

Chapter 6

Inventing Home: the Celebration of the Kay Htoe Boe Festival and the Erection of the E-Lue Ritual Pole

Similar to the preceding chapter, chapter six will explore how the Kay Htoe Boe Festival is created as a space of articulating ethnic identity. In this Chapter, I focus on the celebration of the Kay Htoe Boe Festival to explore how the Karenni refugees recreate and appropriate their space of the Kay Htoe Boe Festival in the confined camp, turning it into some kind of home or ultimately, a constructed space as “our” in the displacement setting (Dudley, 2010) and connect in the various contexts of the Karenni communities. The recreating of a familiar practice in the Kay Htoe Boe Festival, such as the erection of the E-Lue pole, making offerings in a sacred space, and the performance of traditional dancing, enables the Karenni refugees to maintain their religion practices and reconstruct the Karenni identity in the displacement context.

This chapter will begin with an ethnographic study of the Kay Htoe Boe Festival which further examines the process of the reinvention, organization, and preservation of the Kay Htoe Boe Festival. In order to understand the continual process of organizing and preserving of the Kay Htoe Boe Festival, this chapter will explore the meaning of the E-Lue pole, flag, and dancing performance, and examine the roles of the BMN Camp Cultural Committee, Camp Committee the section cultural leader, and the section Kay Htoe Festival leader who engage in the process of organizing and preserving the Kay Htoe Boe Festival.

6.1 Ethnographic Study of the 2016 Kay Htoe Boe Festival

It is regrettable that there was no Grand Kay Htoe Boe Festival or there was no related hosting section for this year. Since there was no Grand Festival, the observation could not concentrate on how the Karenni refugees from all the sections erected one pole together or observe the social interaction on a large scale; thus, the observations were only upon the interactions within a section or the nearby sections. This year, the Kay Htoe Boe Festival was held for four days and three nights from 14-17 April 2016. I participated in the Kay Htoe Boe Festival in various sections.

I conducted the participant observations in Sections 5 and 7 which comprised a large number of Kayah traditional refugees, and Section 10 which comprised a population from a variety of backgrounds in ethnicities and traditions. From the selected sections, I could see how the Karenni refugees seek to keep a similar pattern of practices to resemble the villages or modify the practices according to the camp's circumstances. For instance, Sections 5 and 7 have kept the similar pattern of practices by annually erecting the pole. The other sections, like Section 10, do not erect the pole annually; they just decorated the existing pole. This ethnography study also focused on a descriptive of the ritual activities which show evidence about how the Karenni refugees interact and are involved in the community contributions to the Festival, how the role of the celebrants was divided, and how the Festival has strengthened the community bonds of the relationships between the older and the younger generations, and among the celebrants from various ethnic backgrounds. Thus, in this section, I will elaborate a descriptive of the ritual activities, the participation of the section residents, and the social interactions that I have seen, heard and learned through the Kay Htoe Boe festival celebrants.

Day 1, 14 April 2016: Unification of the Section Celebrants in Cutting and Carving E-Lue Pole

In the morning session, I concentrated my observations on Section 5. The Section 5 Kay Htoe Boe site was on a hilltop and Section 6 joined the site with Section 5. On the Kay Htoe Boe site, there were around sixty children who carried small bottles of water which had acacia leaves in them. They had been waiting for one hour for the group that

would be carrying the pole back to the Kay Htoe Boe site. Around twenty of the children were sitting in a small shelter at the site, while others were standing and waiting with great excitement. In the site's compound, twenty-five youths were cleaning the place, sweeping the leaves, and preparing the station for the pole to be placed. Around fifteen adults and elderly men were waiting for the group who had cut the teak pole and prepared the Ter Yae for the group. When I arrived there, they gave me a cup of the Ter Yae; it was a usual practice of serving the Ter Yae to the participants during the Festival. The annual ritual festival of the Kay Htoe Boe practice was also known as the "*Eating and Drinking Festival*". The taste of the food and the drink contributed to the sense of remembering the festival and the socializing in the past.



Figure 6.1 A group of male laborers carrying the teak pole back to the Section 7 Kay Htoe Boe Site, field work, April, 2016

While waiting for quite a while, I curiously asked a section Kay Htoe Boe festival leader (E-Lue Pen Je) what time the group went to the forest to cut the tree. He told me that the group went to the forest around 7:00am, and they had not yet arrived back. They may be cutting a large tree as planned. Suddenly, I heard the sound of males shouting along with the rhythm of a goblet drum, cymbals, and a flute; the shouting sound was approaching the Kay Htoe Boe site in Section 5 on the hilltop. The group was comprised of middle aged males, elderly males, and youth aged from 12 to 22 years old. There were about a hundred of them and they were carrying a teak pole, which was already carved, and pieces of teak which would be used for repairing the platform. At

the same time, two little boys shouted loudly that “they are coming back now!” The E-Lue Pen Je and the other older men, young girls, and children at the site were ready to sprinkle water and provide cups of the Ter Yae to the group. The music became louder as they approached the Kay Htoe Boe site; they shouted even louder as they were climbing up the mount. Everyone, especially children, ran to line up on the way that the group would pass by. When the group was passing by, they poured and sprinkled the water on the people who were carrying the pole and the wooden pieces. Finally, the pole was placed on the station and the celebrants came to pour and sprinkle water on the pole as well as sprinkle water on each other.

The practice, during the laying of the pole on the station at the Kay Htoe Boe site, was similar to the Thai’s Songkran festival as the celebrants were sprinkling water on each other. I also went to a participant’s house in Section 7, not far from Section 5. I asked Hsaw moe, a 50 years old woman, my research informant in Section 7 about the group who would bring the pole back to the site. She told that the group went to the forest ever since this early morning, but they had not come back yet. I told her that Section 5 had already carried the pole back to the site. She told me that it was because Section 5 went to a very near forest. However, the Section 7 group went to a more distant forest which took around an hour to get a large pole. Around 1:00pm., I heard the shouting of the group at Section 7. Children and women rushed to the Kay Htoe Boe site with water bottles and acacia leaves. They have brought the larger teak. More female adults and children came to sprinkle water on the group, and provide the Ter Yae to them.



Figure 6.2 The pole was placed on the station at Section 5's Kay Htoe Boe site. April 2016.



Figure 6.3 The Pole was placed on the station at Section 7's Kay Htoe Boe Site, April 2016

At the BT zone, I went to the Section 10's Kay Htoe Boe site. I saw that a group of twenty children and young girls were waiting there. I asked a young girl how long she had been waiting. She told me that she had already been waiting there for two hours. As the male laborers in the Section 10 had been gone for many hours, I anticipated that the pole of Section 10 would be as large as the one in Section 7. After waiting for more thirty minutes, the shouting of the males was getting louder and louder with the rhythm of drum and other instruments. I did not see a large pole, but only pieces of teak and a small pole carried by a couple of males who came back from the forest. I curiously asked them about this and they told me that, this year, they did not erect the pole because the chicken bone divination in Section 10 said that they should build a new platform. Thus, for this year, Section 10 did not erect a new pole or decorated the old pole.



Figure 6.4 Male laborers carrying pieces of wood to the Section 10's Kay Htoe Boe site, April, 2016.



Figure 6.5 females sprinkled water with acacia on poles and to male labors who were dancing around the pole at Section 10, April 2016

The observations that I made, from those three sections, was that the relationship bond between the Kayah and non-Kayah traditional religion practitioners and the other ethnic groups, particularly the Shan, had strengthened the practice of the community contribution of financial donations and labor in the Kay Htoe Boe Festival. Kler Reh, a 37 years old man, the Section 10 Kay Htoe Boe festival leader (E- Lue Pen Je) described that, the Shan or Paku in his section, participated in laboring, accompanying the group to the forest, and carrying the teak back to the site. The females also assisted by providing water to, and sprinkling water on, the male laborer group around the Kay Htoe Boe site. Kler Reh described that the section residents were aware of the common welfare of the section. On the first day of the Kay Htoe Boe Festival, I would say that it was a tiring day for those males who carried the pole back to the site; so the activities in the first night around the Kay Htoe Boe site were silent. Rather, the people began to visit and enjoy drinking the Ter Yae. Actually, the visiting was similar to the Dee Ku Festival.

Days 2 & 3, 15-16 April 2016: Collection and Decoration Day, and Restless Dancing

On the second day, it was about the collection and the decoration of E-Lue pole in the evening. Because there was no Grand Festival in this year, the Festival in each section was quieter than two years ago in 2014. Around the 4:00pm in Section 7, the celebrants began to decorate the E-Lue pole, and the E-Lue Pen Je was leading this decoration activity. He painted the E-Lue pole with a lime solution because this was the role of the E-Lue Pen Je to conduct the E-Lue decoration ritual and offer food to the god on the platform at the site.

For this evening, there were around a hundred celebrants; they were mostly children with some male adults, the elderly, and a few females. The celebrants came to see the process of decorating the pole and support the male dancers who would be dancing around the decorated E-Lue pole on the station. The females provided the Ter Yae for the dancers. The second day ended with the E-Lue pole's decoration and the cycled dancing. One of celebrants, Say Reh, told me that, on tomorrow night, there would be more dancing around the pole and it would run through the night until the next morning.

When the third night came, I observed that the number of celebrants had doubled compared to the previous night. Around two hundred celebrants gathered at the Kay Htoe Boe site. Around a third of them were males with about fifty young and adult females; the rest were children and females. Obviously, the participants' ages were diverse and each age group had a specialized role for their participation in the festival. The elderly men usually led the ritual process and played the music, such as the drum, cymbals, gongs, and flute, while the young males usually tramped their feet in dance steps around the Kay Htoe Boe site.

The female role was to provide the Ter Yae to the male dancers. The children just came to cheer on the dancers. Sometimes they held the flag and led the dancing group around the pole and the platform. While dancing, a few of the males wore the female coiling crafts to represent the female's participation since the females were not allowed to dance around the E-Lue pole site.



Figure 6.6 A male was wearing female coiling craft and dancing around the platform at Section 7's Kay Htoe Boe site. April 2016.



Figure 6.7 Males with traditional instruments and the flags were dancing around the platform at Section 7's Kay Htoe Boe Site, April 2016

Hsaw Moe, a 50 years old woman told me that she would be sleepless tonight or stay awake until the morning to support the dancing team by serving the Ter Yae to them. She said that this symbolized the unity of people in the community. Simultaneously, the Section 9 dancers arrived to the site and danced around the Section 7's E-Lue pole. Related to the dancing around the pole, Say Reh, a Section 7 male celebrant, told me that each section supported one another for the dancing, so the dancing could continually go on until the morning without a break. In Section 7, many of celebrants had made the commitment to stay sleepless and support the dancing group. The females also supported by serving soup and giving the Ter Yae to the dancers. The dancers would take turns dancing during the whole night until the morning. Say Reh told me how the dancing is meaningful to the sense of community:

“When the music was played faster and faster with feet tramping faster, this means that the god could hear clearly and that it also represents the unity of the community. The loud music could also be heard by the other sections. All this means that all sections would continue restless dancing together until the early morning to show the solidarity of the camp”. (Say Reh, April 2016)

I also went to Section 10, which was the same situation as Section 7. There were about forty males; some were sitting on the ground while others were dancing around the pole and the review platform. The E-Lue Pen Je, in Section 10, told me that they just came back from Section 20, which was next to their section, to support the dancing there. The important ritual performance was the dancing. In this night, the section residents actively played their specialized roles to support the dancing to give honor to the god of the E-Lue.



Figure 6.8 Elder males dancing around the platform at the Section 10's Kay Htoe Boe site.
April 2016.

Crucially, this sort of dancing activity brought the Karenni people together to share a sense of joyfulness. The reminiscences of the practice of dancing, in the villages, had reminded them of their past rapture, just as Mu Preh Law described how they continued dancing restlessly to nearby village. It was a really restless dancing as I described because I still heard the rhythm of dancing throughout the night.

Day 4, 17 April 2016: Erecting the E-Lue Pole

It was early morning around 6:00am with the sun beginning to rise. Around two hundred celebrants gathered in Section 7 for the erection of the E-Lue pole. For the erection, about fifty males were involved in this process while another hundred participants, children and women, observed around the pole site. Around twenty males helped to dig a hole for the pole to be planted. Shortly after the hole was ready, the pole

was dragged with a rope and a hundred males, especially the youth, pulled the rope so the pole could gradually stand up. After the pole had been stood completely upward, one male climbed up the pole, by using a wooden stair, to hang the ladder and put the triangle roof on the top of the pole. Under the pole, around ten males held the pole to ensure that the pole was strong enough and would not collapse.



Figure 6.9 A middle-aged male climbing up the E-Lue Pole to decorate the top, April, 2016.

When the male was done with the decoration on the top of E-Lue pole, the pole was successfully erected. Around fifteen middle aged and elder males played instruments and danced around the E-Lue pole. The instruments were a goblet drum, a pair of cymbals, and a gong, and flutes. This dancing was an offering to the god and symbolized that the New Year celebration had now come. After the dancing was done, the celebrants brought chickens to the site. Each household brought one or two chicken to conduct the sacrifice ritual and divination. Each family conducted a chicken bone divination under the newly erected E-Lue pole. The divination would forecast what the New Year would bring.



Figure 6.10 Young, middle age and elder males played instruments and danced around E-Lue pole, April 2016

Around one hundred celebrants conducted a chicken bone divination. About 40 females, mostly housewives, held their chickens and were waiting for an older man to conduct a chicken bone divination since the females were not allowed to conduct the divination according to the norms of the tradition. Therefore, I saw several middle aged and elderly women bring their chickens and ask an older man to conduct the divination for them. Mu Preh Nga Reh, who had good skills in conducting chicken divinations, was asked by several females to read and interpret the divination for them.

What is more, I had been told that, for these practices, the households that converted to the Roman Catholic religion, also continually practiced this. Law Reh, a middle aged male as one example of those who converted to the Roman Catholic religion, told me that every year he was involved in the practice of the chicken bone divination because he saw this as an important traditional practice. Also, he greatly believed that the chicken bone divination could divine how to spend life carefully throughout the year. For instance, if the chicken bone divined that this year his family members would not be in good situation or would have some bad luck, he would take life more carefully or avoid doing the risky things.



Figure 6.11 Chicken bone divination by pricking sticks to two chicken bones. April, 2016



Figure 6.12 Males conducted the chicken bone divination at Section 7 Kay Htoe Boe Site, April, 2016

Interestingly, I had been told that the resettled Karenni refugees, in the third countries, continually asked their families or relatives, who left in the camp, to conduct a chicken bone divination for them. Beh Meh, an elderly female, was one example whose husband and children had resettled to USA and who was asked to conduct a divination. She described that her husband in the USA told her to conduct a chicken bone divination for him because his health was not so good in this year. For this time, she told me that the divination said that her husband health condition would become worse. Anyhow, she explained to me that even when the chicken bone divined that the health was not good, she believed that it would be good. She totally interpreted the divination in the opposite way.

After making the divinations, the celebrants brought their pair of chicken bones, which had been pricked by two small bamboo sticks into the two holes on chicken bones tied them on the small E-Lue pole. Regarding on the chicken bone divination, it is an important component practice of Kay Htoe Boe because the celebrants believed that this would guide their life's direction or the well-being of the families throughout the year.

After everyone was finished with the divinations, they brought the death chickens back to their houses. It was now the role of the females to cook the chickens because the

chickens would be used as food offerings to the E-Lue pole in the afternoon. For the males, they would continue to stay at the site, and make a sacrifice and a divination from a pig, which was more complex than a chicken bone divination. It would divine the health condition and the well-being of the whole population and the unity of people in the Section.



Figure 6.13 Males conducting pig sacrifice and divination at section 7, April, 2016

One of my observations was that there is connection between the refugees left in the camp and their relatives or folks in third countries. The E-Lue Pen Je in Section 7 told me that this year one young male who resettled in the USA sent an amount of remittance as a financial donation for the ritual sacrifice, particularly to buy one pig for the Section's sacrifice ritual. Significantly, the remittance also became a component of the Section's community contribution from the Karenni people who had resettled to third countries. They wanted to maintain an active connection with their folks and relatives in the camp in order to preserve the continuity of the annual ritual festival. For this year, Section 7 had two pigs: one was from the contribution of the young male settling in the USA and the other pig was from the community's financial donations.

As part of the community donations, the E-Lue Pen Je told me that this year they collected 100 baht from each household, and that both animists and Catholic practitioners contributed to the financial donations in the Section. The pork was mainly used in the sacrificed ritual for an offering to the god. After the offering was made, the pork would be distributed to each of the households who contributed the financial donations to the annual festival. It was also given to those families who were unable to

contribute. However, it was not given to the Baptist families who followed the strict rules of their religion.



Figure 6.14 Celebrants bringing the chicken and the food to make offerings around the Section 7 Kay Htoe Boe site. April, 2016



Figure 6.15 A male and his family prepared for food offering to E-Lue pole, April, 2016



Figure 6.16 Males making offerings to the E-Lue pole, April, 2016

It was silent during the afternoon. A lot of celebrants felt tired today because many of them did not have enough sleep the last night as they stood by for the overnight dancing. Most of them were resting after the males had finished the pork divination. At 1:00pm, every celebrant went back to the site with the chicken, pork, boiled eggs, and leaves. Each household had prepared the food for offerings at the site. They put the food

on the leaves and placed them around or under the E-Lue pole. The youth and children were very excited to offer this as the role of offering was the role of males. For the females, they were marginalized from the practice of the offering. It could be said that a patriarch society was continually involved in the traditional practices of the Karenni community as the males had the lead role in the ritual practice.

The last activity of the practice was dancing to honor the households. Around 3:00pm, the musicians, the cultural leaders, and the E-Lue Pen Je were ready for the dancing for the honoring to each household. The team was led by the man who was holding the Kay Htoe Boe flag and followed by a group of the male musicians who were beating the goblet drum and cymbals, and the elders who were blowing flutes. There were also the section leader, the E-Lue Pen Je, the section cultural leader, and the contribution collector. There were seven musicians who were the dancers and five who were the follow-up dancers.

Before the honoring dancing group arrived at a house, two young males would first distribute the pork to the household. For the host family, they were ready to sprinkle water on the musicians and the dancers. The dance steps were same with tramping the foot in accordance with the rhythm. Hsaw Meh sprinkled the musicians and the dancers, who were at her house, with water that was soaked with acacia leaves. After the dancing finished, the dancers sprinkled water back on the host family's members. The host also made financial donations to the collector who was holding a silver bowl inside which they had put rice and candles. These contributed funds would be used for the next year's festival.

The dancers went to every household in the Section; not only to those who contributed the funds for the Festival. From participating in this Festival, I clearly saw how the gathering at the Kay Htoe Boe site to support the male dancing group and the dancing honoring the households intensified the social interaction and strengthened the relationship bond between the older and younger generations, and among the diverse ethnicities.

Through my attendance at the Kay Htoe Boe Festival, I made four main observations. First, the practice of community contributions, both the financial donations and the

voluntary labor in Kay Htoe Boe festival, strengthened community bond. The traditional and non-traditional relation practitioners from different age groups, genders, and ethnic backgrounds took specific roles in the pole activities, such as cutting the teak pole, carrying the pole back to the site, and erecting the pole. Prominently, the observation also made clear that the Kay Htoe Boe Festival is largely a male affair, especially the ritual activities of dancing, sacrifice, divination and offering food; while the females' role remains with the domestic work, such preparing the offering food, and serving the drink and food at the Festival. The patriarch society is continually maintained in the practice of Kay Htoe Boe festival. Second, the practical components of festival; sacrifice rituals, divinations, dancing, and offering the food to E-Lue pole are constructed as sacred space for the traditional religion practitioners. Third, the erection of the pole and the dancing are also constructed as social space since the non-traditional religious practitioners, or those recently converted to other religions, have become involved in the activities, support the dancing, and contribute to the labor work. This is because the Karenni refugees, who converted to other religions, still perceive the E-Lue pole as representing the Karenni culture and the New Year celebration when the Karenni refugees erect the pole together and apologize to each other. Fourth, through dancing around the E-Lue pole or at the households, the refugees have a sense of joyfulness and rapture. The dancing activity has also strengthened the unity within the sections and throughout the camp as the sections become involved in each other's dancing to honor each section's pole.

Here it can be concluded that the Kay Htoe Boe Festival is not merely sacred space, but also extends to social space. The practical component, particular the dancing and the pole activities, have strengthened the sense of commonality and belonging to the group they were part of in the past. This ethnography section demonstrates that the recreating of the familiar practice of the Kay Htoe Boe Festival serves to recreate a sense of belonging and extends to the mode of articulating collective identity in the context of the displacement. Therefore, this section has led to a further examination about how the Karenni refugees recreate symbolic meanings in the Kay Htoe Boe Festival and how they reinvented the festival in the early years of the camp. In the following sections, I will explore the meaning of the sacred symbols and ritual performance and the historical background of the reinvention of the Kay Htoe Boe festival in the BMN Camp.

6.2 The Symbolic Meanings: Sacred Symbol and Ritual Performance

The erection of the pole, the fluttering of the flag, and the traditional dancing are important practical components of the Kay Htoe Boe Festival. Furthermore, these practical components have become prominent symbols, especially the ritual pole and the flag. They became the symbols in the sacred space and were represented as symbols in the traditional or Kay Htoe Boe religion. On the other hand, the pole is also constructed as representing the Karenni culture. For the dancing performance, it is practiced as part of the offering to the god of E-Lue and also it contributes to remembering their past rapture in the village and strengthens the unity of the community. Thus, it could be said that, through all sacred symbols and the ritual performances, the Karenni refugees seek to maintain their traditional religion and recreate their origin identity. In this section, I will explore the meaning of the E-Lue pole, the flag, and the dancing to examine how and why the Karenni refugees seek to recreate these symbolic patterns in the camp.

6.2.1 The E-Lue Pole



Figure 6.17 The E-Lue Pole at the Kay Htoe Boe site

The most prominent symbol in the Kay Htoe Boe Festival is the E-Lue pole. The large teak pole is painted with a lime solution with the top decorated with a star, rice grains, and a moon which is made with woven bamboo. The ladder of the pole is also made with woven bamboo. It has been said that the E-Lue pole is the most important symbol that represent Karenni culture and society; so the erection of E-Lue pole can be seen everywhere among the Karenni communities in places of origin, diasporas communities, and displacement areas.

In the displacement area where the camp is located is a confined space, the E-Lue Pole becomes a notable landscape feature in the camp. In the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp, every section has its own Kay Htoe Boe sites. Some sections erect the pole on the hilltops while others erect theirs in the middle of the sections. The erection of, and making offering to, the E-Lue pole are widely practiced by the Karenni animists or traditional religion practitioners, especially the Kayah, Kayan, and Kayaw as the majority ethnic groups. Mu Preh La explained that, in the animist or traditional religion context, the pole is said to symbolize the cane of the god which connects to the E-Lue god. These animist practitioners believed that, after they offer to the god through the E-Lue pole, they would be blessed. The Festival was also known as the “*Rain Making Festival*”. After offering and praying to the god, they believe that the god would bless them to have rain for the forthcoming cultivation season.

The Karenni people traditionally practiced the erection of the E-Lue pole before the introduction of other religions into Karenni State. Thus, many Karenni refugees, who convert to Christianity or the other religions, cannot give up the practice of Kay Htoe Boe. More importantly, the erection of the E-Lue pole is recognized as the symbol of the Karenni New Year celebration. The Karenni New Year celebration is unique because it has no specific day as the public New Year. Mu Preh Law described that, in 2014, the practice of the erection of the E-Lue pole and the Karenni New Year celebration had been practiced for 2,775 years.

Hsu Mar, one of my several informants who converted to Christianity, told me that she and her family remain involved in practicing the Kay Htoe Boe tradition because they see the erection of E-Lue pole as the most important tradition for the Karenni people and an event to celebrate the New Year. Mu Preh Law also described that the E-Lue pole is representing a remarkable space where the Karenni people can erect and dance around the E-Lue pole to apologize to each other and

cleanse their bad past year. Thus, the E-Lue pole has held the Karenni people together.

6.2.2 The Kay Htoe Boe Flag



Figure 6.18 Kay Htoe Boe Flag at Section 7's Kay Htoe Boe Site, April, 2016

The colorful flag of the Kay Htoe Boe clearly flutters at the Kay Htoe Boe site and symbolizes the ritual meanings during the Festival. The Kay Htoe Boe celebrants commonly used this flag both in Karenni State and the displacement area. The flag consists of three broad stripes and at the edge of the flag, there is an E-Lue pole placed on the earth. The first white stripe represents the purity of the villages and the villagers; the yellow stripe is about a good paddy harvest, and the blue stripe is believed to chase away bad spirits and illnesses; so it represents good health (Dudley, 2010). During the celebration of the Festival, one male holds the flag and leads the traditional dancing team to dance around the E-Lue pole and honor each household in the section or the camp.

6.2.3 Traditional Dancing and Instruments

During the Kay Htoe Boe Festival, the traditional dancing takes an active role in constructing the sense of rapture in social relations. The dancing is different from the Dee Ku Festival because only males are allowed to dance around the E-Lue pole. Thus, it can be said that the females are more marginalized than in the practice in the Dee Ku Festival. The dance step also required more unity of foot tramping steps and the musicians needed to tramp. Sometimes, when there were no dancers, the musicians danced and played the instruments at the same time. The dancing and music began on the first day of collection. The rhythm of the large drum was beat loudly while the flute was blown in accordance with the gong and drum rhythm beats.

Mu Preh Nga Reh described that the people in the section gather to support their folks to dance restlessly during the second night of the festival. He said that the rhythm of the music means “tramp strongly, tramp together”. He also told me that the louder the rhythm, the better that the god can hear. This very much shows how the dancers are united. During the second night of the Festival, each section visited and danced around the Kay Htoe Boe site in the other sections. From my observations, I saw that the Section 9 dancers come to dance around the Kay Htoe Boe Site in Section 7. Thus, this dancing is said to symbolize the unity of the community.

This dancing activity also integrates social relations within the sections and the camp. This is because the interactions between the dancers and the hosts, during the honoring dancing, create a sense of rapture. The host welcomes the dancers by sprinkling water with acacia on the dancers while the dancers in turn sprinkle water back to the host. Mu Preh Law described that the practice of sprinkling water, or watering, during the dancing honoring the households, is said to apologize to each other as the New Year had come. Therefore, the traditional dancing and

music in the Kay Htoe Boe Festival strengthen the relation bonds within the sections and throughout the camp.

6.3 Historical Background of the Reinvention of the Kay Htoe Boe Festival

This section will explore why and how the Karenni refugees seek to reinvent and continually preserve the practice of the Kay Htoe Boe Festival. The Kay Htoe Boe Festival is also called the “*E-Lue Festival*” because the E-Lue pole is the most important component of the Festival. Since the erection of the E-Lue pole both represented a sacred space and Karenni New Year celebration, the Kay Htoe Boe Festival significantly uses a greater amount of resources than the Dee Ku Festival, particularly the teak pole which is an expensive wood. Additionally, the physical space of erecting the pole should be wide or large enough for the celebrants to have space to dance and make offerings, and should have extra space for a pole to be added annually at the Kay Htoe Boe site.

In the conversations with the informants, several of them described how the Kay Htoe Boe Festival in their villages was such a great celebration which had large poles. Also, the E-Lue Pole became the most prominent landscape feature in the villages. From another respect, the number of years of a village could be counted from number of the poles. Mu Preh Law told me that the pole in the camp was smaller than the one in his village. In the first year of the camp, the Karenni refugees were concerned that they would not be able to use local resources, such as cutting a teak tree, as they were able to do in the other territory. This concern was resolved because the KNPP and the Camp Committee negotiated with the local Thai authorities and the Camp Commander about this important issue. As a result, the Karenni were allowed each year, since 1994, to cut the tree for a pole and celebrate their festival.

In 1994-1995, only four sections in the camp celebrated their Kay Htoe Boe Festivals in different sites of their sections. Bo Sein Bui described that, in the early years of the camp in 1994, the Kay Htoe Boe festival was celebrated among Kayah traditional religion practitioners. However, he and his Shan folks also attended the Kay Htoe Boe Festivals whenever they were invited. He further described that, at that time, the Kay Htoe Boe festival, was merely seen as religious or sacred space and only a section

event, not yet a camp event. The Kay Htoe Boe festival was led by a section Kay Htoe Boe Festival leader (E-Lue Pen Je) and the section cultural leader. Each section invited and attended each other's celebration, dancing and visiting at the Kay Htoe Boe's sites at the nearby section or sometimes to every section that had E-Lue poles throughout the whole camp. It could be said that the setting of the celebration of the Festival in the camp was as same as in the villages.

Not later than May and June in 1996 when the second wave of refugee¹ arrived to the camp, they were located in new settling sections depending on their primary origin villages and kin ties. Boe Ka Nga Reh, a former Daw Kra Aww village headman and BMN cultural chairman described that his villagers were the first group, among the second wave of refugees arriving in the camp, which had been able to celebrate their Kay Htoe Boe Festival and erect the E-Lue pole in their new settling section in 1997. The 1996 arrivals in the other sections were not able to celebrate their own festivals or practice the traditional annual rituals in their sites. These newly-arrived Karenni refugees, who could not organized their own festivals, attended other sections' festivals, particularly those in Sections 4 and 5 on the erecting day and individuals conducted the chicken bone divinations around the E-Lue pole and made offerings to the E-Lue pole

In discussing about expanding the size of the Kay Htoe Boe' site in his section, Mu Preh Law described that the people in the section, especially the youth, complained that, after attending another section's E-Lue pole's site which was far from their section, they saw that their E-Lue site was too small for celebration. Due to the far distance in between each section and some different pattern of practices² in each village, more sections increasingly requested the Camp Committee for permission to erect the poles. In 1998, several sections began to have separate E-Lue pole's sites. Because of the increasing number of poles every year, the E-Lue compounds' space in each section had expanded. This created a concern that having different sites for the Kay Htoe Boe Festival would increase separation in the camp. In response, the BMN Camp Cultural Committee, in 1999, established public events, such as sports events, dancing

¹ The second wave of refugees was largely Kayah who arrived in the camp as the result of being affected by the forced relocation strategy (see Chapter 3).

² Inside Karenni State, the top of the E-Lue pole was decorated in different styles or designs in each village or township.

competitions, and stage show nights to bring celebrants together. They also decided that each section would take turns annually in hosting the erecting of one large pole together.

So as not to disturb the normal working week and to increase number of participants, the Kay Htoe Boe Festival was set up and recognized as a camp public holiday by the Camp Committee. Thus, for those who worked in the social groups in the camp, such as teachers, medics, and NGOs' camp-based workers, they were able to participate and celebrate the Festival. The Karenni refugees celebrated the Kay Htoe Boe Festival on the same days which were determined by a single divination of chicken bone. The length of the Festival was the same four days and three nights for the whole camp.

During the Kay Htoe Boe Festival in the camp, the most popular and rapturous activity was the traditional dancing in each section. This is because the traditional dancing of each section was on a large scale. Some sections danced only in their nearby sections, while other sections danced in every section or to the end of the camp. Some sections even went to dance in Ban Nai Soi village. For instance, the Section 10 cultural leader, Su Reh, described that, in the past, his section regularly went to dance in Ban Mai Nai Soi village. They walked to the village; but on the way back, they hired a truck by spending the funds from the contributions that they received from the host houses that welcomed the dancing group, especially the KNPP leaders' houses. This shows how Karenni refugees, in the past years, sought to maintain the connection with their folks or the KNPP in the local Thai village. Apart from maintaining the connection with folks and the KNPP in the local Thai village, the Kay Htoe Boe Festival was mobilized as a sacred network. From 1999-2012, the Karenni refugees mobilized a sacred network with the Kayah and Kayan villages in Mae Hong Son Province through the exchange visits of the Kay Htoe Boe Festival. Furthermore since 2013, the sacred network of the Kay Htoe Boe Festival helped Karenni refugees to create connections with Karenni State.

For the Grand Festival, a large pole was erected in the hosting section. All the youth, the section cultural leaders, and the section Kay Htoe Boe festival leader (E-Lue Pen Je) organized their people to attend and help in the hosting section. The Grand Festival in the camp was visited annually by the Kayah and Kayan communities in Mae Hong Son

Province. Since the organizing of the Grand Festival caused a great concern about the large cost of the tree and the annual funding needs of the camp, the Camp Committee and the Karenni Cultural Committee rescheduled the whole camp's combined event. It was changed from once a year to once every three years beginning from 2014. In other words, the whole camp combined event, or the Kay Htoe Boe Grand Festival, changed from a section a year to a section in every three years. As a result in 2016 during my data collection, I had no chance to participate in the Grand Festival. Instead I visited different Kay Htoe Boe Festival sites from my selected section.

In this section, it clearly explains how the refugees maintained the practice of the Kay Htoe Boe Festival and who mobilized the practice of the Kay Htoe Boe Festival. Therefore, I will next examine the roles of the BMN Camp Cultural Committee, the traditional leaders, the camp youth group, and the young traditional dancers who are engaged in the process of organizing and preserving the Festival.

6.4 The Role of the BMN Camp Cultural Committee and the Camp Committee: Negotiating for the Right to Access Local Resources and Bargaining for Support

This section will explore the role of the BMN Camp Cultural Committee in organizing the Kay Htoe Boe festival, negotiating for resources and space, and mobilizing the sacred network. It is clearly seen that their role in the Kay Htoe Boe Festival is busier and more involved than in the Dee Ku Festival. The sacred space in the Festival requires a large physical space for ritual activities and the place for the erection of the pole, and related necessary resources, especially the teak and sacrificial animals. In this regard, the Camp Cultural Committee has taken an active role in negotiating with the humanitarian organizations for their support, and the right and the space for the ritual practice with the Thai authorities and the Thai Forestry authorities.

In 1997, the celebration of the Kay Htoe Boe was expanding in each section with more sections erecting the poles, a greater use of local resources, such as the teak, and the expansion of the forest area for ritual space. This caused concern to the hosting Thai authorities. In response to using local resources, the Camp Committee would not allow any more sections to celebrate or create their Kay Htoe Boe site due to the concern of violating the Thai forestry laws and camp regulations on the restriction of movement.

The Camp Committee was very concerned about this issue and did not allow the sections to have their own Kay Htoe Boe site. In response, the traditional leaders in the each section and the former Kay Jar's, who resettled in the same section with their own folks originating from the same villages, requested the Camp Committee to negotiate with the Thai Mueang District Governor. In doing this, the Camp Committee sent official letters to the Thai Mueang District Governor about the Kay Htoe Boe Festival to explain the reason for its celebration which was clearly identified as the continuity of religion practice.

Official letters were sent to the District Governor about this request for twice, but it was not approved. Mu Preh Law described that, after sending official letters to the Thai authorities in 1998, the District Governor and other local Thai authorities came to observe the Kay Htoe Boe Festival in Section 5. The former Kay Jar and the Camp Committee explained the purpose and the importance of the ritual annual festival for Karenni refugees. They gave the reason to the gathered Thai authorities that religion was very important for the Karenni refugees and was followed by them ever since their pre-displacement life. Furthermore, they also explained how it was difficult for each section to share the same site of the Kay Htoe Boe Festival due to the small space for large numbers of celebrants to gather and the size of each section. Once these reasons were given to the Thai hosting authorities, they began to have a better understanding of the Karenni refugee's situation and how the Karenni refugees deal with their trauma of forced migration through the practice of religion.

However, the accessing of local resources was still regulated, meaning that it should be reported to the Thai local authorities how many and what type of trees had be cut for annual Kay Htoe Boe site. This clearly shows that the key actors in the camp, particularly the former Kay Jar who was involved in the BMN Cultural Committee and the Camp Committee, took a very significant role in negotiating with the local Thai authorities. They used their religion identity to negotiate for their right to practice and for access to the local resources.

As part of the process of getting support, the BMN Cultural Committee and the Camp Committee had negotiations with NGOs in the monthly meeting, the so-called the Camp Coordination Meeting. Every NGO, working in the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp, received

the same proposal from the BMN Cultural Committee and should then consider how and how much they would donate. Khu Ei Reh explained that the support from each NGO was dependent on their budget availability. The negotiation and funding proposals happen every year. The Camp Committee and the BMN Cultural Committee have always successfully negotiated with the NGOs.

In this section, I demonstrate how the BMN Cultural Committee and the Camp Committee developed their agency in a way in which they are active in communicating with the hosting authorities and the NGOs. In the following section, I will explore the role of the section traditional leaders and youth who work closely with the BMN Cultural Committee to preserve the continuity of the practice of the Kay Htoe Boe Festival.

6.5 The Role of Traditional Leaders

This Chapter shows that these section key actors are very busy with the role of organizing and leading the ritual process, especially the grand celebration of the E-Lue Festival. In this section, I will examine the role of these key actors, how they lead, are involved, and work with the BMN Camp Cultural Committee to be integrated into the Kay Htoe Boe Festival.

6.5.1 A Section Cultural Leader

I have discussed about the role of the section cultural leader in the Dee Ku Festival in the preceding chapter. In this section, I will focus on the role of the section cultural leader in organizing the annual ritual Kay Htoe Boe Festival. Since the celebration of the annual ritual Kay Htoe Boe Festival requires more resources and is more complicated than the Dee Ku Festival, the role of section cultural leader in this Festival is much busier in each section.

As a part of leading the festival process in the sections, the section cultural leaders play a crucial role in collecting the financial donations and allocating the funds used for the sacrifice ritual at the Kay Htoe Boe site in the section, and the food and the drink, especially the rice wine.

For the financial contribution role, Su Reh, the Section 10 cultural leader, described that the section collected the financial donations from Kay Htoe Boe religion practitioners' households participating in the sacrifice ritual. The community contribution is also in the form of volunteer labor. Su Reh further described that the contribution of labor was also given by the non-Kay Htoe Boe religion practitioners. Significantly, the section cultural leader works closely with the section Kay Htoe Boe Festival leader (E-Lue Pen Je) in gathering the section residents for the volunteer labor necessary to cut, carry, and carve the tree. The role of the females is to provide food and drink, and water to those male labors carrying the pole back to the Kay Htoe Boe site on the first day. Like their role in the Dee Ku Festival, the section cultural leaders also lead the youth traditional dancers to the dancing honoring the households within in the section, other sections, or even the Karenni communities in the local Thai village. Apart from the role in section, the section cultural leaders also work with the BMN Cultural Committee to organize the Grand Festival which has recently been held every three years.

In regard to their role in Grand Festival, Nga Reh, the Section 7 cultural leader, described that, in the past years when they organized the camp Grand Festival, he gathered his youth and people to participate and help the section cultural leaders in preparing the Grand Festival. The male youth participated in dancing around the pole while the females helped to prepare the food and the drink, and serve them to the guests and the dancers. Obviously, the incorporation of the people, from different sections, strengthened the practice of community contributions in the form of labor and community bonds. Prominently, the role of the section cultural leader is clearly seen as the one who integrates the practice of the community contributions and the section's celebration into the camp communal festival.

6.5.2 A Section Kay Htoe Boe Festival Leader (E-Lue Pe Je)

Contrary to the practice of offerings in the Dee Ku Festival, the Kay Htoe Boe rituals are related to the offerings to the god of E-Lue or the male god. It involves the offerings of dancing and food. The E-Lue Festival leader's role is therefore busier than the Kay Pe Je. The role is more involved in the public events: firstly gathering the section residents to participate in the work of cutting, decorating, and erecting the E-Lue pole; secondly, gathering the section residents to dance around the E-Lue pole; and thirdly, supporting the dancing activity around the Kay Htoe Boe site.

In interviewing with some E-Lue Pe Je, several of them described that, during the Festival, they were very busy with leading the ritual activities, especially gathering and leading the section residents to cut the trees and carry the poles back the Kay Htoe Boe site. Beh Reh, a 47 years old, the Section 18 E-Lue Pe Je, explained about the process of leading the team. As the E-Lue Pen Je, he chose the kind of tree for the pole and would be the first one to begin cutting the tree; the team would help him to cut the rest of it. Before going to the forest, the E-Lue Pe Je had to ensure that the number of section male residents were enough to cut the pole. More importantly, the E-Lue Pe Je also takes the role in conducting the chicken bone divination to ask what kind of pole that the section will need to erect or just redecorate and repair an old pole; and whether to repair or built a new platform. This needed to be done before they went to cut and carve the teak tree for E-Lue pole.

During the collection day, the role of E-Lue Pe Je is also to offer the food at the platform. In the villages during the three nights of the Festival, the E-Lue Pe Je would stay overnight at the platform which was built only for one person to stay. In the camp, this kind of practice does not exist because the size of platform is too small for a man to stay. However, the Section 7 E-Lue Pe Je, Pleh Reh, told me that he always

stays overnight during the Kay Htoe Boe Festival nights on the platform because his section's platform was built as large as the village one.

Besides the offering the food at the platform, the E-Lue Pe Je also leads the offering of the food around the pole's site during the pole erection day. The E-Lue Pe Je also gathers the males to participate in the divination of sacrificial pig because it needs male labors to slice the pork. For the divination process, the E-Lue Pe Je, together with other respected elders, lead the divination. The most tiring work is that of staying awake until the morning, supporting the dancing group, and accompanying the dancing group to dance the honoring dances to the houses in the section or nearby sections.

Kler Reh, the E-Lue Pe Je from Section 10, inherited this role from his elder brother-in-law, who was the E-Lue Pe Je for fifteen years. He described that, during the Festival, many other sections' dancers came to dance the honoring dances to his house; so he had to make contributions of financial donations to each dancing group. Because his role as the E-Lue Pe Je, many people came to dance at his house and the other section's E-Lue Pe Je also experienced the same practice. Regarding to this, he told me that being the E-Lue Pe Je meant that he has more tasks than others.

The E-Lue Pe Je also leads the section celebrants to participate when there is the Grand Festival in the camp. This Grand Festival incorporates the section festivals. The Section 7 E-Lue Pe Je described that, when Section 7 took its turn as the host section for the Grand Kay Htoe Boe Festival, the role of the E-Lue Pe Je became burdensome when compared to the Festival in his own section because, in the Grand Festival, there were many food preparations that he had to lead. During that Grand Festival, the other sections' E-Lue Pe Je also helped to facilitate by informing the section residents to gather and participate in the labor work.

In the Kay Htoe Boe Festival with its greater public sphere, the E-Lue Pe Je has to work with broader community actors, such as the section leaders and the BMN Cultural Committee. The various roles of the E-Lue Pe Je in the Kay Htoe Boe Festival greatly requires the E-Lue Pe Je to have precise knowledge and skills in leading the rituals and sufficient patience to gather the people to participate in the community, lead the practice in the section, and in some years, be involved in the camp's Kay Htoe Boe Grand Festival.

6.6 The Camp Youth Group

As a part of celebrating the Kay Htoe Boe Grand Festival, the camp youth take significant roles in helping the BMN Cultural Committee. They arrange the agenda of the Grand Festival and contribute their labor in preparing the food, welcoming people, and serving the food and the drinks to guests, especially to the KNPP and Thai authorities. The males have a special role in the dancing to give honor to the pole and perform for the guests. Those mentioned above are the significant roles of youth in this Festival. Since the camp youth group was just recently established in 2016, they have not yet taken these roles. Therefore for this section, I have not described how they play a role for this Festival. Instead, I have learnt from them that they had a chance to accompany the BMN Cultural Committee to attend the Kay Htoe Boe Festival in a village inside the Karenni State. Bu Meh, a 18 years old girl, the group leader described that, by attending Grand Festival in April 2016, they contributed their labor in the Festival, particularly the male dancing around the pole, and the female preparation of food. Moreover, they also participated in the dancing competition. Certainly, the role of camp youth group is important since they help the BMN Cultural Committee in organizing the Grand Festival and taking a leading role of demonstrating examples of the practices, especially dancing to the other youth in the camp.

6.7 Youth Traditional Dancers

The annual Kay Htoe Boe Festival is primarily a male affair and females remained marginalized in the ritual process. Thus, the dancing around the Kay Htoe Boe site is only performed by males. The male youths take active roles in dancing around the E-

Lue pole during the Festival and also the dancing honoring each household in their section and the other sections. Su Reh, the cultural leader in the Section 10, described that the traditional dancers play crucial roles in representing the section such as going to dance around the E-Lue at the other sections' Kay Htoe Boe site where they stayed, danced, and supported the dancing during the last night of the Kay Htoe Boe Festival. Prominently, the youth traditional dancers engage in preserving of the traditional dancing of Kay Htoe Boe festival.

6.8The Sacred Network

As the Kay Htoe Boe Festival is traditionally involved within a religion context, the Karenni refugees, who are the Kay Htoe Boe religious practitioners, seek to maintain their religious practices and mobilize a sacred network of Kay Htoe Boe. In doing this, they have created a sacred network with the Kayah and Kayan villages in Mae Hong Son Province to preserve the practice of the Kay Htoe Boe religion.

In 1999, the Karenni Cultural Committee began to lead the Ban Mai Nai Soi community to visit other Karenni communities' annual Kay Htoe Boe Festivals in the Kayan and Kayah villages in Mae Hong Son Province. Those villages in which the Karenni refugees created networks were the Kayah-Thai villages of Mai Sa Pen, Doi Sang, Huay Suer-Tao, and Huay Pheung; and the Kayan villages of Huay Phu Kae and Huay Suer-Tao. Some of those villages, particularly Huay Suer-Tao and Huay Pheung are comprised of the Kayah ethnic groups which migrated to Mae Hong Son Province before the demarcation of the border and the pre-modern state era (field study in Huay Suer Tao village, 2015). Other communities, such as the Kayan and the Kayaw in Huay Phu Kae and Huay Suer -Tao villages were set up as tourist villages in Mae Hong Son Province in the same year when the first wave of Karenni refugees came to the camp. The sacred network was mobilized through the practice of exchange visits among those communities.

In regard to the sacred network, Mu Preh Law described that the mentioned communities have support each community festival, such as the overnight dancing around Kay Htoe Boe site and participating in sports events. Those communities had become involved in preserving of the continuity of the

celebration and the practice of dancing around the Kay Htoe Boe Festival. By doing this, they established a committee, had an annual meeting, and discussed which village would be appropriate to be the host as well as plan and prepare for each year's Kay Htoe Boe Festival. In past years since 1999-2010, youth from each section's group always accompanied the Karenni cultural group to attend the other communities' annual Festival. The relationship between those communities becomes close in a way that they have a shared sense of belonging to the same religious community and a common tradition. Yet, the exchange visits do not last long as the Karenni refugees' right of movement is restricted. Mu Preh Law explained the reason for the discontinuity of the Karenni visiting the Kayah and Kayah Festivals.

“In the past years, the movement was not restricted as nowadays. Refugees could visit other communities and the negotiations with Thai authorities were not difficult as now. They always understood our practice of religion and allowed us to visit other communities with two or three rented trucks. Now the security along the border has become tightened and the refugee movement is restricted. However, this was not only the reason that we could not continue with the visiting other communities. The other factor was we did not have enough funds as the past years; so we were not able to organize the visit as the past years. Therefore, the Karenni refugees have not been able to visit long distances from the camp and the Kay Htoe Boe network with the Karenni community in Thailand has not been active since 2010”. (Mu Preh Law, March, 2016)

Significantly, creating networks with the other communities in Thailand did not last long because of two factors: one was the restriction on the refugees' travel movements and the tightened security along the border; and the second was the difficulty of funding. As the result, the Karenni refugees had a little or no chance to attend the other communities' festivals after 2010. However, the Kayah and Kayan communities in Mae Hong Son Province have continually attended the Kay Htoe Boe Festival in the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp.

The sacred space became active again along the border with the re-opening of the border of Karenni State in 2013. The BMN Cultural Committees sought ways to create and mobilize their networking with the Karenni Cultural Department inside the Karenni State. Khu Poe Reh described that the BMN Cultural Committee had be able to attend the Kay Htoe Boe Festival in Boe Poe Daw village which was a host in April 2016. This

trip included the members of the BMN Cultural Committee, the camp youth group, some section cultural leaders, and section youth members. For the visit, the BMN Cultural Committee and the youth participated in the dancing and helped the host to organize the Festival. Furthermore, Khu Poe Reh described that they had met with the Karenni Cultural Department in Karenni State and agreed to work together for the preservation of Karenni traditional practices and the continuity of annual Festival exchange visits.

After visiting and participating in the Kay Htoe Boe Festival inside Karenni State, three cultural masters from the cultural group in Karenni State were invited by the BMN Cultural Committee to come to the camp to provide a cultural and traditional knowledge training. They came to the camp in April 2016 and provided that training. Therefore, the Kay Htoe Boe network enabled those communities to share the space of knowledge. In essence, because the Karenni refugees have developed relationships with other communities and networks with Karenni communities in Thailand and Karenni State, the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp as isolated community, has been reconnected with the other Karenni communities in forging their traditional religion identity and the religion community is continually constructed and maintained.

6.9 Conclusion

The Kay Htoe Boe Festival serves as a social space which connects past to present. Significantly, the recreating of familiar practices in Kay Htoe Boe Festival helps Karenni refugees to recreate sense of belonging to the religion or sub Karenni group. In ethnography study of Kay Htoe Boe Festival, I clearly illustrate how the celebrants, especially Kayah traditional or Kay Htoe Boe religion practitioners conducted the practice of making offering and animal sacrifice for the well-being of household, sections, or even individuals during the erection of the pole day. Obviously, the Kay Htoe Boe Festival is recreated as sacred space. However, my observation also made that the Kay Htoe Boe festival is also celebrated as the celebration of Karenni New Year as the erection of the pole was traditionally practiced by Kayah populations in Karenni state since an ancient time. Therefore, for those Kayah households that converted to other religion remain involve in celebrating the festival. This allows Karenni refugees to

recreate sense of belonging to a group that they were part of it in the past, especially as Kayah.

In the context of sacred space, the BMN Camp Cultural Committee has worked hard to develop and mobilize a sacred network of Kay Htoe Boe with the Kayah and Kayan villages in Mae Hong Son Province in the past years. In recent years, it has created the network with the Karenni communities inside Karenni State in the form of exchange visits and knowledge sharing. Moreover, the ritual activities in sacred space also strengthens the sense of commonality in the camp as the people become involved in the Festival through their contribution of financial donations and volunteer labor. This is particularly so with the labor of cutting, carving, and carrying the pole back to the site that has been done by both traditional and non-traditional religion practitioners. More importantly, this Chapter shows that, in process of the preservation of the practice of the Kay Htoe Boe Festival, the BMN Camp Cultural Committee and the Camp Committee engage as active agents in negotiating with the Thai authorities and the NGOs for the resources, the right to access sacred space, and support.

Since the Kay Htoe Boe Festival is largely celebrated by both Kayah traditional and none traditional religion practitioners, the grand festival has been set up to articulate as space of articulate Karenni identity. Regards to the grand festival, my observation made clear that the festival does not constitute to the sense of collective identity as Karenni. Rather, the celebrants are more aware of their identity as Kayah. Most of them described the practice in Kay Htoe Boe belong to Kayah or Kay Htoe Boe religion. Particularly, they called themselves as E- Lue Phu. Thus, the identity of traditional religion and Kayah are clearly seen in the Kay Htoe Boe Festival. Apparently, the ritual activities and the erection of the pole, which are practical components in the Kay Htoe Boe Festival, can be understood as a part of the way in which the refugees seek to strengthen community bonds, remember their past rapture, and feel more like home in the displacement. Indeed, this Chapter clearly shows how and in which ways the refugees work hard to recreate their world in the displacement.