

Chapter 4

Recreating Karenni Community: the Invention of Karenni National Day

Chapter four focuses on the Karenni National Day (KND) event. In this chapter, I will explore how Karenni refugees seek to create a space of nationalist identity through the KND event. Relating to notion of identity and homeland, Malkki (1995) pointed out in her study of Hutu refugees in western Tanzania that refugees continually engage in construction and reconstruction of their identity and history as people through memories, imagination, and claims of homeland. A similar situation exists for Karenni refugees who continually engage in the reconstruction of their historical homeland's independence and Karenni identity in the camp. As a part of the continued identity construction process, KND, as a commemorative occasion, has been invented and celebrated to create a conscious awareness of Karenni identity and promulgate the KNPP's idea of Karenni independence and nationalism aspiration throughout the camp.

This chapter will begin with the ethnographic study of the KND event which further leads to the examination of the process of the invention and organizing the celebration of the KND. This study will explore how KNPP plays a crucial role in dominating the process of formulating a Karenni nationalist identity through the invention of the KND event in the refugee camp. Moreover, this chapter will explore how the KNPP involved Karenni refugees into the process of organizing the KND event and raised the awareness of a Karenni nationalist identity through the camp's formal education system. In addition, this Chapter will explore the meaning of the KND event and its symbols, and examine the role of the KND Committee which is comprised of the Camp Committee, camp-based organizations (CBOs) and the Karenni Education Department.

4.1 The Ethnographic Study on the 140th Karenni National Day's Celebration

This section is a well-crafted descriptive which elaborately describes how the KND event is celebrated and who is involved or participates in the event. The participation observation was conducted for three hours during the event. Furthermore, conversations with event participants are included in this section to illustrate how participants became involved in the event and how they understand the purpose and meaning of celebrating the KND.

On 21 June 2015, a formal parade for the KND started with each school marching in an orderly manner to the event venue in Section 8. The large crowd of students lined up accordingly. It was estimated that there were around 4,000 students, 200 members from CC and CBOs, and a few hundred adult refugees at the event venue. The line of people could be seen from afar because of the Karenni red costumes and the white school uniforms. School students were from Grades 1-10 and the post-ten level. The eight schools' representatives held their schools' sign boards, such as *Primary School No. 1*. After the parade, the students were lined up in order according to their respective schools, followed by the lines of the Camp Committee staff and CBOs. They then marched for three rounds around the football ground. Shortly thereafter, each group stood in its line with two men holding each group's sign board. The program for the event began at 9 a.m.



Figure 4.1 Assembly line in KND event, June, 2015

The KNPP members arrived on the stage alongside the Thai local authorities. The Or Sor (Thai Territory Defense Volunteers) represented the local authorities for this year's celebration. In the stage background, a banner, written in three languages - English, Burmese, and Kayah, read "Karenni National Day, 140th Years of Celebration". After the KNPP members and the other guests were invited to sit on the stage, two announcers, one who spoke in Kayah and the other one who spoke in Burmese, read out the agenda for the celebration. The first agenda item was to pay respect to the Karenni national flag and the KNPP leaders on the stage. The leaders of each line said the pledge out loud and promptly, and people supported them with cheerful voices. Following this, the leaders of each line shouted out commands for turning left and right in the same style of military parading. One leader led the singing of the Karenni national anthem with others following him in the singing. After singing the national anthem, the participants sat down and listened to the speeches of the KNPP leaders.

The speeches, given by the KNPP senior leaders and members, promulgated the KNPP's concept of nationalism and Karenni independence. This year, there were seven members of the KNPP who attended the ceremony. The first speech was given by the Karenni Culture and Literacy's Deputy Director, who spoke about the KND history, the struggle of the older generation in the insistence of constructing Karenni identity through language usage, and Karenni history as an independent state. The speech was given in the Kayah language.

The next speaker was the KNPP Chairperson, Khu Aye Bay Tweet. He is a Kayan ethnic person. Firstly, he offered a greeting in Kayah. After that, he told the participants that his Kayah language was not good enough, thus he preferred to speak in Burmese so that everyone could understand him better. Interestingly, he gave a spirited talk about the hope of returning to the homeland, the ceasefire agreement and situation after the ceasefire agreement in the Karenni State, and the KNPP's political agenda. Nonetheless, he did not give an exact timeline of when and how changes would be happening. It was just a KNPP plan draft; but he wanted people to be kept aware and prepare themselves in some aspects. From his speech, many students, especially from high school and post-ten school, obtained a more precise knowledge about the Karenni political situation. The KNPP Chairman's speech spoke to the preparation for returning. It was very

important because many participants, who paid attention, would be able to learn more about the situation inside Karenni State and the KNPP's preparedness methods, such as the possible places and times to return. The formal program ended with the speech given by the KNPP Chairperson.



Figure 4.2 Speech given by KNPP chairman at KND event, June, 2015

I observed that there was less participation from adult refugees. It seemed that refugees, who were from the background of subsistence farmers in the villages, did not receive an education in the camp, and were not involved in any camp organizations, were less interested in participating in the KND celebration than members of the Camp Committee, CBOs, students, and teachers. This was because most of them were busy with their day-to-day livelihoods struggles in the confined refugee camp. Amidst the crowd, several adults, who attended the event, did not know the precise reasons for celebrating the KND. One of them, Kler Reh, a 38 Years old man, said that he did not have any knowledge about Karenni history or knew the precise reasons for the celebration. However, he did recognize that attending the event is a way of showing support for fellow camp residents and the solidarity of the Karenni refugee community. Conversely, students, teachers, and those who were involved in the Camp Committee and CBOs had far more knowledgeable reasons for celebrating the KND.

As part of a speech given by the KNPP, some adult refugees were excited to receive information about the Karenni situation and the preparedness for returning. Those, who

attended the event, would expect to share what they learn from the speeches with their neighbors, friends, and relatives. In respect to the speech, I approached some KND attendees to ask them about their perception of the speeches. Several informants described that every year the KNPP has been unable to provide the proper information about their plans and preparedness for returning. It seemed that amidst the uncertain situation, the KNPP leaders could not tell them how long they have to be in the displacement, if they must return home, or where they would be settled. Lung Mang, annually attends the KND event, had expected to hear more information about returning. In doing so, he would have more hope while waiting in the displacement. Instead, what he heard was that the general political situation in the Burma is getting better and the returning will be taken soon, but it is now known when and how.

As mentioned earlier, the event was a way for refugees to express their support for the KNPP and show their unity in the Karenni community. Lung Mang, who previously helped Karenni IDPs to cross the Salween River by raft in 1996, demonstrated clearly how he strongly identifies himself as a Karenni and what being a Karenni really means to him. From Lung Man's standpoint, it is clearly illustrated that the Karenni identity is keenly represented as a heterogenous group of all sub-ethnic groups that were originated from Karenni State and that Karenni identity is not used only to represent the dominant Kayah ethnic group.

“The Karenni is like a forest in which this forest is not comprised of only one particular kind of tree, but diverse kinds of trees. As in the forest, there is not only one kind of tree, Karenni people are like that by being comprised of diverse ethnic groups, but they become one as Karenni who shared the myths, history, and territory, and further share the sense of togetherness in the camp. (Lung Mang, June 2015)

Apparently, the KND celebration has reinforced the KNPP's standing within the Karenni refugee community and the collective sense of Karenni identity which is referred to as the sense of sharing a common history, myths, territory, and experiences during the forced displacement moment.

For students who were the most active participants, the speech enhanced their knowledge of Karenni independence and the sense of obligated duty for the Karenni

community. The students in Grade 10 and post-high school became more aware of the KNPP's struggle for independence. Most of them were able to imagine their Karenni nation which they do not corporeally reside yet or might not be able to reach in reality. One of my observations is that most students have strongly defined themselves as Karenni. A question arose about how the younger generation perceives their nation, whether a nation in the displacement or inside the Karenni State. The answer to this question is still unclear among the younger generation. This is because most of the students or young people were born and grew up in the camp. This, most of them feel attached to the home in displacement more than the home of origin. When talking about their community, they referred to the Karenni community in the displacement. Kler Meh, a 19 years old girl, graduated from the KNCC described that she had no idea of her home of origin and no desire to return to the homeland. She wants to integrate into the camp and work for her people in the camp. On the other hand, some students want to return to Karenni State and help their people there. For instance, Dah Reh, a 21 old man who graduated from the Karenni Social Development Center (KSDC), has the personal goal to reintegrate himself back into Karenni State and educate people in the remote villages inside the Karenni State. From these two perceptions, the sense of home depends upon the degree of where they felt like home, either in the displacement community or Karenni State. Crucially, the KND occasion has reminded them of the sense of where they originated, what caused them to be here in displacement, and what should they do for the betterment of the community. The KND event thus serves as a way in which Karenni refugees to able to remember and imagine their homeland. Consequently to most of the refugees, the nation is more likely to be imagined and it is not necessary to reach in reality. However, it can be reached through the memories and the claims of homeland which they were no longer or could corporeally reside (Malkki, 1995).

From this ethnography discussion, it clearly shows that the KND event largely involves the KNPP's promulgation of homeland independence and nationalism aspiration. Also, it reflects that student groups are the largest number of participants or the most active participants. Consequently, this event can be interpreted as a KNPP attempt to articulate Karenni nationalist identity through the KND event, especially raising the awareness of a nationalism mindset among the younger generation. This leads to further questions

about how the KNPP dominated the process of formulating Karenni nationalist identity through the KND event and who engages in the process of organizing the KND event. Thus, the next section will explore the KNPP's domination of the process of celebrating the KND.

4.2 The KNPP's Domination of the Process of Celebrating the KND

The KND has been continuously dominated by KNPP's ideology of nationalism through its involvement in the camp administration and camp education system. The KNPP, as the KnRC advisory board, highly influences the decision making in a number of situations. For instance, the KNPP exercises a strong influence every three years when elections are conducted for the KnRC and Camp Committee to determine who will be the committees' members and of course, the chairpersons. Needless to say, the KNPP plays a critical role in the continual process of Karenni identity reconstruction through the use of the Camp Committee mechanism.

Both the KnRC and Camp Committee actively collaborate with the KNPP in raising the awareness of Karenni identity through the continual process of organizing the KND event. The Camp Committee is the key incorporating actor related to establishing the KND organizing committee by which it hand picks its members from the CBOs. More importantly, the KNPP's Education Ministry oversees and administers the camp education department, the Karenni Education Department (KnED). Therefore, the KNPP's ideology of nationalism and dream of an independent Karenni homeland are promulgated through the formal education in the camp.

In the history subject within the KnED curriculum, Grade 8 students learn the history of Karenni independence and Karenni myths from KNPP-produced textbooks dominated by the ideology of Karenni nationalism. The KNPP established Kayah as the Karenni national language. Students, from Grade 5 to Grade 8, learn the Kayah language in the school. Furthermore, the school routine activities are also involved in the KNPP's domination process, particularly in the singing of the Karenni national anthem on every Monday and Friday during the morning assembly session at each school. The KNPP's message is to strengthen a sense of duty for the Karenni community and defeat the Burmese through the education that is continually disseminated to school students. This

message continually serves as an aspiration, among the younger generation and students, to work for their community after they graduated from the school in the camp. Through these dominating processes, the KNPP has targeted students as a reproductive social group, serving for and rebuilding the Karenni community.

In both past years and now, large numbers of young people have continually served the camp as school teachers, medics, CBO workers, and KNPP members. It is regrettable that large numbers of them, who previously worked for the community, have resettled. But some still remain in the camp and continually serve the community. An example is Meh Reh, a 34 years old man, who graduated from post-ten school has continued to remain living in the camp and be involved in KNPP work. Presently, he works inside the Karenni State to support villagers and some Karenni IDPs in livelihoods and basic education. He mentioned that he is willing to serve to rebuild the Karenni community because he is conscious that his duty and fulfillment are needed for the community.

It is common for students in high school and post-high school to train their juniors in primary or middle school for the KND event. With these practices assigned by school teachers, the students become more aware of their duty to the community. Bue Meh, a 18 years old girl, as one of several examples, recently graduated from Grade 10 described that she is happy to serve as a school teacher in Grade 8 because the camp now lacks teachers since many of them have been increasingly resettling to the third countries. This is one example showing how a young person's sense of community service has been reinforced the KNPP's aspiration message which strives to convince them, throughout their student life, of service to the Karenni community.

For those who resettled to third countries, they still maintain connections with their past life in the displacement. They have reinvented the KND event overseas with this process largely by led by resettled youth who previously received an education in the camp. Obviously, this reflects that the KNPP has successfully created a conscious awareness of the Karenni identity and reinforced the sense of duty for the community among the young people to some degree.

Since the KNPP signed a bilateral ceasefire agreement with the Burmese government in 2012, it has been seeking to recreate their community in the Karenni State. A part of

this process began with the 2014 celebration of the KND in Loi Kaw which was allowed by the Burmese government. The KNPP has made an effort to reintegrate the refugee community into Karenni State. Thus, through the celebrating the KND, it could help the Karenni communities in two countries to become reconnected. Apparently, the KND event has been used as a method in which the KNPP seeks to recreate their nationhood in Karenni communities within various contexts: refugee community in Thailand, Karenni communities living abroad, and Karenni community within Karenni State. To formulate the nationalist identity, the KNPP has also invented national symbols. The next section will explore the meaning of two national symbols.

4.3 The Symbolic Meaning: National Symbols

In building a nation-state, national symbols become an important aspect in creating a nationalist identity. Considering Karenni as nation-state, the KNPP invented two symbols; the flag and a national anthem to forge its nationalist identity. In the refugee camp, the KNPP instituted the two national symbols into the formal school system and public commemorative occasions to establish and maintain the nationalist identity. This section will explore the meaning of the two national symbols; how they are being used and for what purposes that KNPP seek to invent. Also, it will be explored how the two national symbols take significant roles in establishing the KNPP's nationalist identity in the camp.

4.3.1 The Karenni National Flag

The national flag is the prominent national symbol in any nation-state since it represents the national identity in a way in which people feel that they belong to the same group or are a part of the same nation. In the Karenni displaced community, the flag serves as important component of Karenni nation-building. The Karenni flag is unique because it has been invented by the KNPP-in-exile. However, it has never been officially used in Karenni State. The KNPP initially invented the national flag in 1969 to represent their resistance movement for self-determination and an independent homeland. Since the invention, the flag has been widely used by the KNPP to demonstrate their nation-in-exile wherever they are

present, especially at its headquarter and military bases. The flag is well-respected among the KNPP political leaders, members, and soldier. It is recognized as a very important element of nationalist identity.



Figure 4.3 Karenni Flag, Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/karenniflag/14828990500/>, June 2016

Like other nation-state's flag, the strips' colors and specific picture are constructed for meanings that represent the concept of nationhood. The so-called Karenni national flag has the frog drum as a prominent symbol in the center of the flag. The symbol of a frog drum represents the prosperity of the Karenni homeland, rivers, natural resources, and the victory from the historic battles of the past.

Displaying the flag as a way of formulating the Karenni nationalist identity in the KNPP-controlled areas is not an issue, but placing national symbols in the camp is other matter. The placing the Karenni national flag in Thai territory presents many political issues, therefore the flag is not placed in the public places in the camp or in the refugee school assembly. Nonetheless, students still learn the characteristic pattern of the flag and its meanings through the history classes to build a well-founded knowledge and understanding about the flag. Not only students, but those who work in CBOs or were previously involved in the political groups also recognize the flag as a symbol representing the Karenni

national identity. In the camp where the flag is not allowed to be publically placed, I observed that the flag is largely printed on T-shirts. The flag is not only used in the camp, but it is continually displayed by Karenni people in overseas communities. Thus, it can be said that the national flag was invented by the KNPP as part of formulating the Karenni nationalist identity through which people seek to imagine their nation. Students and people who involves in CBOs or political groups are aware of the underlying reasons for wearing T-shirts printed with the flag. Since the flag is rarely presented in the camp, a majority of the camp population do not have a precise knowledge or understanding about the flag. However, throughout the camp whether on a T-shirt or in a textbook, the flag has allowed students and the younger generation to become aware of the nationalist identity influenced by the KNPP.

4.3.2 The Karenni National Anthem

Apart from the national flag, the Karenni national anthem has been also been invented by the KNPP. The national anthem was composed by a former KNPP president, Saw Samuel Bani, a Bwe ethnic person. It was first composed in the S'gaw Karen language and then translated into the dominant Kayah language. The national song speaks to the remembering of the homeland; the prosperity of Karenni State; the river, forests, beautiful land, resources; and the imagination of the nation-state as the land of freedom and independence. Moreover, the national anthem seems also to reinforce the sense of nationhood and peoplehood, and unity. The national anthem, in English, is as follows:

“My native country, a land of freedom, a land of gracious, the country that I love, this is the land of my parents, the land of my ancestors, I am the child of this land. The country that I love.

My native country, a land of freedom. A beautiful land. The country that I love. Abundance with mountains and trees, the rivers flow along the thicken forests, A land of prosperity, the country that I love.

My native country, a land of freedom. A land of happiness. The country that I respect, to all the kings, to all this nation's soldiers. And to all people in this land, I respect you".

(Translated and altered by Maw Theh Mar, March, 2016)

Like the national flag, the national anthem is sung by students in the school morning assembly on every Wednesday and Friday. For the KND celebration, the Karenni national anthem is the most important practical component of the KND program. It was sung loudly by the celebrants with students leading the singing. One of my observations was that the students or the people, who received their education in the camp, were able to sing the Karenni national anthem, while most adult refugees had no idea about the anthem. Thus, the Karenni national anthem was invented as part of nationalist identity formulation by the KNPP and propagated through the formal education system. For the younger generation, they imagine their nation while singing the national anthem since it provides the sense of where they belong and why they need to serve the community as a part of the nation-building process.

4.4 Historical Background of the Invention of the KND in the BMN Camp

In preceding section, it is clearly related how the KNPP has dominated the process of celebrating the KND, and the meanings of national symbols used in the KND event. Thus, this section will explore how the KND celebration was invented and celebrated in the camp. The KND event, involved in a political context, is one of the four commemorative occasions¹ invented by the KNPP. The KND was firstly celebrated on 21 June 1969 by the KNPP at its headquarters. Since then, this event is celebrated every year in reminder of the Karenni history of homeland independence which was recognized by the British in 1875. The Karenni State had always insisted on its independence and autonomy. In the displacement context, the KNPP used the history of an independent homeland to launch opposition against the Burmese military government for a struggle for self-autonomy. Significantly, the KND event has been

¹ The four commemorative occasions are Karenni Army Day, Karenni Resistance Day, Karenni Martyr Day and Karenni National Day.

widely involved in the construction of the Karenni history of independence and the conscious awareness of Karenni identity among the Karenni refugees, particularly the younger generation. It has served as space to remind Karenni refugees who they are, where they were from, what caused them to be here in the displacement and how they will be. As a communal event, the KND event has been recognized as a camp public holiday.

In discussing the celebration of the KND in the BMN Camp, the KNPP had invented the event in 2002. The program was three hours long and began with the parade of marching school students, CBOs, Camp Committee staff, and camp residents from each section to the event venue. Then, the gathered people lined up to take the oath and listen to the speeches of the KNPP leaders. Of course, the program is somewhat similar to those of other nation-states in celebrating their own national days. Actually, the KND celebration was something new for the second wave of Karenni refugees since most of these refugees had never experienced celebrating the KND event in the village life. Regard the issue of domination, Boe Sien Bui, a 60 years old man, the former camp leader, related, that in the beginning years of celebrating the KND, the KNPP oversaw the process by collaborating with the Camp Committee in establishing the annual committee, comprised of people from the Camp Committee and CBOs. This Committee undertakes significant responsibilities in organizing the formal parade and program activities which involve students and camp residents.

In the early years of the celebration in 2002-2005, the KND event had a high participation by adult refugees and the young generation because the Karenni refugees were aware of their shared suffering and coming together to the camp, and perceived the KNPP as their protective leaders when they arrived in the camp. In regard to the participation of refugees in the early years of the celebration, Boe Sien Bui remarked that the refugees were very interested in the speeches of the KNPP leaders because it was an occasion to learn more about the situation in the Karenni State. According to him, it was estimated that two-thirds of the Karenni refugees in the camp attended the event. Thus, the KND celebration even at that time, was quite crowded. Actually at that time, most refugees perceived the camp as a temporary place and hoped to return to their villages after only a short stay. However, not all refugees, who attended the event,

knew or understood the political situation, conflict, and the KNPP resistance movement. Rather, they just simply knew that when the situation became more secure and there was no more fighting, they could return to their villages and continue their former lives.

Obviously, the student group became the central group or the active participants for the KND event. Thus, the KND Committee relied upon the Karenni Education Department (KnED) in organizing the event. More importantly, the KNPP leaders have continually delivered speeches at the event and these speeches served as aspiration messages for the participants. As previously mentioned, the earlier KND celebrations had a large participation by the camp population. Now the refugee participation at the KND celebrations has significantly decreased due to the prolong displacement. Therefore, the KND event remains as active space primarily for the students, Camp Committee, and CBOs. In this section, it clearly shows that both the KND Committee and KnED have been actively engaged in the process of organizing the celebration of the KND. Therefore, the following section will examine the role of the KND Committee and KnED.

4.5 The KND Committee and its Role

Each year, the Camp Committee leads the KND Committee with the KNPP members responsible for organizing and key members of the KnRC providing advice for the program activities. The Camp Committee takes a significant role in leading the meeting related to the event arrangements. The Committee members are the directors or representatives of each CBO. In discussing the location for the celebration, it has been pointed out that the KND event is not always held in the camp. Some years, it is celebrated at Nyar Mu, the Karenni Army base which is about a three hours walk from the BMN camp. Thus when it is celebrated at Nyar Mu, the KNPP members need to discuss with the Committee about the readiness of getting the participants to the venue. Also, the Committee members from different organizations must accept various responsibilities for taking care of the students, such as providing food, medical service if needed, and accommodations, and organizing the parade with each of the groups that will participate in the event. Whether the KND event is celebrated at Nyar Mu or in the camp, the arrangements and the sharing of responsibilities are the same. For the celebration in the camp, the current CC chairwoman has annually suggested that the

KNPP members avoid a long program because it may be too hot for students to attend since the venue is outdoors. A shorter program encourages students, especially the younger students, to pay more attention to the program. As mentioned earlier, the students are the central group and most active participants in the KND event. The Camp Committee relies upon the KnED to organize the part of the parade involving the eight schools: the rest of parade participants are from the Camp Committee, CBOs and few numbers of camp residents.

In respect to the participation of the District Governor or the MOI, they act as official observers to this event. Prior to the celebration of the KND in the camp, Bo Sein Bui described that they discussed about celebrating of the event with District Governor. The District Governor allowed them to celebrate the KND event but with the condition that the event must not engage the Karenni political movement or create political activism. In response, the event does not display the Karenni national flag. Since those negotiations, the KND event has been allowed to be celebrated annually in the camp without further issues from the Thai authorities. However, Thai authorities are always in attendance at the annual KND in the camp.

In recent years, the Camp Committee, as the representative of the KND Committee, has invited the District Governor or MOI to attend the event. The invitation was done formally by sending an invitation letter or properly informing the Thai authorities and providing them with a detailed agenda of the event at the monthly MOI meeting. Through the celebration of the KND, the Karenni community has regular contact or connection with the Thai host community, particularly the local authorities and the local MOI. The KND Committee, led by the Camp Committee, has developed their agency through the negotiations with the Thai authorities and leadership of the continual process of organizing and celebrating the KND event. More interestingly, in an interview with the current CC chairwoman, I learned that, apart from the KND Committee, the camp education sector has also become the central core of the KND organizing process. Therefore, the next section will explore the role of the KnED.

4.6 The Role of Karenni Education Department (KnED)

The camp education department and its association to the KNPP's nationalist ideology have been integrated together with the process of organizing the KND celebration. It is clear that the camp education department has become the key actor in the process of organizing the KND event. The routine of school students' regular singing of the national anthem, and the Monday and Friday's morning assembly have played a central role in the KND program, especially the opening session. Obviously, the school teachers undertake a significant role in training students in regard to practicing the KND activities, disseminating messages of national aspiration to the students, and encouraging students to serve the community. Thus, the school has become the center for the reinforcement of the sense of Karenni identity's conscious awareness and service to the Karenni community. This section will explore the crucial role that school teachers, especially the headmasters, play in leading the school parades in the opening ceremony at the KND event.

In the camp, there are eight schools located in each zone: two primary schools, three middle schools, one high school, and two post-ten schools. The school morning assembly is held every Monday and Friday. The assembly starts by singing Karenni national anthem, and then listening to speeches from the school teachers, most particularly the headmaster, KnED director, or key staffs. The speeches provide academic and administrative information from the school, advice, and more importantly the KNPP nationalism aspiration message of reminding the students of their future duty to the Karenni community. In an interview with Khu Bue Reh, 50 years old man and the current KnED Director, he explained that he and the KnED staff visit every school each week, disseminating the KNPP aspirational message to ensure that the students understand that it is their duty to serve their own community and they be aware of who they are and where they came from. He further described that, currently, the school teachers must work harder to disseminate that message among newly-arrived students who may have never heard about the KNPP aspiration. In 2015, it is estimated that there are annually around 100 new students coming from Karenni State to attend schools in the camp. Thus, school teachers have an additional training role at the assembly for the newly-arrived students, such as in singing the national anthem, and

providing special classes to them about Karenni history. The Karenni identity's conscious awareness program for the newly-arrived students is for about one semester.

In discussing the process of gathering students for the KND event, Khu Bue Reh explained that once the KND Committee finalized the role for each department and social group, the KnED was always assigned to be responsible the parade. Therefore, the KnED would organize a meeting among the teachers from every school to divide the tasks involved with the parade. School teachers are well-experienced with the KND event since most of them participated in the event when they were students. This reflects that some refugees have experienced the event both as participant students and also when they became teachers and took the role in organizing and leading the students in the KND parades. Nay Reh, the former school headmaster at Primary School No. 1, is one of the several examples of those young people who are serving the community. He described that his role as school headmaster also made him responsible for leading 300 students in the parade. He described that he and the other teachers trained students to memorize the oath and practice marching around the school compound every day for one week before the KND event. The adult refugees, in the sections, also joined with the school parade. The school students from Grade 1 to post-high school attended this event. The post-high school students played a role in leading the program, such as reciting nationalist ideology on the stage. It is clearly seen that the schools have played a crucial role in training students to become the most active participants in the KND event. The schools also help graduates to continue the role of serving the community and engaging in the process of organizing the KND event.

4.7 Conclusion

Unlike other two communal events in tradition context, the KND celebration has brought the Karenni refugees from different background of ethnicities to aware of Karenni nationalist identity. Particularly, students or younger generation are mainly engaged in the celebration. Clearly, the KND event is created as a space of articulating or formulating Karenni nationalist identity which has been invented by the KNPP. Apparently, the KND event has served as an effective way in which the KNPP seeks to recreate a sense of nationhood in the displacement community.

As a part of the Karenni nation-building process, there are two significant national symbols promoted in the refugee camps and the Karenni communities abroad. The Karenni national flag and anthem have symbolized the Karenni nationalist identity. Because the two national symbols are largely used in education and commemorative occasions, not all refugees, especially those who came from the background of subsistence farming and did not receive an education in the camp, have a precise knowledge or an understanding of these two national symbols. Rather, the students and the groups involved in the KND event, Camp Committee and CBOs are more likely to be familiar and have an accurate knowledge and understanding about the meaning of these national symbols and recognize these national symbols as something they share in common.

In this chapter, the roles of the KND Committee, KnED staff, and school teachers, especially the headmasters, are examined. This chapter shows how the KND Committee and KnED are key community actors who have agency in the way in which they actively lead the process of the official organization and celebration of the KND. Key community actors, particular the KND Committee, also create connections with the hosting Thai authorities through negotiations for organizing the KND celebration, and maintaining connections with the Karenni communities abroad and in Karenni State.

As this study observed, there was less participants from adult refugees. It is clearly seen that not all refugees are aware of Karenni nationalist identity. Rather, they also have their own layer of identity in a way which they still identify to themselves belonging to Karenni sub groups or currently as refugees. As a part of articulating Karenni nationalist identity process, KNPP and KND committee annually have to mobilize people from various age of groups to participate in the event, especially participation from students. Therefore, it is the students who have become the most active participants or central group for the KND event. I would conclude that the KND serves as event which recreates conscious awareness of Karenni nationalist identity and reinforce sense of communal duty for Karenni community among younger generation.