation strategy, best known as the "Four Cuts Strategy", to "cut" off food, money, information, and new recruits allegedly given by the Karenni villagers to the Karenni insurgents. The villagers, in the conflict areas, were threatened to not support Karenni soldiers and forced to leave their villages within a week to the Burmese military's relocation zones away from the active Karenni insurgent areas. It was estimated that 96 villages were affected by the forced relocation strategy (Grundy-Warr and Wong, 2002).

After the villagers were forced to leave, the Burmese soldiers destroyed some villages by burning down houses and paddy stock, killing livestock, and planting landmines. Pleh Reh, 40 years old man, was one of my several informants whose houses and villages were burnt down. He related that, when he and other villagers fled and hid in the jungle, they could still see smoke from the burning houses. This narration makes it clear that many Karenni villages in the conflict areas were burnt down and destroyed which resulted in a large number of the Karenni villagers in the conflict areas becoming homeless. Some villagers moved to the relocation zones as ordered by the Burmese soldiers. Others hid and spent life in the jungle as internal displaced persons (IDPs) for varying periods of time or crossed the border into Thailand. Bo Gha Nga Reh, 58 years old, former village headman in Shadaw Township, related that the relocation zone was like a concentration camp where people had to share houses and there were no food or

available livelihoods. Therefore, his villagers instantly fled and hid in the jungle for a short period of time before they finally crossed the Thai border and went directly to a Thai border camp. He further described that, during their journey to the camp, they received help from Karenni soldiers who accompanied them and showed the route to the Thai camp. Several informants narrated how life, hiding in the jungle and journeying to the Thai border camp, was troubling and difficult. Mr. A, former village headman, related that the Burmese soldiers sent a notice ordering the villagers to move to the relocation zone within one week. The notice said that all villagers must arrive to the relocation zone within one week or otherwise the village would be burnt down and the villagers would be killed.

The former village headman and his villagers just ignored the letter. They did not move to the relocation zone as ordered. The Burmese soldiers became angry, came to the village, and ordered the former village chief to take all the villagers to the relocation zone within three days. To enforce this order, the Burmese soldiers took three men from the village as hostages and threatened that if the villagers did not arrived within three days, the three hostages would be killed. The former village headman with the agreement of the villagers decided to take the risk not go to relocation zone as ordered again. He reasoned that the villagers would have an unsure life in the relocation zone. Thus, he felt that it was more preferable to risk three men hostages rather than risk losing the lives of all the villagers. He led the villagers to hide in the jungle before they made their way to the Thai border camp.

Life in the jungle was a most difficult period for villagers since they had to live together in a group and always be cautious of the approach of the Burmese soldiers. Mr. A mentioned that they spent one month in the jungle with little or no food. Furthermore, the crying of infants caused the villagers to argue among themselves because the sound of the crying might draw the attention of patrolling Burmese soldiers. While in the jungle, some of them became sick, but did not know the cause. Others died on the way when the group was unable to help them anymore. Along the way, the Karenni soldiers guided them to the Thai border camp and warned them to be aware of the Burmese military patrols in the area. When the Burmese soldiers were patrolling the road they planned to use, they had to turn back which caused more time in the jungle. Due to the unsecured journey, it took more days and weeks to cross the Thai border.

Not all forced relocated villagers or IDPs arrived in the former Camp 2 in 1996 since some of them hid in jungle and moved from place-to-place inside Karenni State. Some arrived in the former Camp 2 in later years after spending lives in the jungle or conflict areas as IDPs. Most arrivals, from 1996 to 1999, were the villagers who were affected by the forced relocation strategy in the eastern townships, especially the Shadaw and Bawlakhe Townships of Karenni State. After 1999, there were still quite a number of villagers, affected by the forced relocation strategy, who arrived in the camp. However, the numbers were as not as high as the previous four years. Those refugees, who arrived in the first and second periods, have been identified or recognized as populations affected by the conflict and fighting with their arrival in the Thai camps during the conflict period. In contrast, there were a number of Karenni villagers who arrived in the Thai camps during the post-conflict period or when there was no major fighting along the border or in the conflict zones. The latest flow, or the third wave of refugees to the Thai camps, was villagers who could not bear life hardships, such as poor education and healthcare services. This group came to the Thai camps after 2005 with some still arriving in the camps as recent as 2015.

Thus, there were three various waves of refugee migration to the Thai border camps. The first wave of the refugee movement was from 1989 to 1994; these were those affected by the attacks on the KNPP's headquarters in Ban Thana Kwai and Na Ong. In this group, most of them were KNPP members, families, and relatives, and the 8888 Students. The second wave of the Karenni refugees began with those who were affected by the forced relocation strategy and made their journey directly to the Thai border camps. It also included those who arrived in the camps in later years after hiding and spending life as IDPs in the jungle. Significantly, the major influx of Karenni refugees into Thailand was in 1996. By that time, there were five Karenni refugee camps. The third wave of refugees started with those who arrived in the camps during the post-conflict period, just after 2005 with a significant increase in 2009.

Those refugees, who came in different periods of time, were placed into different camps. In the Mueang District, the refugees from the former Camp 1 were consolidated with the former Camp 2 in 1996. Then in 2002, the former Camp 3 was relocated to the former Camp 2 which is now known as the "Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp or Karenni

Refugee Site 1". In the Khunyuam District, the former Camp 4 was close to the former Camp 5, so they were consolidated together into the former Camp 5 in 1999-2000. Today, it is known as the "Ban Mae Surin Camp or Karenni Refugee Site 2". The Karenni refugee camps were consolidated into two camps, or sites, according a Thai government policy to decrease the number of refugee camps. The Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp was one of the results of consolidated camps. This situation will be explained further within the following section.

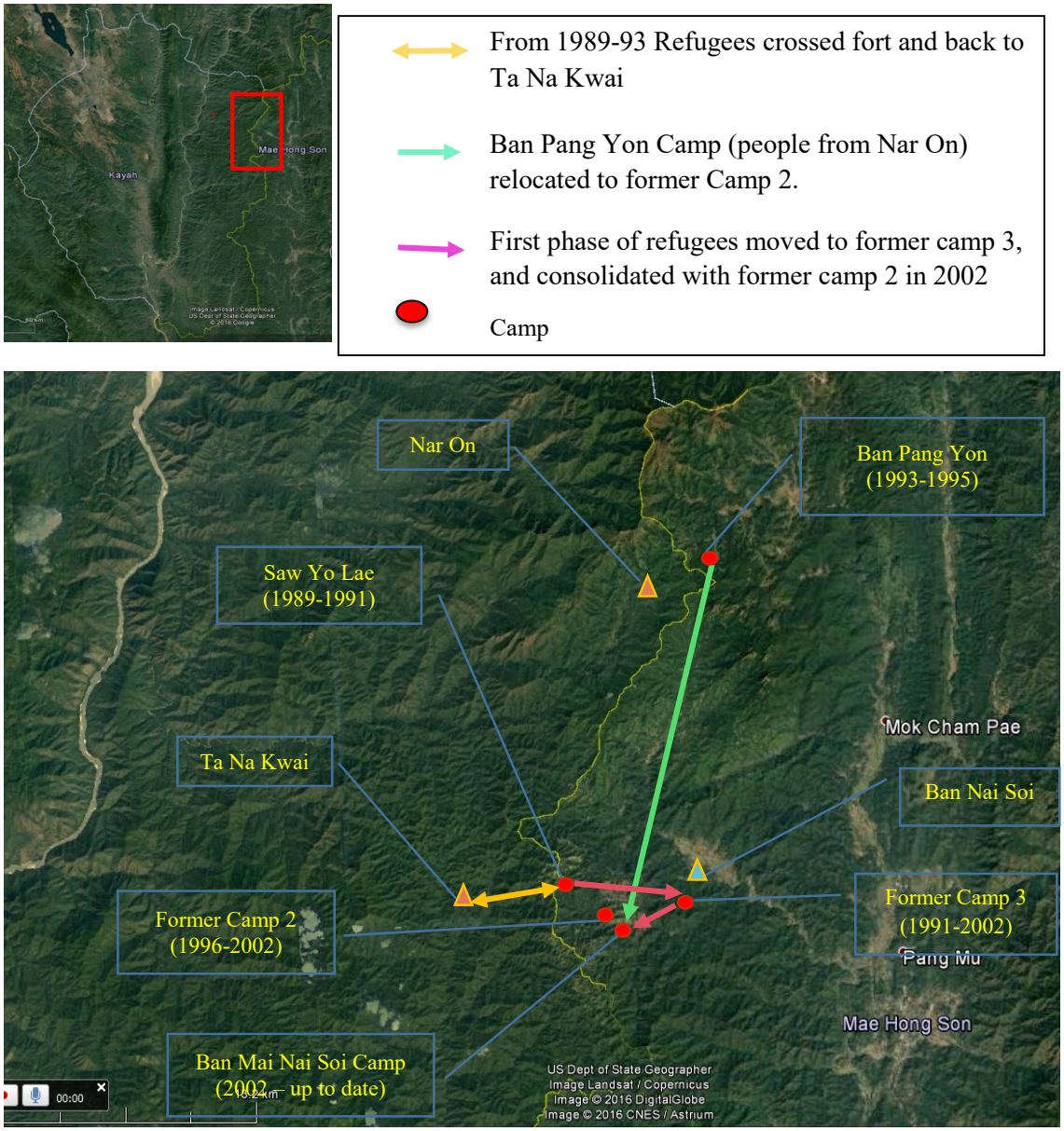

Figure 3.1 A Map of Migrating Route and Camp Settlings

3.4 Historical Background and the Profile of the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp

The Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp is located in the remote jungle along a rough road which has heavy mud during rainy season. The Karenni refugees call the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp or as Noe Pa Ah[8] in the Kayah dialect; while outsiders and refugees officially call it Sa Kha Tee[9] in the Burmese language which means Camp 1. Local Thai-Shan villagers, in Ban Nai Soi, called it as Hauy Mor[10] because the camp is geographically located in a basin. These various names of the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp sound interesting and somewhat complex; however, these various names are not the subject of this research. Rather, this short discussion reflects some of the historical complexity with the establishment of the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp. Added to all of this, it was officially named the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp Temporary Shelter when it became the new consolidated camp at the time that the three Karenni refugee camps were combined into one camp. The Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp was initially established in 1996 when the Royal Thai Army and Thai Border Patrol Police relocated the former Camp 1[11] and Camp 2[12] to the area of Ban Pang Kwai (BK) and Ban Tractor (BT) (Prungchit, 2008). Following later in 2003, the Karenni refugees, in the former Camp 3[13]which located near Ban Nai Soi village, were relocated to the former Camp 2, forming the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp as we know it today.

Mu Preh Law described that, when they arrived in the former Camp 2, they were just a small population and scattered around the northern part of the camp in Ban Pang Kwai which located is near the Thai border adjacent to Karenni State. The rest of the camp

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[8] "*Noe Pa Ah*" is a phrase in the Kayah language and means "*heavy mud*". Many Kayah refugees call the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp as Noe Pa Ah. Other sub-ethnic groups also recognize this name. Most Kayah elder and ordinary refugees always introduce themselves as one who are from Noe Pa Ah

[9] This means Camp 1 in English. The term of "*Sa Kha Tee*" has been officially used by the Karenni Refugee Committee, Camp Committee, camp-based organizations, refugees, NGOs, and outsiders.

[10] Local Shan-Thai villagers called it "*Huay Mor*" in the Shan language. They recognize this name because the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp is located among steams and basins. They also call the refugee laborers, who work on their farms and travel to the village, as "*Khon Hauy Mor*" which means the "*people from Huay Mor*". Huay Mor was the first place that the Karenni civilians, and the KNPP leaders and members took refuge in 1989 before they moved to a more secure place in the former Camp 3 where it was close to Ban Nai Soi.

[11] The Karenni refugees, who scattered at Pang Yong along the border, were relocated in the former Camp 1 in 1995.

[12] The former Camp 2 accommodated the newly-arriving Karenni refugees who fled from the ongoing fighting inside Karenni State and were affected by the forced relocation strategy of the Burmese military government in 1996. Those, who fled to the camp, were ordinary villagers from the villages in Shadaw Township.

[13] The former Camp 3, named Ban Mai, was established in 1991 and located near Ban Nai Soi village.

area was forest. It was the time when refugees from the former Camp 3 were relocated in their camp resulting in an increase in the camp's population. The Thai Ministry of Interior (MOI)[14] relocated these new arrivals in the southern part of the camp. As a result, the camp areas were eventually extended into the forest. Now, there are twenty sections in the camp. The camp was divided into two zones, BK and BT.

Moreover, he also described that many Karenni refugees from Camp 3 spoke Burmese, whereas he and the people from the former Camps 1 and 2 rarely spoke Burmese. The reason was the population from the former Camp 3 was from different ethnic backgrounds and some of them had been part of, or had been involved in, the Karenni resistance movement (Dudley, 2010). Some Kayan and Kayaw groups that formerly settled in Section 6 in the former Camp 3 also moved to the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp in the following years (David, 2008). Therefore, the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp brought together a diverse population in the new consolidation camp.

3.5 Community Structure in the Camp

Like the other refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border, the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp has its own administrative system or self-designed governing bodies. The Karenni Refugee Committee (KnRC) is the largest administration unit, overseeing the two Karenni refugee camps. Within a camp, the Camp Committee manages the day-to-day camp affairs and works with the CBOs. Both the Camp Committee and the CBOs receive financial and technical support from the NGOs. Under the Camp Committee, the camp is divided into sections which are the smallest administrative units. Each section has a committee called the Section Committee which is headed by a section leader who responsible for the section's daily affairs. The role of the Camp Committee is not only to manage the camp affairs, but it also takes the leading role in Karenni traditions and

cultural preservation. In the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp, the Camp Committee therefore cooperates with a committee called the Ban Mai Nai Soi (BMN) Camp Cultural Committee, to organize and run the annual festivals, and the traditional and cultural events in the camp. This next section will explore the BMN Camp Cultural Committee

[14] The MOI (Ministry of Interior) administers the local district in monitoring the refugee camps.

which is the most important committee engaged in the process of preserving the Karenni cultural and tradition practices in the camp.

3.5.1 BMN Camp Cultural Committee and its Role

This section explores the historical background of the BMN Camp Cultural Committee and its role. The BMN Camp Cultural Committee has preserved and led the Dee Ku and Kay Htoe Boe Festivals. This Committee is different from the Karenni National Day Committee which I will discuss in a later chapter. But both committees have the involvement and support of the KNPP. Since the two annual ritual festivals were the reinvented, the former traditional leaders in the Karenni villages became the key actors involved in the process of reinvention and preservation of the continuity of the two annual festivals.

Actually, the BMN Camp Cultural Committee became active in 2012 after the consolidation of the Karenni Cultural Committee members into the camp's advisory board. The Karenni Cultural Committee had been involved with the worship ceremonies and was the ritual center of the Kay Htoe Boe religion practitioners (referred to as traditional religion or animism). During 1999-2011, the Karenni Cultural Committee was separated from the camp cultural committee structure, but the Karenni Cultural Committee played a significant role in overseeing and supporting the camp cultural committee. To comprehend how the BMN Camp Cultural Committee came to take significant role in leading the process, it is necessary to understand how the Karenni Cultural Committee was established and became first involved in the camp's cultural affairs.

The Karenni Cultural Committee was initially established in 1999 by a group of former Kay Jar's, former village cultural leaders, and KNPP's members. Mu Preh Law narrated that he and a group of former Kay Jar had discussed about the continuity of the traditional practices in the camp with the KNPP. He and former Kay Jar Oo Reh were recommended by

the KNPP senior leaders to work diligently to preserve the continuity of the traditional practices in the camp. At that time, Kay Jar Oo Reh was selected as the chairperson of the Karenni Cultural Committee. The selection was done by the chicken bone divination and the agreement of the members of the Karenni Cultural Committee and the KNPP. The role of the chairperson is to lead the practices and work with the Committee to oversee the organizing of the festivals or rituals in the Karenni refugee camps. In the initial years, the KNPP was involved in the Committee. The KNPP helped the Committee to negotiate with the MOI or the local district governor for allowing the Karenni refugees to carry on their traditional practices and use some local resources.

For the structure of the Committee, the Karenni Cultural Committee incorporated KNPP members in leading and organizing the festivals in refugee camps. The Karenni Cultural Committee was under a department of the KNPP since the KNPP remained actively involved in the Committee. The members of the Karenni Cultural Committee consisted of other former Kay Jar's and young people from the camp's youth group.

In the meantime, the two annual cultural festivals had become camp affairs. As a result, the Camp Committee established the BMN Camp Cultural Committee. Bo Gha Nga Reh, former village head of Daw Kra Aww village, was assigned as the BMN Camp Cultural Committee chairperson in order to work with the Karenni Cultural Committee in organizing and facilitating two annual cultural festivals in each year. As communal cultural festivals, the sections in the camp celebrated the festivals on the same days. The date of celebration of the festivals was determined by a chicken bone divination conducted annually by the BMN Camp Cultural Committee.

The Karenni Cultural Committee established various public events to draw in participants from other religious beliefs, such as sports events, stage show nights, and traditional dancing competitions at the two

festivals and the Kay Htoe Boe Grand Festival in 1999. Over 1999-2012, the public events were greatly supported and funded by the KNPP. Simultaneously, there were community contributions from the Karenni refugees themselves. During 1999-2002, the refugees, from the former Camps 1, 2, and 3 attended each others' festivals. The hosting camp was financially supported and helped by the Karenni Cultural Committee. Over 1999-2010, the Karenni Cultural Committee actively played the role of creating and mobilizing a network for the practice of Kay Htoe Boe with other Kayan and Kayah communities in Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand. The other significant role of the Karenni Cultural Committee was raising funds for the two annual cultural festivals in the refugee camp. In recent years, the Karenni Cultural Committee has faced challenges in a continuance of the festivals as the financial support from the KNPP was reduced. Therefore, the Karenni Cultural Committee had to look for alternative financial support, such requesting support from the NGOs through contributing awards or prizes in the sports events and traditional dancing competitions. Each NGO, which worked in the camp, gave contributions for the annual festivals.

After seeing that the festivals in Camp 2 were not as active as in past years, the Karenni Cultural Committee members changed their status to the BMN Camp Cultural Committee Advisory Board in 2012. It can be said that the Karenni Cultural Committee was dissolved, but the BMN Camp Cultural Committee replaced it, yet it was supervised and advised by the former Karenni Cultural Committee members. In 2013, the BMN Camp Cultural Committee, with its camp advisory board, was consolidated into the KNPP's Literacy Department.

In August 2013, there was new selection of the committee members. Khu Poe Reh, 47 years old, Kay Htoe Boe religion practitioner, was selected as a chairperson. From a conversation with him, it was learnt that he was a Kay Jar back in his village life. He, therefore, had a good experience in leading the two annual festivals and knowledge of the rituals and traditions. When he arrived in the camp, he also continued a role in

leading the annual traditional festivals in his Section 14. Thus, with his previous position and role as the section cultural leader, he was considered to very suitable for this position on the BMN Cap Cultural Committee. In interviewing Khu Poe Reh, he explained that, in recent years, the preservation of the two annual rituals festivals and traditions have been integrated through the process of the cultural transmission of traditional knowledge and the creation of networks with the Karenni communities inside Karenni State. He also mentioned that the Committee plays an important role in transmitting traditional knowledge. In particular, the elder members, on the advisory board, actively educated youth about the ritual performances and the historical myth of the two annul rituals. Through the process of the preservation and organization of the two annual rituals festivals, it can be said that the BMN Camp Cultural Committee has been able to develop and exercise their agency.

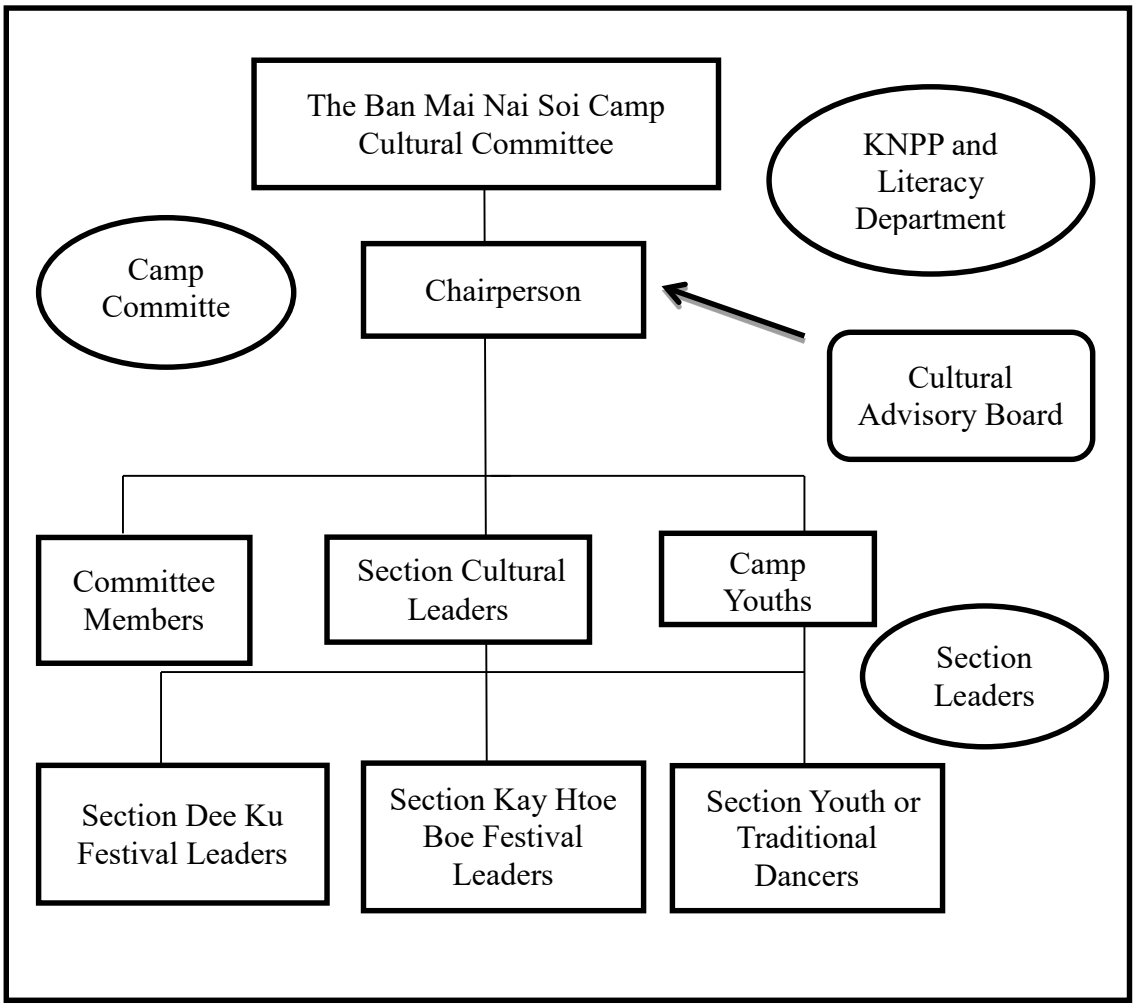

Figure 3.2 Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp Cultural Committee's structure

The figure above shows the structure of BMN Camp Cultural Committee and how the Committee involves the sections' traditional leaders and youth into the structure. It also depicts how the Camp Committee and external actors, particular the KNPP, are incorporate into the structure. The Committee works closely with the Camp Committee in leading the annual festivals in the camp.

In this respect, it is also greatly supported with funding and advice by the KNPP Literacy Department. The Camp Committee is involved in the work of informing camp residents, facilitating the venue, and helping to negotiate with the local Thai authorities and the NGOs for support of the annual festivals. More importantly, to integrate the section festivals and practices in the camp, the Committee also involves the section cultural leaders in the structure. It does this

so the section cultural leaders can inform the section residents about the annual festivals and integrate the practice of the section into the camp. Furthermore, the section cultural leaders also gather the section residents to become involved in the camp, especially the youth. The Committee also established the youth group to help in organizing the festivals, lead the traditional dancing performances in the camp, and train the section youth and children to learn the traditional dancing patterns or skills. In each section, the annual festivals are also facilitated by the section leaders who help the traditional leaders to make announcements and gather the residents to participate in the festivals. Thus, the BMN Soi Camp Cultural Committee is the central group which incorporates key community and external actors to become involved in the continual process of organizing and celebrating the two annual festivals of Dee Ku and Kay Htoe Boe.

3.6 Life as Karenni Refugees in the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp

The Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp is considered as a protracted refugee situation because the camp has existed for more than two decades. It has been hosting pre-existing refugees and a flow of new refugees over this period with the refugees crossing the border, relocating in a consolidated camp, being employed as illegal migrants in Thailand, and resettling to third countries. Therefore, the population number has been unstable. The population numbers began to change in the first year of the resettlement program in 2005 with the increasing number of post-conflict arrival refugees.

Since then, the MOI and UNHCR have classified refugees into different statuses, determined by the reasons for, and times of, arrival. The affected population from the conflict or fighting is categorized as registered refugees with the post-conflict arrivals categorized as unregistered refugees. Some of latter post-conflict arrivals are granted PRE status, waiting for the verification process to be registered as refugees and to be able to re-unite with their families in third countries. Not all who have PRE status are granted the status of registered refugees because the verification process determines whether the reason for coming to camp is that of fleeing from persecution.

Table 3.1 Refugee Status

Status	Post-2002 Camp Consolidation	Post-Resettlement 2011	Recent 2015
BMN Registered	17,883	11,263	7,785
PRE Status	No new Arrival Record or had not arrived this year	1,032	707
Unregistered	No new Arrival Record or had not arrived this year	2,300	2,963

The above table shows the number of refugees by different status. The unregistered refugees tended to gradually increase over 2006-2015 while the registered refugees gradually decreased. Obviously, the circumstances and situations of the camp have changed since the post-resettlement. Therefore, this section will explore refugees' lives and the situation of the camp based on two periods of time: pre-and post-resettlement. Additionally, this section will also discuss the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp's connections and relations with other communities, particularly with the local Thai community.

3.6.1The Camp Prior to the Resettlement

The traditional refugees[15] were the pre-existing group in the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp, or the former Camp 1, located in the Ban Kwai area. They were later joined by the former Camp 2 inhabitants who arrived in the Camp in 1994. After the consolidation of Camps 1 and 2, people still called it Camp 2. The former

[15] I use the term "*traditional refugees*", from Dudley (2010), in identifying a group of refugees from a background of animism and lesser education, and residing in the northern camp during 1996.

Camp 2 was located in a remote and less accessible area compared to the former Camp 3. There were just a few middle schools in the former Camp 2. Students, in the former Camp 2, had to continue high school in the former Camp 3. Therefore, the distance and time to transport students to the schools in the former Camp 3 were significantly increased. All the Karenni refugee camps were connected as the refugees travelled to other camps regularly, in the earlier years of the camps, for exchanging visits with their relatives and friends, especially during the annual ritual festivals, and attending high schools and post-ten schools.

Significantly, the former Camp 3 was a more accessible location than the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp because it was situated near the local Thai village of Ban Nai Soi. The camp residents could easily contact foreign volunteer teachers. Because of the availability of foreigner teachers in the former Camp 3, students, at that time, received a good education especially in English. Thus, the former Camp 3 became the center for the Karenni refugee camps to contact the outside world and get foreign aid. It also became the education center for all the Karenni refugee students who wanted to pursue a post-high school education. It was regrettable that the former Camp 3 did not last long. All camp residents were forced to relocate to the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp, or the former Camp 2, due to complaints from local Thai villagers that some former Camp 3 residents had trespassed into their farms and gardens. In fact, the reason behind the relocation of the former Camp 3 was to benefit local traders and businessmen because the more remote the camp, the more refugees had to rely upon them.

In 2002, all the sections in the former Camp 3 were relocated to the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp. The former Section 6, the “Kayan Long Neck Village” which was designed to attract tourists, and the former Section 7, the Dohkhita village which was the place for the disabled former Karenni soldiers, were not relocated at that time. Not only did the disabled refugees live in the former Section 7, but also the KNPP family members or those who were previously involved in the KNPP lived there as well. Those two former sections were still considered a part of Ban Nai Soi village. However, the refugee status of the two former section members, estimated around 961 people, was still recognized. Therefore, they were entitled

to receive food rations. The two former sections were recognized as Section 19 of the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp (TBBC Report, 2002). Since the relocation of the former Camp 3, both a high school and a post-ten school were rebuilt in the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp and this contributed to a great change in the education system. It had been integrated and upgraded through a combination of teachers and material resources. Many primary and middle schools were expanded to have enough space for larger numbers of students.

The camp consolidation brought significant changes, not just in education, but it also brought diversity in term of religions and ethnography into the camp. The former Camp 3 residents were mostly Baptist and Catholic. Therefore, more churches were built in the camp. However, the Karenni traditional religion, or animism, still remained as the dominant religion in the camp even after the consolidation. The relationship with the local Thai village was extended into a trading relationship. More and more local Thai traders supplied goods to the small grocery shops in the camp. Simultaneously, the Karenni refugees also walked to Ban Nai Soi to buy goods and commodities as they had in the past, but now it was more distant. Apart from being trading partners, the local people also played a key role by transporting food rations and shelter-building supplies to the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp. The truck suppliers were paid by the NGOs. After the camp relocated and as the population in the camp increased, food supplies were increasingly delivered by those local suppliers. Therefore, more local people were hired in the transportation sector. This is how relocating a refugee camp also brought some benefits to the local Thai people.

Meanwhile, the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp also supplied the daily paid labor to Ban Nai Soi village and other nearby villages. Many Karenni refugees worked as seasonal laborers in locally-owned gardens and paddy fields. Needless to say, the local villagers relied heavily upon the cheap labor from the camp. The local villagers and Karenni refugees became dependent upon one another in terms of livelihoods; but whether it was a fair relationship is questionable. These relationships of trading partners and employer-laborer developed across the time. The Camp also became connected with the Karenni or Kayah communities in Thailand through exchange visits for rituals and maintaining the Karenni

traditional practices. As the population in the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp became increased, the Camp became more connected with the local communities.

3.6.2 The Camp in Post-Resettlement

Once the resettlement program was introduced, various changes took place in the Camp, especially a human resources shortage or "brain drain" and a downward swing in the population size. In the 2006, the Karenni refugees began to resettle to third countries. At the same time, the UNHCR and Thai MOI started to classify the number of UNHCR registered and non-registered holders. Because of the opportunity for a better education for the younger generation and a more convenient life in third countries, more households were interested in applying for resettlement, especially the refugees from the former Camp 3.

Of course, only UNHCR registration holders were entitled to apply for resettlement; but there was an exceptional condition for the holders who did not live in the camp's compound. The problem began when the Kayan refugees, especially women who wore brass coiling rings in the tourist attraction site - the so called "Karen Long Neck Village", desired to resettle in a third country. However, the local Thai authorities did not allow them to exercise their right for resettlement. This issue became more complex because of the politics of the issue. As a result, the refugees, who were in that place, Sections 6 and 7 of the former Camp 3, were asked to relocate to the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp if they still desired to retain their registered status and the right to apply for resettlement. More restrictions were applied upon the Kayan women who were seen as belonging to the Thai tourism village by the local Thai authorities. Those women were not allowed to resettle to third countries unless they took their rings off and resided in the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp (David, 2008). Additionally, the residents in the Dohkhita, or the former Section 7, also had to choose their status. This meant that if they wanted to retain their UNHCR registered status, they must reside in the camp. With this condition enforced by the MOI, the residents, in these two former sections, moved to the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp to retain their registered status and obtain right for resettlement.

In 2009, higher numbers of refugee applied for resettlement to third countries, especially to the United States, and consequently, the camp population dramatically decreased. Most notable to resettle were the numerous residents who worked in the CBOs as school teachers and medics. Consequently, the camp began to be faced with human resource shortages in community services, particularly in the education and healthcare sectors. The shortage of highly-experienced and well-trained school teachers became a concern in the camp. For instance, youth, who graduated from the high school with a little or no experience in teaching, had to replace resettled school teachers. Furthermore, the rate of dropout students increased because many of them could not concentrate on their studies while waiting for resettlement. This education crisis in the camp began in 2009. Currently, many high school graduates have become school teachers while others have continued with their post-high school education.

Although the quality of the camp education system was in critical condition, this was the only choice for the new arrivals that came for a better education. Among the new young arrivals that came to the camp to continue their Grade 10 education, I was able to have a brief conversation with Theh Myar, a 29 years old woman, who arrived in 2009. She told me that she was unable to complete Grade 10 in Myanmar since it was very expensive. So, she decided to continue her Grade 10 education in the camp. Because Theh Myar heard that the schools in the camp were free and better than in Myanmar, she and many other young people from Karenni State came to the camp in 2009. Since 2009, the number of students coming to the camp has become higher. Free healthcare services were also another reason given by some new arrivals for coming to the camp. With these two reasons, the new arrivals kept coming to the camp until as recently as 2015. Moe Bue, a 32 years old current Camp Committee chairwoman, described that the population in the camp remained more or less the same because the new arrivals replaced the number of those who resettled. According to her, few new arrivals came to look for business opportunities in the camp such as opening a grocery shop. They also came to gain a UNHCR registration status which would eventually enable them to apply for resettlement.

After the seemingly positive changes in Myanmar's politics or the so-called "democratically-elected parliamentary government", humanitarian assistance, especially the food rations, were dramatically reduced beginning in 2012. And in 2013, the rice ration was reduced to 10 kg per adult per month. Many residents began to worry about their daily family's food security. To manage to have enough to eat, several households began to cultivate dry rice on the hilltops near the camp and even expanded into the forestry area. This cultivation became an important issue for the Thai Forestry Department and District Governor. Moe Boe related that the Thai authorities told the Camp Committee to prohibit the camp residents from any cultivation in the restricted area. The Camp Committee chairwoman also explained that since the food ration cuts, people movements became more difficult to manage. Some households decided to work outside the camp in nearby villages as wage laborers. However, since the wage labor rates are low and not enough to help meet household needs, many people began to work farther away in the town. This puts them at risk of being caught by the Thai police. Simultaneously, many residents went to cultivate food crops and dry rice near the border which was also risky because of landmines. Moe Bue described that more and more residents left the camp to find earnings ever since the food rations were reduced in 2013.

In 2013, apart from the concern of the food ration cut, camp residents began to become nervous due to the rumors about repatriation back to Myanmar. After a survey showed that a group of refugees were willing to take part in a pilot volunteer repatriation program, some camp residents became worried that they would soon be repatriated. From my field work, I learnt that more households applied for resettlement because they had become concerned about being repatriated when the situation in Myanmar was not stable or one of sustainable peace. Now, many households, that had once insisted that they would not resettle but would wait to return home, began to change their minds and started

to apply for third country resettlement. This was because the rumor of repatriation had created fear in those who saw that the situation in Myanmar was not yet ready to welcome refugees back. They were not sure about their safety and security if they were repatriated.

Currently, the camp setting and environment have become more somber than ever before. Left-behind households, which did not apply for resettlement, relate that they are seeing the many new faces of the recent arrivals in the camp, but missing the faces of those neighbors who have been resettled. Pa Reh, 55 years old man, explained that many of his neighbors had resettled to third countries and from the earlier times, only his family was left in the camp. Around his house compound now, there are empty houses from those who have resettled and other houses are now occupied by the new arrivals that came to live in the houses of their relatives who went to third countries. Currently, several households recently resettled to third countries and this has brought significant changes compared to previous years. This has also affected the local Thai villages in terms of trading and the labor workforce. The population decrease has lowered the demand for livelihood supplies and the resettlement of the active daily laborers also affects the local farm owners. The reduction of food assistance and rumors of repatriation have changed the situation in the camp and are stimulating more refugees to apply for resettlement. This has also caused camp residents to go out farther out to look for better paid wages in riskier areas. The refugees' fates have thus become more uncertain.

Because of the length of time spent in the camp, many refugees felt attached to the displacement, especially the children who grew up in the camp and the adults who experienced forced relocating and the physical hardship of journeying. The fear from the past memories of the unsecure lives and losing homes causes them to unwilling return to their homeland. Kue Reh 54 years old, one of those informants who experienced forced relocating, described that they do not have a house and farm anymore, so they cannot return home to resume normal life there. Although refugees could not physically return to home or some are unwilling to return, they are still culturally connected with their home and past way of life through the continuity of traditional or ritual practices

in the camp. Thus, it can be said that, Karenni people in the displacement, have come to see or accept the term of "*refugees*" while they are also struggling to maintain or reconstruct their Karenni identity.

The camp is not solely a space of refuge and place for protection, but it becomes meaningful space where refugees recreate their element of past life, through rituals and certain practices, to maintain and articulate their original identity as a collective one. In this regard, this research will explore how Karenni refugees turn their refuge space into meaningful space through the continuity of the symbolic food, materials, objects, and certain rituals and practices which contribute to the process reconstructing their collective identity.

3.7 Conclusion

The use of the term *"Kayah"* is based upon the preference of the Burmese government to denote a territory, Kayah State, formerly called Karenni State, as well as an ethnic group. On the other hand, the term "*Karenni",* which is continually used in the displacement as a political umbrella term, identifies the Karenni as heterogeneous group and reconstructs a Karenni collective identity.

To conclude, the refugees identify themselves as Karenni to differing degrees depending upon one self's political awareness. The first wave of refugees were from the political and social groups who were involved in the reconstruction or shared dream of an independent Karenni homeland in concert with the KNPP's political aspiration. Conversely, the second wave of refugees, mostly from the background of subsistence farmers who were affected by the forced relocation strategy, had limited or even no awareness about the political conflict and did not relate to the aspiration of Karenni independence. The third wave of post-conflict refugees, who came later, mostly identified themselves as just as ordinary Karennis since this group did not have direct experience with the armed conflicts. Significantly, the self-perceptions of the refugees have been shaped by their experiences of forced displacement. Consequently, the displaced Karenni people have accepted themselves as being a refugee, but also struggling to reconstruct their Karenni identity.

Prominently, this study observed that the Karenni identity, which is formulated through the resistance movement and forced displacement moments, is continually reconstructed

through the invention of commemorative occasions and recreating of the pre-displacement way of life, such as the annual ritual festivals. The following chapters will explore how the Karenni refugees seek to reconstruct their Karenni identity through three communal events. Chapter Four will discuss the Karenni National Day event.