WAITING FOR ELSEWHERE: PLACE, TEMPORALITY AND MYANMAR MIGRANTS IN THAILAND

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Inga Gruß

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Inga Gruß, PhD

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The central argument of this dissertation upholds that the experience of time cannot be understood independently of the experience of place, in other words, that the experience of time is inextricable from the experience of place. I argue that migrants experience Thailand foremost as a non-place. The difficulty they have in molding place according to their own wishes, results in an increased desire to formulate flexible orientations in and towards time. Migrants increasingly live oriented towards the future and the present becomes a tool for envisioning and working towards the life-to-be. The future, however, is not only a temporal condition. Embedded in the waiting process is the realization that the future will only fulfill its promise if it is going to be lived elsewhere. The return to a place with room for personal histories, meaningful identity-formation processes and lasting relations is necessarily a move through time and space.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Inga Gruß holds a degree in Psychology (Diplom Psychologin) from the Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule. She graduated from the University of Amsterdam with a M.Sc. in contemporary Asian Studies. She furthermore graduated from the National University of Singapore with a M.A. in Southeast Asian Studies before taking up graduate studies at Cornell University.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BBC	Burmese Border Consortium
BSPP	Burmese Socialist Programme Party
DVB	Democratic Voice of Burma
EU	European Union
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KNU	Karen National Union
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NCGUB	National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NV	National Verification
OFM	Organization for Migration
THB	Thai Baht
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
US	United States
USD	US Dollar
USDA	Union Solidarity and Development Association

INTRODUCTION

During the first few weeks of my fieldwork I met most evenings with one my neighbors, Nwe Nwe, a woman in her late twenties and keen to improve her English skills. We had agreed on a regular language exchange; I tutored her in English and she returned the favor by helping me with my Burmese. To prepare for our meetings I compiled lists of words that I had been unable to recall or translate into Burmese during my daily conversations. I tried to look all the words up in the dictionary, and used the meetings to verify that the words I had found encapsulated the appropriate meanings. For one of our early conversations, I placed the word 'migrant' at the top of the list. Having been unable to find it in the English-Burmese dictionary I was using, I was somewhat embarrassed not to have a clear translation for this term that seemed so crucial to my research.

We met like all the other evenings outside the small one-room house I rented. The house was part of a settlement of five houses lining one side of a quiet side road and six houses on the opposite side. All the houses were small studio or one-room affairs, mostly rented to migrants from Myanmar. I purchased a rattan mat for us to sit on the floor in the evening breeze outside. The novelty of my presence slowly wore off and neighbors were now accustomed to seeing us sit outside chatting. Once in a while, somebody would come by to listen to our conversation for a few minutes and then return home. That evening, I had attempted to explain to Nwe Nwe the meaning of the term 'migrant' in Burmese. My initial explanations of the word only resulted in an uncertain look on her face. Her uncertainty made me insecure about my explanation and I started to explain the word to her again, changing my word choice and using different examples. Initially, it appeared to me that she continuously failed to understand what I was asking her to translate. Finally, I came to realize that she had in fact understood my explanation, but that she

did not know the appropriate Burmese word. Upon this realization, it was now my turn to look consternated.

Nwe Nwe arrived in Thailand a few short months before me. Coming from an office job in Yangon, she now worked as a teacher for a private school set-up for migrant children in Thailand. Despite her recent arrival, it did not seem unreasonable to me that she would know the Burmese term for migrant. However, during that fated moment when her language skills seemed to leave her wordless, she stopped our conversation to ask our neighbor if he would know the term. Her assumption appeared as logical as my own had been; he understood the migrant experience. After all, he was employed for an organization whose work focused on migrants and offered varying forms of support and services for them. She crossed the street to visit him at his house and on her return after only a minute or two, she took a piece of paper and wrote down the term that he had shared with her: ရွှေ့ပြောင်းအလုပ်သမား *(shwe pyaun a louq tha ma)*. The literal meaning of ရွှေ့ပြောင်းအလုပ်သမား *(shwe pyaun a louq tha ma)* can best be explained as 'a moving worker.' It was a word that I would use excessively during my research; a word that I thought provided a fair description of the group of people that I had set out to learn from, and about. It took many more months before I realized that the situation that evening should have alerted me to some of the shortcomings of my most basic assumptions.

Fieldwork, time and place

I take as a starting point, as others have argued, that perceptions of time and places are formed through our everyday experiences and actions (Irving 2005). Migration, travel or any other discontinuity that removes us from familiar environments necessitates a re-orientation in time and toward place. The ways we have learned to move our bodies, how we interact and communicate, may suddenly seem out of place. Migrants, the actors at the center of this

dissertation, are often challenged to face their assumptions about place and time that they had learned to be natural and rarely ever questioned. Some of these adjustments can be transformative, while others remain quite inconsequential. In the short episode narrated above, Nwe Nwe attached such little significance to the concept of 'migrant' that she was entirely unfamiliar with the word. Many migrants from Myanmar lived for years, decades or even until the moments of their deaths in Thailand, the site of this research project. Despite their usually extended stays or what one might even call 'permanent relocations,' their identities as migrants often remained secondary.

Their apparent reluctance to self-identify as a 'migrant' was rarely mirrored in the perceptions that others had of them. My decision to use the term migrant throughout this dissertation, for example, reflects part of the reality that migrants live under: others' perceptions do carry significant value. Although external perceptions might not determine how people see themselves, they can play an important role in the ways in which others interact with and treat them. We each see the world through partial or incomplete perspectives (Haraway 1988), but these perspectives can become very powerful and influential. Thailand, the place that positioned all of my interlocutors as migrants did not become a site of meaningful identification to those characterized by the term. Decades of living as migrants did not alter their desire to return to their homes and to focus their temporal outlook on the present. I suggest that this common view of place and time meaningfully captures what it means to be a migrant.

My interlocutors, labor migrants from Myanmar, had moved to Khuan Charoen in Thailand mostly for work. All were there to improve their socio-economic standing; few were intending to stay. They imagined their futures elsewhere, mostly back in Myanmar. Their lives

after return would be different from the lives that they had moved away from in the first place; first and foremost, not as challenging.

Khuan Charoen, a pseudonym for my field site, was in Phang Nga province on Thailand's west coast between Thai Muang and Takua Pa. It was a vastly rural area where hamlets of houses had cropped up near small places of commerce or other sites with income-generating opportunities. Rubber and oil plantations that often expanded beyond the sight of the eye characterized Phang Ngas' landscape. Their ever-expanding presence transformed lush, tropical growth into monotonous, strangely beautiful plantation landscapes. The regularity with which the plantations were organized created an illusion of timelessness and uniformity.

Many of the approximately 30,000 – 80,000 migrant workers from Myanmar in Phang Nga province found employment on plantations. Others worked in the fishing industry as fishermen or in factories processing fish and shrimp. And still more worked in the construction sector or service industry that had developed around tourism. The Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 had its epicenter off the coast in Sumatra, Indonesia. It hit the coastal area in Phang Nga province hard and put a temporary dent into the budding tourism industry. At the same time, it resulted in a construction boom by investors who acquired land along the coast cheaply and who were determined to turn Phang Nga's coast into a tourist destination like the better known and more frequently visited province of Phuket. The destruction by the tsunami resulted in an unprecedented need for labor; word spread fast and most of the urgently needed manpower came from Myanmar.

It was roughly a three hour trip from Khuan Charoen by bus to Ranong, the most southern border crossing along the Thai side of the border with Myanmar. On the other side of the border was Kawthaung in the province reffered to colloquially as Dawei. The term Dawei

describes the province (officially known as Tanintharyi) as well as the local language spoken, the name of an actual town, and provides a form of communal identification.

The majority of migrants in Phang Nga province called Dawei their home. While the lack of access to a visa made it impossible for me to visit Dawei, its inhabitants have ensured me that it is stunningly beautiful. Access to fresh fish, deserted beaches and their home villages figure large in the memory of people from Dawei. At the same time, Dawei proved to be a great disappointment for residents. Despite very similar geographical features to Phang Nga province, rubber yields were disappointingly low and there is limited access to technology that would improve betel nut production.[1] Despite their efforts, the land has not been able to provide for those who work which has played an important role in migrants' decision to leave.

Other migrants come from areas further north in Myanmar, but shared similar frustrations about being unable to make and maintain a livelihood. The struggle for economic security did not only concern agricultural workers, but often included those who had completed higher education and still were not able to find work that provided a living wage. Then there were migrants from urban areas like Yangon or Mandalay who migrated to support families who remained behind in the cities. The great majority of migrants though, in Phang Nga province, were former agricultural workers who migrated as nuclear families. They regarded their stays in Thailand as temporary, until the economic hardship they had experienced had been addressed and would allow for a return to home. The often dreamed about future return would not be predicated on returning to lives of poverty, but migrants' economic power would allow them to transform their homes and lives to live more comfortably.

[1] ကွမ်းသီး (*kwon thi*) or betel nuts are the fruit of a palm tree. Wrapped in a leaf together with tobacco and lime they are a widely enjoyed stimulant. The stained red teeth of many in and from Myanmar are testimony to the popularity of betel nut.

Naming conventions and choices

Any dissertation or publication concerned with Myanmar, unfortunately, still warrants a paragraph explaining the choices authors have made in referring to people and places. Before continuing, I would like to do that here. Throughout the dissertation, I use the term Myanmar when referring to the country in general. Myanmar is the official name used in written, formal Burmese and is commonly used in formal writings. Burma, in contrast, is often used in vernacular speech and if reproducing dialog where my informants used the term in Burmese, I will use it here in English. My choice, therefore, reflects common usage as employed by people from Myanmar themselves. Furthermore, my formative experiences as an observer of Myanmar took place mainly in Myanmar, not outside its borders. As Metro (2011) so aptly has observed, observers who got to know the people and the country first by visiting within its borders usually use the term Myanmar, while people familiar with the country from outside its border (or along the border) mainly use the term Burma. The debate, after all, has been created and politicized foremost by political activists who live in exile and does not reflect the concerns of the greater majority of citizens of Myanmar. I use the term Burmese to refer to the language widely spoken in Myanmar. When referring to (national) forms of identification, the English term Burmese suggests a pan-national identity that includes all its citizens. I have had many discussions with informants about such a possible identification and term and it was widely agreed, that people prefer to refer to themselves according to their individual nationalities: for example Dawei, Mon or Burman. Here, the English term 'nationalities' might be misleading at first. In Burmese, however, people refer to themselves as a specific kind of person and the Burmese term လူမျိုး *(lu myo)* can much more aptly be translated as nationality rather than the often employed term 'ethnicity' or 'ethnic minority.' Moreover, the Burmese term လူမျိုး *(lu myo)* does not indicate

whether people constitute a majority or minority. Pan-national perceptions of identity are uncommon and I have no intention of creating them through the usage of the English term 'Burmese.'

All the names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms. I offered every informant the opportunity to create their own pseudonyms, but most preferred leaving it up to me. Some gave me permission to use their real names unless my dissertation would be political. Given that my informants and I had divergent understandings of the term political, I have chosen to create pseudonyms for every single person. The prefixes ဦး *(U)*, ဒေါ် *(Daw)*, မ *(Ma)* and ကို *(Ko)* are kinship terms. U means uncle, Daw means Auntie, Ma means (older) sister and Ko means (older) brother. I have retained the kinship terms to indicate the age-status a person holds relative to me. U and Daw are people of roughly my parents' generation and Ma and Ko can be considered older siblings to me. Children are often addressed with daughter or son and anybody my age or a few years younger are addressed with only their names. There are other honorifics such as teacher that are commonly used.

Senses of home through language

I had come to Phang Nga province after multiple years of short and intermediate-term (research) travel in Myanmar and other places along the Thai-Myanmar border. I was familiar with places along the border further north in Thailand where many people from Myanmar lived and had found myself uncomfortable there in the past. Therefore, I decided to conduct my research in Phang Nga province, a place I was unfamiliar with, but that appeared attractive because of the large contingent of migrant workers. As a result of the circumstances, I did not speak any Thai and my plans to acquire Thai skills during the fieldwork were initially relegated to the back burner and later entirely abandoned. I initially had planned to do my research in

Myanmar, but was not able to obtain a visa. I was preoccupied with learning to understand Dawei, a regional vernacular derived from Burmese spoken by many migrants, but often distinctly different in word choices and grammar. Furthermore, I found that the presence of manpower from Myanmar was so predominant in Phang Nga province that one could go anywhere and most likely find a Burmese-speaking person in all public places: gas stations, markets, restaurants, stores or at bus stops. What must seem like the intrusion of foreigners to local Thai people became the world I exclusively moved and lived in.

Moving within Burmese-speaking circles provided me with a sense of place and time very different from a bi-lingual or Thai-speaking environment. At the same time, my language limitations were the closest aspect in which my experience of place as an anthropologist mirrored those of most migrants. Few migrants learned to speak Thai beyond a very basic level. Whether they acquired Thai skills mostly depended on the sectors they worked in, how long they had stayed in Thailand and to some extent their educational backgrounds. Acquiring a foreign language was entirely new to most migrants of whom the majority had finished primary education only and often experienced language learning an insurmountable challenge next to work and family obligations. I enjoyed the moments of intimacy that were created between migrants and myself when for example I went into a store and asked for a Burmese-language speaking employee. Some Thais were taken aback by it, others who saw me regularly, started to appreciate my language skills because the common language I shared with their employees made me return to their stores and market stalls.

Rarely did I wish to be able to speak Thai. There were a few moments where it would have been advantageous for my research given the wider circles of informants it would have opened up. At the same time, spending time with only migrants, provided me with a sense of

place that helped to understand many of their experiences better. It created a sense of intimacy that I had not foreseen. Often, when I was introduced by one migrant to another, the person introducing me would emphasize that I had decided to learn to speak Burmese, but that I did not care to learn to speak Thai. This experience was empowering for them and filled many with great pride. In a similar vein, some of my mannerism were recognized as bodily behavior distinctive to Myanmar and not Thailand - like touching my right arm with my left hand when handing something over to another person or slightly bowing one's head and shoulders when quickly passing in-between the conversation of others. Recognition of these behaviors furthered the trust and intimacy between my interlocutors and myself.

Sometimes, I was left wondering how different my impression of Khuan Charoen would have been, if I had spoken Thai. In the early evenings, I often went to participate in aerobics together with a group of older Thai ladies. It took place in the parking lot outside a community building. The building did not house any organization or groups permanently, but could be rented by anybody for hours or days and was empty most of the time. At six o'clock at night, anybody could come and participate in one hour of aerobics for 15 Thai Baht (THB). The sum of 15 THB can be exchanged for about 50 US Cents and 30 THB equals roughly I USD. There were usually 15 - 25 people, all of them women; very rarely would another Caucasian woman participate. I had encouraged migrant friends to come along, but was only successful in ever convincing one friend who started to come along regularly. The Thai ladies were welcoming, but taken aback that neither Soe Moe, the friend who joined me on many occasions, nor I spoke any Thai.

During this hour, I often forgot about conversations from during the day, problems that migrants had shared with me or other things on my mind. It made me feel like being part of a

routine that took itself for granted. To begin with, these women were from a different socio-economic class than most migrants. Their sedentary routines made it necessary to exercise after long hours in office chairs. More importantly, these women exuded a sense of confidence and belonging that few migrants ever had in public. The building was located along the main road and the presence of a group of middle-aged women performing aerobics often drew a lot of attention. Nevertheless, there was no doubt that these women had a right to be there every evening to perform aerobics in the sight of anybody passing by. They felt at home and exuded a sense of ownership of place that I rarely encountered among migrants.

I did not develop any particular ties or attachment to Khuan Charoen and this experience helped me to realize that there were more reasons than I at first believed for that. My fieldwork lasted 18 months, from January 2011 - June 2012. A period of time long enough that it ordinarily would have allowed me to become comfortable and to feel at home. I have moved often, lived in many different places, and usually have developed a much stronger sense of attachment to wherever I lived. Different this time, however, was that I began to share the sense of impermanence and passing-through from my friends and informants peculiar to Khuan Charoen. It was as if we all were waiting for elsewhere, but few people seemed to be able to tell me where this elsewhere would be.

This deeply intertwined relationship between time and place among migrants that I describe above is at the center of this dissertation. Place has long been of interest to anthropologists and it has received ample treatment (Basso 1996, Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Its study has further proliferated with the rise of transnational studies (Clifford 1997, Kearney 1995). Transnational approaches highlighted the shortcomings of analytical frameworks that promoted congruence between geographical territory and cultural patterns. They played a crucial

role in abandoning the notion of bounded, essentialized cultural units that could be mapped onto distinct sites. The emergent transnational literature emphasized the interaction between local and global processes in producing unique cultural forms and the role and meaning of place in an increasingly mobile world were questioned anew (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, Hannerz 1996).

Transnationalism furthermore illustrates a shift in temporalities of everyday lives. As Portes and others (1999) have argued, the term transnationalism describes a simultaneity of engagement with at least two nations that is expressed through mostly material, political or social exchanges. Despite the underlying temporal shifts that many transnational migrants experience, temporality has rarely been explicitly analyzed with regard to migrants' lives (Griffiths et al. 2013).

Migration in context: Thailand

Before situating this dissertation vis-à-vis the general body of literature on migration, time and place, I discuss relevant region- and Thailand-specific scholarship about migration and its implication for interpretations of place and temporality.

Southeast Asia has long been characterized by extensive labor movements and Thailand is no exception to this pattern (Kaur 2010, Lieberman 2003, Reid 1988), the emphasis in this dissertation is mostly on contemporary migration (see chapter 1 for a more historically focused discussion of movement and migration between Myanmar and Thailand).

Perhaps the most ubiquitous contemporary domestic migration pattern in Thailand started in the 1960s: from Thailand's' Northeast to Bangkok (Porpora & Lim 1987). The Northeast, or Isan, at the time was a vastly rural area where agricultural production was the main income-generating mean. Isans' population represented a diverse medley of different dialect speaking peoples, many of whom felt close kinship with the bordering Lao. This sense of belonging and

difference was furthered through contrast with central Thais. The term Isan came to represent not only a geographic region, but also a distinct form of identification (Keyes 1966).

The associated terms urban for Bangkok and rural for Isan similarly took on larger symbolic and ideological connotations. This urban - rural dichotomy was central to Mills' ethnography of female migrants factory workers from Isan in Bangkok (1999, 2001). On the one hand, women took up factory work to supplement their extended families income. On the other hand, moving to Bangkok allowed them to embrace many of the qualities that they perceived urban life to represent: modernity, progress and development. Within their ideological hierarchies the *urban* was the seat of power and prestige while the temporal frames mapped onto the *rural* expressed opposing characteristics of the urban: backwardness, stagnation and underdevelopment.

Despite embracing the hegemonic ideals that effectively subdued rural inhabitants in the first place, the women of Mills' ethnography felt empowered by being able to participate in the performative modernity of the urban whose core was expressed through capitalist-driven consumption. By adapting the role of consumers, migrants emulated hegemonic, urban patterns that they experienced as empowering and liberating.

More recent studies of rural - urban migration in Thailand point to interesting continuities and shifts in this relationship. While the de facto infrastructural gap between Bangkok and Isan has arguably narrowed, the opposing temporal frameworks within which both operated have remained largely unchanged (Keyes 2012). Migrants' presence has become crucial in the daily functioning of the city as the political protests in 2010 illustrated. Motorbike taxi drivers, mostly operated by migrants from Isan, successfully shut down parts of the city by immobilizing traffic (Sopranzetti 2014). However, the power and control they have developed in the urban setting has

not translated into changes in the hegemonic power structures in which rural residents continue to be looked down upon and are even demonized for having the same consumer desires like urban residents (Sopranzetti 2012).

These ethnographic inquiries have somewhat contradictory implications for understanding *place* in migrants lives. Mills' (1999) ethnography highlights that migration can be an empowering tool for renewal and reinvention. By moving to Bangkok, migrants - in their own eyes - started to embody the ideal qualities of place; thus place served as a site for positive, self-initiated social change. Sopranzetti (2014) illustrates that migrants have even gained control over space to such an extent that they can manipulate it at their own will. This power and control though does not influence the larger power hierarchies or structural conditions, neither in Mill's nor in Sopranzetti's analysis.

Migration in context: Transnational movements

As discussed above, analysis of domestic migration often highlight the potential of migration as an engine of positive change. This potential is rarely acknowledged in inquiries that focus on transnational migration. Commonly, repressive facets of systemic conditions are placed center-stage over more empowering aspects. This analytic tendency is reflected in scholarly works on transnational migration to Thailand. Transnational migration to and from Thailand has increasingly become commonplace during the last decades; many Thais have migrated to international destinations and Thailand has welcomed large numbers of transnational workers (Hall 2011, Keyes 2012, Sobieszczyk 2000). Among international migrants, workers from Myanmar and Cambodia play the central role in providing labor for low-skilled jobs and make up the largest group of international migrants (footnote to Howard 2009 and expats moving to Thailand).

In their analysis of women from Myanmar working in factories in Mae Sot, Sangkhlaburi and Samut Prakan, Pearson and Kusakabe (2012) portray factory work as inherently restrictive; the women in their analysis emerge as victims of an abusive system. The image the reader constructs is entirely different from the women that Mills (1999) portrayed in her ethnographic work of factory work. Female Thai migrants were empowered through their factory work and choices that hitherto had remained closed off became accessible. If this is the case for female migrants from Myanmar, it remains underanalyzed. According to Pearson and Kusakabe, exploitation and abuse are central angles to understanding the lives of Myanmar factory workers. The negative conditions under which migrants work are mostly caused by shortcomings in legislation and other structural factors. Following their line of argument, structural conditions weigh so heavily in the everyday lives of migrants that personal betterment is postponed until improved regulations and legislation are not only in place, but implemented as well.

The importance of systemic structures for the unfolding of lived realities is highlighted as well by Arnold and Hewison (2005). In their analysis of Myanmar factory workers in Thailand, factories emerge as precarious sites that nurture insecurity and dependence on others in more powerful positions. Campbell (2013) continues to operate within the paradigm of precariousness and insecurity in his ethnographic assessment of Myanmar factory workers. He, however, emphasizes the ways this commonly shared oppressive experience can nevertheless create positive interaction among migrants. Despite increased flexibilization under which workers de facto have fewer and fewer rights, migrants express solidarity by forming trade unions and other organizations that represent their interests. Thus, in Campbell's analysis a common experience of place - even when this experience is largely negative - can create webs of positive identification and interaction. Sai Latt (2011) illustrates the difficulties migrants can have in making their

bodies legible in a transnational context. Agricultural workers from Myanmar are crucial in operating a Royal Development project site in northern Thailand. Despite their central role their presence is rarely acknowledged, not the least due to their insecure legal status.

Derks (2010) similarly illustrates the restrictions that Cambodian migrant fishermen experience upon arrival in Thailand. In their situation the power of employers is further exacerbated by mostly working on sea. While working on land has not proofed to guarantee legal protection as argued above, geographically further detached from the workings of the law allows employers to control resources, bodies, movement and time of migrants.

As already stated, the limitations of place that these studies point to that migrants experience is closely connected to the legal structures and power hierarchies they move within. Control over their time and movement are crucial tools in exercising power and maintaining their subdued hierarchical position. This experience is not unique to transnational migrants existence in Thailand, but common among the lives of the "transnational working-class" (Pattana 2014: x).

The heavy reliance on migrant workers for the functioning of the Singaporean economy offer rich case studies for understanding the meaning of place and time in migrants' lives. Pattana (2014) argues that Thai migrant workers, mostly men in his ethnography, are governed by processes other than citizens in the country of residence or their home countries. They move in an alternate legal space and often this space imposes suffering causing them to assess and reconstruct the essence of who they are. Thus, in Pattana's ethnography control over the presence is cause for re-crafting intimate ways of existing.

Even in contexts where migrants work in domestic spaces and systematic conditions are mitigated on a more personal level, migrants' mobility continues to be monitored and restricted by employers (Yeoh and Huang 2010). Transnational domestic workers in Singapore experience

strict regulation of their time and the spaces they can move in. Employers often write detailed timetables for every day of the week, regimenting how down to the minute domestic workers are supposed to spent their time. In addition to close control of time, space is similarly controlled. Domestic spaces are segregated into no-go areas or other zones where migrants are confined to.

Placing restrictions on migrants' time is central as well in the few available studies that explicitly investigate temporality and migration. Andersson (2014) argues that the control over individuals' time has become a new tool in Europe's fight against undocumented migration. The borderlands of Europe are partially constituted by the struggle between migrants who want to enter and border authorities who are attempting to restrict access to European countries. In Ceuta, a Spanish enclave on the African side of the Strait of Gibraltar, African migrants are detained at random. States exercise their power by spatially restricting the movement of migrants and at the same time having total control over their time. The time of detention is ordinarily unknown, just as the next destination is unclear. The state is ultimately able to control individual, subjective temporalities.

The disempowerment that migrants experience when they lose control over temporalities of everyday life is highlighted by Griffiths (2014). The lives of asylum-seeking migrants are suspended while waiting in detention for their deportation once their pleas have been rejected. Griffith argues that the control the state has over personal time during detention periods disempower migrants who ultimately feel there is no alternative but to surrender to the total control of the state.

The studies above all share that they establish relationships between the present, - either as operational framework or as subjective experience - place and migration. More commonly, migration and place have been interrogated with regard to the past (Basu 2007, Binaisa 2011,

Coutin 2010, Eisenlohr 2004). In very few instances, the future or future orientations have been the object of interest.

In a rare exception, Lindquist (2009) highlights the *not yet* of migration which is partly the promise for a different life that is inherent in migration, but also the incomplete nature of travel, stories, developments, thus the material and existential basis of everyday life. He focuses on the emotional impact that living in a different place and the constant expectation and hope that this place will deliver its promise has. In the end, many migrants feel trapped, not able to move forward - economically or personally - partly caused by the shame they experience over their low status as migrants. Thus, while hoping for a different future, they are trapped in the present which will never bring them any closer to their dreams and hopes.

Hope is central to Pine's (2014) essay on migration. He describes migration as a future-oriented process that embodies hope. Migrants always move in different temporal and physical spaces; oriented toward the future, but looking backward, living elsewhere, and thinking about home. The importance of different temporal frames and spaces associated with it, are central to this ethnographic project as well.

Gendered perspectives

Before discussing the implications of the studies above further for this dissertation, I briefly want to stand still at the role that gender plays in my dissertation. Most of the studies mentioned so far privilege either male or female perspectives, few of these ethnographies are informed by intensive contact with both male or female migrants. This holds true for this dissertation as well. Myanmar is a socially conservative society and most social interactions occur within the same gender. Based on my own gender, most of my informants were women. There are no direct taboos about cross-gender interactions and I had plenty of opportunities to

talk to men as well. Often, the context makes it clear whether informants were male or female. If no specific context is provided, it can be assumed that my informants were female. In some chapters, gender emerges in the foreground of my analysis; in other chapters it underlies all of my interactions. I do not relativize perspectives or opinions based on the gender of the informants which is an attempt to work against dominant frameworks in which men continue to be the unmarked majority and the opinion of women emerge as (marked) by-products of the unmarked, male hegemonic ideal.

Place and non-place

Important implications from the studies above that inform my own analysis mostly relate to the control and influence that states, but others in positions of power as well have over migrants' bodies, time and movement. As amply illustrated, this control does not only operate on an abstract level, but seeps into many everyday situations. It can be manifested in obvious ways such as (arbitrary) detentions or poor work conditions. At other times, it operates on a more subtle level and results in intimate struggles that migrants experience over self-hood, their position in society and their comfort with physical spaces. Structural impediments often limit migrants place-making abilities. My understanding of place-making as employed here builds directly upon a conception of place-making articulated by Feld and Basso (1996). Specifically, it defines place-making as the ongoing processes through which people imbue sites with significance. Place-making is conceived of as an open-ended practice that allows for continuous renegotiation and changes. Imbuing sites with meaning is crucial as well to distinguish between the terms space and place. According to de Certeau "space is a practiced place" (1984: 117) which describes the process in which space is personalized by everyday practices and thereby

transformed into place. As stated above, the processes in which place is made, are influenced by a number of factors.

The importance structural conditions play cannot be underestimated. It can, however, unnecessarily narrow the analytical framework. In-depth inquiries into the relationship between place, temporality and migration might prematurely be foreclosed by highlighting the limitations migrants' experience. These limitations are tangible and important to the lives of migrants in this dissertation as well. Instead of solely pointing to the limitations, I ask which role place plays in migrants lives, not only in the present, but also in the future. Furthermore, by extending the perspectives on the subjective temporalities of my informants, I am able to overcome the often debilitating effects that structural limitations have when thinking about the lives of those subjected to them. By taking into account perspectives on the future, long-term gains as perceived by informants come to the fore, that otherwise might be lost when focusing only on the present.

In the definition of place-making above, the act of creating personal ties with place is emphasized. In a similar vein, Augé defines place as a site of relations, history and identity (1995). People form ties through common languages, shared memories and embodied knowledge of places. The interaction between people and places is dialectical. People invest themselves into place while the history and meanings places offer means of identification and community-building to people. He contrasts the concept of place with non-place and defines the latter as void of (communal) history and foremost representing individuality and contractual relations; non-places are built with specific purposes in mind (1995: 101). Augé describes sites like airplanes, travel plazas, shopping malls or commercialized leisure spaces as non-places. These non-places are characterized by people needing to validate their identity upon entering: a ticket to board an

airplane, entrance fee to enter an amusement park or a credit card to purchase things at a shopping mall.

Rather than stimulating interaction between people, "non-places create solitary contractuality" (Augé 1995: 94). Augé concedes that these two characterizations are ideal types that do not exist in mutually exclusive spaces, but at times might overlap. According to Augé, the dominance of one concept over another is temporally determined. Anthropological places are characteristic of modernity; modernity, however, by now has come to be replaced by supermodernity. Excess of space, a by-product of supermodernity, results in the proliferation of non-places and will be the dominating mode of place in the future.

A similar distinction between place and non-place is advanced by Escobar (2001). Escobar describes the terms place and non-place to a lesser degree as temporally bound, but considers them to be distinctive of two different modes of existing in space: through stasis or mobility. Places stand for grounded-ness, a sense of boundaries and a connection to everyday life. Non-places are largely described as a result of increased mobility. People travel, migrate or flee across borders resulting in diasporas, displacement and hybrid identities. With the deterritorialization at hand, it becomes less obvious to people what the core of their identities and existence is built upon.

Both authors touch upon aspects of place and non-place that are useful for my own conceptualization. Mobility can be an important concept to keep in mind for analysis, in particular in comparison to sedentary populations. I, however, do not consider mobility or deterritorialization a requirement for experiencing non-place. Place-making always requires individuals to engage in acts of work; communal identities that are associated with particular places do not exist primordially (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). As Malkki (1995) has shown, the

conditions under which displaced refugees develop grounded ties in their new locales are more complex than merely ascribing it to the experiences of deterritorialization and mobility. Escobar's conception of non-place mostly places an emphasis on movement through space and thereby neglecting that not only the physical conception of space plays a role in place-making, but rather that embodied, emotional individual aspects play an important role as well (Rodman 1992).

Augé's supermodern non-places have few aspects in common with the condition of non-place that I rely on throughout this dissertation. His definition of place, however, provides important conceptual suggestions for the non-place at hand. Augé (1995) emphasizes the desire of people for wanting places to be sites of identity, of relations and of history. In order to avoid a negative definition of non-place (the absence of these three aspects), he goes on to define non-place as an excess of space.

Migration, time and place: desiring future

I, however, want to stand still at the point of desire and place-making. It is important to emphasize individual desire and the absence thereof to engage in place-making. If making place is the process of imbuing meaning to sites, then, after all, people can choose not to invest into this process. There can be multiple reasons for the absence of desire to invest oneself in place. This dissertation will highlight reasons that are at times grounded in structural conditions that are repressive and outside the influence of migrants. Moreover, more personally intimate reasons and choices weigh often just as heavily. In the light of the possibility that people might choose not to make place, different language is needed to describe their site of dwelling. In this dissertation, the term non-place expresses the idea that place does not always hold meaning to people. In Augé's distinction between place and non-place, overarching temporal structures are

crucial in which these alternate sites exist, I am, however, emphasizing the subjective temporal orientations of individuals that live in non-place. By sharing temporal orientations, a common ground is laid for the communal identity of migrants. Portes et al. (1999) defined transnationalism as a continuous process that connects people through social or economic interactions to more than one country at a time, thus transnational practices are expressed primarily through material, social and intellectual exchanges. I suggest that Myanmar migrants are not merely set apart from sedentary Myanmar citizens through these exchanges. Faucher argued that relative intra- and intergroup social distance between Thais and Myanmar migrants fosters social unity among migrant workers (Faucher 2010). I suggest that it is a shared temporal practice that provides a unique aspect of Myanmar migrant workers' transnational lives. This common temporal outlook is foremost created by living in non-place. Thus, the central argument of this dissertation upholds that the experience of time cannot be understood independently of the experience of place, in other words, that the experience of time is inextricable from the experience of place. As I have suggested above, I argue that migrants experience Thailand foremost as a non-place. The difficulty they have in molding place according to their own wishes, results in an increased desire to formulate flexible orientations in and towards time. Migrants increasingly live oriented towards the future. The present becomes a tool for envisioning and working towards the life-to-be. The future, however, is not only a temporal condition. Embedded in the waiting process is the realization that the future will only fulfill its promise if it is going to be lived elsewhere. The return to a place with room for personal histories, meaningful identity-formation processes and lasting relations is necessarily a move through time and space.

In their play with time, migrants subject themselves to few limitations and demonstrate great possibilities for temporal orientations; their play with time can ultimately be understood as an act of power and agency (Greenhouse 1996). The future they are building, is not only limited to their current lives, but includes future lives as well. Rebirth is taken for granted and it is empowering for migrants to be able to engage in transforming their future circumstances. It is the possibility to think beyond the present life that functions as a powerful mechanism and highlights the agentive aspect of playing with time.

This agentive aspect of playing with time came to fore in a question that I asked many migrants. If they were to write a book about their own lives as migrant workers, what would the focus of the book be? I asked this question because I wanted to gauge what my informants considered central to their lives. How would their lives look like on paper if they were not rendered by me, but had the opportunity to describe it themselves? The question always resulted in stunned silence, I never received an answer. Most often, my question was met with embarrassed giggles, shy silences or remarks that they were not writers that it was up to professionals to write books. My attempts to point out that it was acceptable if they would speculate, even knowing that they were not attempting to be authors, did not help in soliciting answers. Many informants pointed out that they would never write a book, what was the point in thinking about such a project, if it would never come true? It was difficult to argue with their rationale and I let the point rest. Similarly, when I asked about plans for the near future, the responses were muted. They would tell me about their immediate plans for the next few days or weeks at best. If I asked about return plans to Myanmar I usually was told that of course they would return to Myanmar, but how could they know when that would be?

Playing mind games about projects that they would never engage in or speculating about future events that seemed unpredictable was a waste of time in the eyes of the informants. Their answers do not point to a disinterest in their own futures or lives, but it speaks to their focus on the aspects in their lives and futures that can and cannot be influenced. Concentrating on those elements, specific details, that were out of reach focused attention on the difficult to influence and even harder to predict aspects of their lives rather than focusing on those that seemed to be possible to predict and influence. Throughout this dissertation, these different ways of understanding time and place are central to each chapter.

Organization of the dissertation

The dissertation is organized into seven chapters that take the reader from the past through the present into the future. The first chapter is a historical narrative of movement in and out of Myanmar. It provides historical context for the ethnographic project at hand. Most importantly, it takes issue with claims that often place Myanmar out of time and suggest that Myanmar until recently existed in isolation. The chapter serves as a reminder that the migrants who appear center-stage in this dissertation, are part of an on-going historical process that continues to be in making.

The second chapter takes the reader into the ethnographic context and analyzes performative acts of self-representation. Self-proclaimed elites among migrants have played a crucial role in shaping the position that migrants occupy in Thailand. This position is at the bottom in a hierarchical order between migrants and Thai nationals. Escape from this position is performed as possible only by a retreat into the past, rather than engagement with the present or the future.

The third chapter discusses (in-)visibility of migrants in the public sphere. Migrants are aware that their visibility in public can be contentious and despite efforts to address this contentiousness by evoking symbols of loyalty to the Thai nation, they cannot match the powerful narrative of illegality that Thai authorities evoke to curb their public presence. The fourth chapter argues that boredom is one of the dominant experiences that migrants associate with living in Thailand. In contrast to other conceptualizations of boredom as a foremost temporal condition, the boredom predominant among migrants is rooted in their experience of place in Thailand and can mostly be overcome only through spatial relocation rather than engagement with their presence in Thailand. The fifth chapter analyzes the National Verification process and the temporal conditions it inscribes on the presence of migrants in Thailand. The process marks the legal status of migrants as a temporary condition which is in line with the predominant narrative of return among migrants. At the same time, migrants learn that their presence is tolerated when they subscribe to and become subjects of capitalism and bureaucratic procedures.

The sixth chapter moves from the public into the private sphere and discusses Buddhist beliefs and practices and the temporal outlook they provide on the presence and the future. I suggest that Buddhist practices among migrants in general point to a strong concern with their future. This future is not restricted to the current life time of migrants, but often exceeds the boundaries of their physical existence. A certain sense of alienation with their new sites of living, as elaborated in the other chapters, has further sharpened this focus.

The seventh chapter brings together the focus on the present and the future of migrants as a community by focusing on the departure of individuals in the moment of death. I argue that among migrants, death and the ensuing funeral is a moment that gives life to a public of migrants

that creates literacy in ritual, material and embodied knowledge. This knowledge is crucial in maintaining a vibrant migrant community in spite of the restrictions they face in establishing place in Thailand.

CHAPTER 1: OVER TIME AND SPACE: A HISTORY OF TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIONS, 20TH CENTURY - PRESENT

Moving in space always means to move through time as well. Some spaces though seem to be locked into particular time frames and it no longer is recognized that time always ticks. As I argue in this dissertation, the perception of time and place are closely connected and living in new and different locations can cause a shift in perceptions of time. In the case of Myanmar, time is often perceived as static; people are portrayed as living in alternate time periods that are frozen. In this chapter, I aim to influence the perception of place and time in Myanmar. By engaging with the history of migration, to and from Myanmar since the late 19th century until the present, I demonstrate that Myanmar, like any other place, has moved along the time continuum. People and places in Myanmar do not live and represent alternate time zones, but have engaged in vivid exchange with others over the last two centuries. The image of Myanmar and its people as existing in a timeless vacuum has mostly been created and maintained by misleading narratives. In these depictions, Myanmar is compared and measured against other countries on an evolutionary continuum. By portraying Myanmar in need of development, it is perpetually placed lower on an evolutionary scale and placed in the past. As I, however, demonstrate in this history of connectivity, Myanmar has long been integrated into networks in which languages, information, ideas and objects are continuously exchanged. In light of these transnational networks, portrayals of Myanmar as out of time bear little resemblance to reality.

Many of these stories of people moving between places that started centuries ago are still in the making; contemporary developments continue to shape decisions that people make daily about where to life and how to do so. The moment which I have chosen to start telling this story is not necessarily the beginning of these stories; for some aspects it is the end, for others the

middle and for many facets it is still too early to tell. I have chosen the late 19th century as starting point, because the onset of colonial rule in Myanmar meant a sharp increase in migration to colonial Burma from India, China and Europe.

The migrations of peoples from India to Myanmar has been well documented (Chakravati 1971, Egreteau 2013), similarly the migration of peoples from China to Myanmar (Mya Than 1997, Mya Maung 1994). While there is abundant literature on the impact of colonial rule and administration (Brown 2011, Furnivall 1956), there are few writings that interrogate the roles of Europeans different from colonial administrators (see for example Armstrong 1995, Turner 2010). In a similar vein, limited information is available about the numbers of Europeans living in colonial and post-colonial Burma. The perfunctory treatment they therefore receive here is a consequence of the dearth of secondary materials rather than an indication of the importance of their presence.

Creating the anthropological object

The roots of anthropology as an academic discipline lay in colonial projects of subjugation and domination. Anthropologists have taken these origins as reason for critical scrutiny of the discipline, its foundation, its research methods and resulting representations (Baker 1998, Clifford & Marcus 1986, Rosaldo 1989, Rosaldo & Lamphere 1974, Trouillot 2003). These critiques proliferated in the 1980s and by now many of the then cutting-edge insights have become incorporated into standard practice in anthropology.

According to these critics, representations of cultures were often removed from any change over time and space (see for example Evans-Pritchard 1940). Anthropologists laid claims to representing the essence of clearly-defined cultural groups; thereby creating static, coherent cultural units mostly of non-western peoples. Anthropologists rarely acknowledged that their

ethnographic representations captured a moment in time and space, embedded in a larger historical context (Wolf 1982). Time and place were ultimately connected in the minds of many early scholars to such an extent that after departure from field research, it neither changed or developed in resulting textual representations.

The "systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse" or "the denial of coevalness"(Fabian 2002: 31) have thoroughly been analyzed by Fabian (2002). Fabian demonstrated how informants were rarely regarded as en par with researchers, but often were turned into objects who lived in a different time period than ethnographers. Others have used the term "contemporary ancestors" (Tsing 1993: x) to characterize the tendency of anthropologists to portray their informants as inhabiting a different time zone: ordinarily the past. According to Fabian, the denial of coevalness manifests itself through the use of typological time: "Typological time underlies such qualifications as preliterate vs. literate, traditional vs. modern, peasant vs. industrial, and a host of permutations which include pairs such as tribal vs. feudal, rural vs. urban. In this use, Time may almost totally be divested of its vectorial, physical connotations" (Fabian 2002: 23). In other words, anthropologists place their informants into a time period different from the one they exist in, thereby creating an immutable object that similarly does not move through time in ways others - anthropologists included - do. Another way in which this is manifested is the use of the ethnographic present or present tense in ethnographies - as if their informants continue to exist in the same way - their lives unaltered by change.

Fabian's analysis focuses on the placement of people into particular time typologies. Agnew (1996) suggests the existence of a similar phenomenon for spaces. He argues "that time

has been translated into space," (27) meaning that large spaces are labeled after idealized historical periods: primitive, advanced or backward. This occurs to the effect that spaces are essentialized, exoticized and totalized, society as a whole is constructed to display the same characteristics. Thus, spaces and the people living there are denied not only individuality and the capacity to change, but are also assigned radical alterity.

The role of historical change is at the core of Thomas' (1996) work. He focused on the negligence of historical contexts in many anthropological works. According to Thomas (1996), anthropologists tended to ignore larger historical frameworks mostly to shore up their claims to expertise. By focusing on narrow periods of time and presenting these as perpetual truth, it was easier to know cultures. Taking cultures "out of time" (Thomas 1996: 1) allowed anthropologists to present their expertise as the only valid perspective. This was particularly important as attempts to professionalize the discipline proliferated. A monopoly on knowledge about peoples and cultures was further established by dismissing non-professional sources of ethnographic descriptions (Thomas 1996). Missionaries and other travelers had documented their encounters outside Europe in often elaborate narratives that were difficult to distinguish from ethnographies written by academically-trained anthropologists (Russel 1869). Thomas argued that representing their research subjects as frozen in time was necessary to silence potential authority that readers might perceive in sources written by others that were not trained formally as anthropologists, but spend no less time in field settings.

Exoticism unbound

Creating and placing informants into a different temporal existence helps sustain the romanticism that anthropologists and others projected onto life elsewhere. This romanticism has mostly been left behind in contemporary ethnographies, but continues to be present in many

popular writings. The search for radical alterity fuel travel and tourism. This alterity is often based on erroneous notions of authenticity and exoticism that can continue to be found in only a few places.

Myanmar is one of the places that often is described as almost existing in a different universe, spatially removed from conventional workings of time. Literary narratives are abound with romanticized depictions of life in Myanmar. There are stories of jungle-bred children rescued and finally civilized by the white male savior (Khoo Thwee 2002, Zoya Phan 2009), romances of sudden transformations of a white woman into a Shan princess (Sargent 1994), or fantasies about life in colonial times, always more desirable than living in the present (Mason 2002). Most famously Rudyard Kipling's poem "Mandalay"[2] evokes colonial fantasies of exotic beauty that are more a figment of Kiplings' creative musings than reality.[3]

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[2] By the old Moulmein Pagoda, lookin' lazy at the sea,
There's a Burma girl a-settin', and I know she thinks o' me;
For the wind is in the palm-trees, and the Temple-bells they say:
"Come you back, you British soldier; come you back to Mandalay!"

Come you back to Mandalay,
Where the old Flotilla lay:
Can't you 'ear their paddles chunkin' from Rangoon to Mandalay?
On the road to Mandalay,
Where the flyin' fishes play,
An' the dawn comes up like thunder outer China
'crost the Bay!

'Er petticoat was yaller an' 'er little cap was green,
An' 'er name was Supi-yaw-lat - jes' the same as Theebaw's Queen,
An' I seed her first a-smokin' of a whackin' white cheroot,
An' a-wastin' Christian kisses on an 'eathen idol's foot:

Bloomin' idol made o' mud -
Wot they called the Great Gawd Budd -
Plucky lot she cared for idols
When I kissed 'er where she stud!
On the road to Mandalay,
Where the flyin' fishes play,
An' the dawn comes up like thunder outer China
'crost the Bay!

When the mist was on the rice-fields an' the sun was droppin' slow,

She'd git 'er little banjo and she'd sing "Kulla-lo-lo!"
With 'er arm upon my shoulder an' 'er cheek agin my cheek
We useter watch the steamers an' the hathis pilin' teak.

Elephants a-pilin' teak
In the sludgy, squdgy creek,
Where the silence 'ung that 'eavy you was 'arf afraid to speak!
On the road to Mandalay,
Where the flyin' fishes play,
An' the dawn comes up like thunder outer China
'crost the Bay!

But that's all above be'ind me - long ago an' fur away,
An' there ain't no buses runnin' from the Bank to Mandalay;
An' I'm learnin' 'ere in London what the ten-year soldier tells:
"If you've 'eard the East a-callin', you won't never 'eed naught else."

No! You won't 'eed nothin' else
But them spicy garlic smells,
An' the sunshine an' the palm-trees an' the tinkly Temple-bells;
On the road to Mandalay,
Where the flyin' fishes play,
An' the dawn comes up like thunder outer China
'crost the Bay!

I am sick o' wastin' leather on these gritty pavin'-stones,
An' the blasted English drizzle wakes the fever in my bones;
Tho' I walks with fifty 'ousemaids outer Chelsea to the Strand,
An' they talks a lot o' lovin', but what do they understand?

Beefy face an' grubby 'and -
Law! Wot do they understand?
I've a neater, sweeter maiden in a cleaner, greener land!
On the road to Mandalay,
Where the flyin' fishes play,
An' the dawn comes up like thunder outer China
'crost the Bay!

Ship me somewhere's east of Suez, where the best is like the worst,
Where there aren't no Ten Commandments an' a man can raise a thirst;
For the Temple-bells are callin', an' it's there that I would be ---
By the old Moulmein Pagoda, lookin' lazy at the sea;

On the road to Mandalay,
Where the old Flotilla lay,
With our sick beneath the awnings when we went to Mandalay!
On the road to Mandalay,
Where the flyin' fishes play,
An' the dawn comes up like thunder outer China
'crost the Bay!

[3] Silverstein's (1985) discussion of Burma through the eyes of western literature also reflects a valorization of nostalgic longing for the colonial past.

These fictional and non-fictional stories draw upon fantasies of a pristine Myanmar that is frozen in time, void of change and transformation. In Khoo Thwee (2002) and Zoya Phans' (2009) non-fictional books Myanmar gets to stand for unrestricted, carefree youth. In the end though, it is a place that one eventually needs to leave behind if wanting to enjoy amenities of civilized life such as table manners or education.

Stories in newspapers and magazines further the notion of exoticism unbound in Myanmar. A recent photo report about Myanmar in the National Geographic by Chang (2014) was entitled: "Land of Shadows: As it emerges from isolation, the nation of Myanmar is caught between repression and reform, dark and light." An article in the Washington Post described Myanmar as "emerging from decades of isolation" (Rich). Elsewhere, Myanmar was touted "as the last uncharted frontier" (Lin). The language of discovery and conquest was used as well in a publication that described the contemporary investment landscape in Myanmar (Eleven Media Group 2013).

Notions of frontier, discovery and adventure oftentimes indicate the potential for danger as well. In the documentary "They call it Myanmar," Robert Lieberman portrayed himself as a film maker who risked his own safety while filming. Despite the threat to his person he continued his work, attempting to appear heroic but merely reproducing the narrative of the white, male savior. Other documentaries such as "Inside Burma: Land of Fear" portray danger and anxiety as crucial concepts for approaching the analysis of contemporary Myanmar. In these documentaries, living and visiting Myanmar were portrayed as stepping into a different universe; the people living there became exhibits rather than ordinary people moving in time and through space.

Buddhism and its reputation as a peaceful, other-worldly religion have further contributed to fantasies of Myanmar as a tranquil, harmonious place.[4] Many tourists visit Myanmar for meditation retreats and visit popular touristic sites. During those visits to Myanmar where I stayed in guest houses, many tourists initiated conversations with me about the serenity of Myanmar people. They would comment on the happiness and friendliness of most people in the face of abject poverty. Peoples' kindness towards strangers was seen as an indication of their spiritual and mental balance they found in Buddhism. Furthermore, many tourists interpreted the warmth displayed as a happiness that we all had in us before capitalistic enterprises ruined our - people living in (post-)industrialized nations - peace of mind. This narrative certainly had already lain dormant in tourists' mind before their arrival in Myanmar. Upon arrival it was reinforced and many tourists considered their silent or English-language interactions with Myanmar people on the streets credible empirical evidence that they had been right all along.

Creating isolation

In addition to these popular sources and imaginaries, academic discourse has contributed to the notion of Myanmar as untouched by change or development. Economic sanctions were, until recently, a long-standing policy tool practiced by various governments in order to exert pressure onto the military government and to eventually topple it. Generally, economic sanctions aim to restrict financial transactions, often for targeted populations. In Myanmar, sanctions included a visa ban for officials affiliated with the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), freezing of their assets held in the United States (US) and European Union (EU), a ban on financial transactions and an embargo on any imports from Myanmar to the US and EU (Seekins 2005). The pros and cons of

[4] Following unrelated lines of argument, Schober (2011) and Jerryson (2011) both argue against unduly romanticizing Buddhism.

this policy have been debated widely (International Crisis Group 2004, Pedersen 2008, Steinberg 2007). For the purposes here, the effectiveness of this policy is of little interest; rather, the terminology that it created is important. The mostly Western proponents of economic sanctions were often summarized as being in favor of isolation and contrasted to the position of constructive engagement, practiced by ASEAN and other Asian governments (Maung Thawnghmaung & Sarno 2006, Roberts 2006). While at first isolation referred to economic isolation, it soon was used in a more general sense, describing the condition of the country at large. The language of isolation is commonly evoked when describing Myanmars' contemporary condition: "After decades of isolation, Myanmar has opened up to democratic and economic reality" (Prakash 2013: 1) or "For the Thein Sein government, the failure to reform will prolong Myanmar's international isolation and deepen its overdependence on China" (Sun 2012: 57). The same terminology is reflected in business news (Katakey 2012).

In these narratives isolation and stagnancy are the cause of radical alterity. While isolation and stagnancy are portrayed as undesirable characteristics, the touted exoticism makes Myanmar appear as the land of dreams where one can still find adventure and people from a different era. Countering these limited portrayals are stories of movement, change and integration into regional networks (Adas 1974, Chang 2009, Thant Myint-U 2006). Thant Myint-U (2006) explicitly stated that it is often forgotten that Myanmar, like any other country, has been integrated into global trade networks and has moved along the time continuum like any other place.

Colonialism and migration

Colonialism is often used as an important measuring stick in Myanmar history and it is common to use the terms pre-colonial Burma and colonial Burma or British Burma respectively.

These terms though have only started to describe a more narrowly defined territorial unit after the onset of colonial rule. Clearly defined borderlines were irrelevant up to the arrival of the British and the changing terminology used to refer to Myanmar over time reflects different territorial and political ideologies. Just like the boundaries of contemporary Myanmar are a recent invention, the boundaries of India, Bangladesh, Thailand and China similarly have only been determined recently and in some cases given birth to a country as recently as 1971.

The mandala-state model that dominated in many parts of Southeast Asia was relevant to pre-colonial Burma as well. According to Wolters (2004), the power of rulers was most potent close to their seats of power and weakened concentrically the further one was away from the center. In pre-colonial Burma, the power of the respective rulers barely reached the hill areas beyond their valleys. There, other rulers were dominant who controlled territory in similar ways to Burman kings.

Irrespective though of the dominant rulers, Myanmar was closely integrated into international networks of exchange through trade and travel. The overlapping zones of sovereignty with rulers in what nowadays are Thailand, Laos, China, India and Bangladesh and its 2228 kilometers (1385 miles) long Andaman Sea coast line made pre-colonial Burma accessible to visitors from around the world. It facilitated not only arrival on the coast, but travel from peoples living there to destinations elsewhere as well (Christian 1939, Desai 1936, Dijk 2006, Furnivall 1939, Gommans and Leider 2002, Lewis 2011).

Control over trade was an important factor in the slowly progressing conquest of the British of pre-colonial Burma and demarcation of territory was crucial in establishing control and reaping profits. As the British conquered and subjugated larger tracts of land during three subsequent wars (1824 - 1826, 1852 - 1853, 1885 - 1886) the borderlines with Bengal, Manipur

and China were negotiated and defined. These borderlines were largely arbitrary representations of colonial imaginations about related peoples. Some groups of people that had been ruled by Burman kings were excluded in the borderlines, while other territories that had stood outside this control became a part of British Burma.

The population of British Burma changed with the onset of colonialism, partly due to in-migration from peoples from China, India and Europe. The terms Indian, Chinese and European are misleading though, since, like the peoples of Myanmar, migrants were not homogeneous units. First of all, they came from different geographical regions in the respective countries: southeastern and southwestern China (Hokkien, Guandong and Yunnan); Bengal, Ganjam, Bihar, Orissa, Madras and the Coromandel Coast in South Asia and Great Britain, US and other countries in Europe (Charney 2009). Within these regional distinctions there were religious differences: Migrants from India were mostly Hindus or Muslims, migrants from China adhered to various religious traditions among them Islam, Buddhism and Daoism; Europeans mostly were Baptists and Catholics. The port of embarkation of these migrants ordinarily determined their means of transportation and often where and what they worked as in Myanmar. Those who came from the surrounding borderlands usually settled in the borderlands and continued to regularly move back and forth between their new and old homes. Migrants arriving by boat on the Andaman coast or in Yangon often settled in Yangon and other places that were developed as part of the colonial economy, for example in the Irrawaddy delta.

To briefly recap, the onset of colonial rule accelerated the integration of British Burma into already existing networks of exchange and transfer. Migration to colonial Burma increased and further diversified the already heterogeneous population structure.

Diversifying the colonial landscape

Contemporary Myanmar, although majority Buddhist, is home to a visible Muslim minority. Many, though not all, are descendants of immigrants from South Asia and China. Chinese Muslims - often referred to as Panthay in Myanmar - arrived from Yunnan and settled in Mandalay and northern Myanmar. They initially had migrated from Yunnan, after tensions between Hui (in Yunnan Panthay are referred to as Hui) and Han peoples escalated. The conflict between Hui and Han had its roots in the discontent of Hui peoples with the rule of the Qing Dynasty. The expression of their discontent resulted in violent conflicts in 1856 and many Hui left Yunnan and fled into Shan and Konbaung ruled territory (Yegar 1966).

King Mindon recognized their presence and in 1868 handed land over to Panthays to build a mosque. Despite their settlement in Mandalay, they did not sever all ties with their home communities. The Yunnanese Sultan of Dali, Du Wenxiu financed the construction of the mosque on the land donated by King Mindon. Many of those living closer to Yunnan in northern Myanmar, became crucial actors in the mule trade between Yunnan and Shan territory; they led mule caravans across the mountainous terrain between the two territories. Others came to work as merchants, miners and shopkeepers. Descendants of Panthays continue to live in Myitkyina, Mogok, Bhamo, Lashio, Taungyi and other parts of northern Myanmar (Berlie 2008).

In addition to these Muslims from China, other traders regularly crossed the border. Until the beginning of British colonialism, the overland connection between Yunnan and northern Myanmar was the most common route for in-migration from China. By 1891, 37000 Chinese were estimated to live in Myanmar, many of whom were Kokang and Yunnanese Chinese. In later years, the numbers of Hokkien and Cantonese Chinese increased as more migrants arrived via maritime networks (Mya Than 1997).

Religious persecution also caused the arrival of Jews in pre-colonial Burma. The first Jewish merchant from Baghdad came in 1841 and settled in Sittwe. Other Jews had arrived a year earlier from Galicia and Romania and worked as suppliers for the British army. The growing Jewish population was quick to establish themselves as traders in close association with the British. They settled all over British Burma: Mandalay, Sittwe, the Delta, Yangon and Moulmein. In 1857, the first synagogue was constructed in Yangon. Baghdadi Jews were part of a large diaspora that encompassed most of British India, Southeast Asia and extended further into China. Many of them felt closely related to the British Empire and some even held British citizenship. Their loyalties lay with Israel and Britain and only few learned to speak Burmese. Many men continued to invite Jewish women from Baghdad if they wanted to marry. The desire though to be recognized by the British as equals was denied. Jews did not have access to clubs set up by the British: Pegu Club on Prome Road, the Burma Club on Merchant Street and Gymkhana Club on Halpin Road. The numbers of Jews grew continuously; from 83 in 1872, to 172 in 1881 and 508 in 1901. In 1930, there were 2000 Jewish people living in Yangon. The majority of them were Baghdadi Jews, although there was a small number of Bene Israel Jews who had come from India. Their involvement in the growing rice, teak and gemstone trade allowed many of them to benefit financially and emerge as wealthy business men. Their involvement in other than business affairs though remained marginal. Placed in the colonial hierarchy above local populations, but below British and other Christian Europeans, Jews were not able to identify with their desired strata of society (Cernea 2007).

By 1896, the British had colonized lower and upper Burma and ruled it as part of the British Indian Empire. This meant that Burma was not administered as an independent territory, but an appendage of India. The British encouraged migration within the empire and the final

occupation of all formerly Burman-ruled territories resulted in a dramatic increase in the numbers of migrants arriving from India. Trade to and from Burma held great potential and amending laws to facilitate trade, economic growth and greater capital gains for the British were a high priority at the onset of colonial rule. In order to stimulate economic growth as envisioned by the British, immigration of Indian labor was encouraged. Many immigrants brought skills they had acquired in their home communities and occupational stratification oftentimes occurred along ethnic lines: Ooriyas worked foremost on docks and the railway in Yangon, Tamils worked in rice mills or as clerks, Chittagonians worked on river boats and Telugus in factories and mills (Charney 2009).

While the immigrant body was a diverse amalgamation of languages, religions and customs, one group came to almost exclusively represent this heterogeneous medley of people: Chettiars from Tamil Nadu. Their prominence in the historical record is due to their role in the agricultural expansion of the Irrwaddy Delta in the early 20th century. Guided by the mantra of economic growth, expansion of the rice export sector was one of the main British policy goals. Prior to the arrival of the colonial government, the Delta had been sparsely populated and domestic migration had almost exclusively accounted for any population increase and allowed for initial agricultural expansion. The Delta offered the opportunity for individual farmers to obtain their own land through land tenancy regulations that the British had implemented. Conditions for agricultural production were more favorable than in other parts of British Burma. In the Dry Zone in upper Burma, one of the most densely populated areas, droughts had caused food shortages and famines were prevalent. Approximately 90 % of all domestic migrants arrived from this area of colonial Burma. The Irrawaddy provided a direct connection between upper and lower Burma and made travel easier than overland travel. Between 1881 and 1901 the

population in the Delta grew by 1.4 million people (from 2.6 million to 4.1 million) and rice cultivation was expanded by 600 % (Adas 1974a, Charney 2009).

Few domestic migrants arrived with the necessary capital to immediately claim their own holdings. In order to accumulate the necessary money, many worked the lands of others and lived with friends or family until they had saved enough money to claim their own plots. Early in the 20th century though, land become sparse and arriving migrants needed to claim land faster in order to ensure their own holdings. They were able to do this by taking up loans from mostly domestic moneylenders. In addition to these moneylenders, Chettiars provided loans to cultivators.

Cultural and religious differences between migrants from India and domestic populations were significant and migrants from India did not easily assimilate into existing social structures, but maintained their religions and cultural specificities. Many maintained close contacts with their homeland which was facilitated by professional connections. The existing infrastructure and expertise that enabled Chettiars to smoothly move into the position they held connected them to Tamil Nadu. The companies they worked for had their head quarters there and enabled Chettiars in fulfilling their professional roles as moneylenders (Mahadevan 1978). Between 1891 and 1931 the total Indian population grew by 143 % (from 420830 to 1017835) (Bhaumik 2003).

It is remarkable that almost all immigrants maintained contact with their homelands, despite the difficulties to do so. Colonial Burma had turned into one node of global diasporas that extended from the Middle East to South and East Asia.

Colonization by the British also meant the arrival of more Europeans in Burma. In addition to colonial administrators (Furnivall 1956), Europeans came as missionaries (Bigandet 1996), scientists (Kingdon-Ward 2005), pilgrims (Turner 2010) and merchants (McCrae 1990).

While their numbers might be small, 133 Germans were counted in the early 20th century. German merchants arrived to promote the rice trade between Burma and Germany. They succeeded in making rice exports to Germany one of the most significant trade item of colonial Burma (Zöllner 2002).

Particularly influential among these visitors were missionaries who often established permanent residency and stayed until their deaths only to be succeeded by other missionaries. Missionaries in the first place had mostly come from Europe, but increasingly arrived from the US. Adoniram Judson, an American, arrived in 1813 to introduce Baptism to pre-colonial Burma. His initial efforts were only modestly successful; after taking residence in Yangon it took six years before he finally had converted one Burman. Preaching Christian doctrine was met with strong opposition by Burman rulers and only after the arrival of the British in 1826 and his move to British-ruled Moulmein was he able to convert mostly Karen peoples at a faster rate (Anderson 1987). Contemporary Baptist churches in many parts of Myanmar are the result of his and other missionaries presences. The works of missionaries contributed to fostering a sense of ethnic pride among hill peoples and emphasized the importance of their distinct identities (Brant and Mi Mi Khaing 1961). In addition to capitalism and different religious beliefs, existing ideas about for example womanhood and modernity were influenced by the colonial presence (Ikeya 2008).

The British also employed hill peoples in their army that was used to complete the occupation of colonial Burma. Many Karens had joined the army and as a result of their professional roles came to live in more central parts of the country (Kratoska 2002). In addition to Karen people, the British heavily employed Gurkhas from Nepali. During the Second World War, Gurkhas fought on behalf of the British against the Japanese. Many settled in what then

were British hill stations: Taungyi, Myitkyina and Bhamo. Prior to the arrival of Gurkhas as part of the military force, Nepali merchants had set foot into Burma and opened businesses (Joshi 2011). Thus, immigration further entangled colonial Burma in global exchange networks, among others resulting in the diversification of religious beliefs, languages spoken, political ideologies held and professions practiced.

The end of the empire

The growing numbers of migrants from China, India and Europe had significant consequences for social order and interaction in Myanmar. The influx of foreigners was accompanied by structural changes in the economic and legal structure of the country. Furnivall (1956) argued that changes the British had implemented led to the disintegration of existing social life. According to Furnivall, abolishment of customary law and the introduction of unregulated capitalism resulted in the so-called plural society. In the plural society, different racial groups only interacted in the market place and did not share a common social life. They fulfilled distinct economic roles and there were few incentives for people to intermingle beyond economic interactions. Furnivalls' analysis though ignored populations that were indigenous to Myanmar and focused mostly on the presence of Chinese, Indians and Europeans. The assignment of names of different nationalities as state names suggests that these nationalities lived neatly divided in different parts of the country. As already mentioned above, this is and has been misleading. Non-Burman populations lived in central parts of the country as well and Furnivall failed to take their presence into consideration.

In addition to changes in the social structure, sentiments towards immigrants and the colonial presence changed in the 20th century. Nationalist groups became more vocal about, initially, their right to self-governance and separation from India. This frustration was partly

expressed through violent conflicts and attacks on migrants from India, mostly in Yangon. Whether these attacks were the result of grievances about the role of migrants from India in the colonial economy (Adas 1974a) or the result of the rise of nationalist and xenophobic sentiments in general (Gravers 1993) is debated.

During the Second World War, Japanese forces entered Burma and drove out the British. Among the 600000 people fleeing from Burma to India, were many Jews and Indian migrants (Cernea 2007, Egreteau 2014). At the end of WWII and the defeat of Japanese forces, the British returned, hoping to be able to assume control over Burma again. With the British, approximately 300 - 400 Jews returned from India, attempting to pick up the lives they had left behind. Burma had suffered severe infrastructural destruction though and left behind pieces could not just be picked up. The presence of the British proofed to be short-lived. In January 1948, Burma gained independence from their British colonial rulers. The departure of British administrators was accompanied by the departure of many other Europeans who had mostly been affiliated with the colonial power through trade. The legacy of colonial rule could be felt heavy-handed in Burma. Relevant for the purposes here was the presence of immigrants who often had lived for longer than one generation in Burma and considered it their home. Their role in post-colonial Burma would be contested as some considered Chinese and Indian immigrants the embodiment of capitalism which in turn represented colonial rule.

Nationalizing a country

The first decade after independence was politically volatile and set the tracks for migration patterns for the next decades. Immigration to Burma that had been one of the accompanying by-products of colonial rule would almost entirely come to an end, emigration from Burma to other places though would accelerate over the next decades.

The government led by U Nu faced several challenges: disagreements within the Communist party resulted in the creation of competing ideological factions. Beyond internal party politics, separatists challenged the authority of the central government; foremost in the borderlands. The civil war escalated and the central government that controlled less and less territory focused all its resources on armed warfare rather than a broader set of policies. The economic situation was dismal and Burma still suffered from the infrastructural devastation that the Japanese occupation had brought along. An additional challenge was the escalating Cold War that caused Kuomintang forces to cross the border into Shan-controlled territory where they sought refuge from their political opponents in China (Smith 1999).

Nu and his government were tasked with restructuring the economy. The British and their business partners had been instrumental in running the economy (to their benefit) and many businesses continued to be owned by people perceived as foreigners: foremost Chinese and Indian merchants. Nu aimed at placing economic power in the hands of the state, before planning to form a Burman-dominated business elite. The singular dependency on rice exports as the engine of profits proved challenging and the economy did not recover as planned. Nu attempted to curb capital flight to primarily India by controlling the exports of precious stones and limiting financial transactions (Charney 2009).

The business climate turned increasingly hostile vis-a-vis Indian and Chinese merchants. In order to rid the post-independence economy of the remnants of colonial rule, businesses owned by immigrants started to be nationalized. Only indigenous people could obtain licenses to run businesses. Entrepreneurial minded residents bought licenses and sold them to Indian or Chinese merchants. Besides these economic reforms other targeted measures included hiring

more indigenous people to work in the civil service. The overall process of restoring power in the hands of Burmans has been referred to as Burmanization (Holmes 1967, Mya Maung 1964).

These measures were further intensified after the coup d'etat by the Revolutionary Council in 1962. The subsequent installation of the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) as all powerful government furthered the migration trends that had started after independence: flight of Indians to India, the disappearance of almost the entire Jewish community and a concentration of Chinese merchants foremost in the borderlands.

Not only had the nationalization of the economy alienated Indian and Chinese immigrants. New citizenship laws had already been put in place in 1947. According to these regulations any foreign resident had to give up their foreign citizenship if they wanted to become a citizen of Myanmar. Legislation was vague though and left it unclear who was considered a foreigner. The introduction of this law and the changing business climate resulted in more Indian migrants returning to India. The rise of power of the BSPP in 1962 voided the 1947 constitution which contained the citizenship law. Growing pressure and fewer entrepreneurial opportunities resulted in approximately 200000 to 300000 Indians leaving Burma to India during the 1960s. Other destinations were Thailand, Singapore and Hong Kong (Egreteau 2014).

Out-migration further intensified when in 1982 again a new citizenship law was passed by the BSPP. This time, a distinction was made between people who had become citizens more than one generation ago versus those who had emigrated more recently. The burden was placed on people to proof that they had lived in Burma for more than one generation. The border conflict between Myanmar and Bangladesh about the presence of Rohingya peoples had initiated the tighter regulations and tighter border control, but also meant further curtailing of Indian

immigration since many had come across the border that now was stricter regulated (Taylor 2006).

While the number of Indian migrants continuously decreased, the number of Chinese continuously increased. This was partly due to the political situation in China, as mentioned above already. Kuomintang supporters crossed into Myanmar and remained in Shan State. Others were able to take over some of the businesses that had been abandoned by Indians. According to estimates, by 1961, there were 350000 Chinese in Myanmar. It became increasingly difficult though to estimate the numbers of Chinese in Myanmar since intermarriage was fairly common and people identified in multiple ways (Tong 2010).

Despite attempts by the BSPP to constrain cross-border interaction, the developing black market economy created even more thriving cross-border interaction with Thailand and China (Chang 2009, Lintner 1996). The proliferation of the black market was mostly a result of the failure of the BSPP to develop a functioning economy (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2003). Yunnanese traders emerged as crucial players in the licit and illicit trading networks (Chang 2013).

While the number of European visitors and business parters was curtailed in BSPP-run Burma, select guests continued to be welcome. The memoirs of Otto Esche are a testimony to his and Annemarie Esches' stay (his wife) after 1960 for more than 10 years in Burma. They were citizens of the German Democratic Republic, a country that had been founded on Socialist principles, as attempted by the BSPP as well. The BSPP ruled years are often the reason for the sustained image of Burma as isolated and closed off, despite the intense exchanges across the Thai and Chinese borders and continued presence of foreign visitors in Burma. I suggest that this image came about and has had such a lasting impact as most technological developments came to a complete stop under BSPP rule. Technological innovations have for a long time, most

notably during colonial expansion, been used to compare and measure societies and determine their evolution on an imagined civilization scale. The absence of further technological innovations in Socialist Burma has been equated with stagnation and isolation of the society-at-large. The perceived isolation of BSPP-ruled Burma is furthermore caused by a dearth of publications regarding the relevant time period. Few Caucasian researchers visited Burma and accordingly few publications are informed by ethnographic or other field-based research methods which says nothing or very little about the actual state of the country.

To conclude, the perception of Burma as isolated and closed off mostly relies on an ethnocentric bias on technology and the importance of the presence of Caucasian in functioning as an engine of change and innovation. Furthermore, merely drawing on the BSPP-ruled period to formulate an overall understanding of contemporary Myanmar ignores larger trajectories of historical change that are outlined here. As I have argued above, the presence of thousands of immigrants in colonial Burma provided an important connection to places around the globe. Immigrants even further diversified an already heterogeneous community. Their influence on Myanmar and its connection to other parts of the world could not be reversed overnight through the rule of an autarkist government.

Reversing migration patterns

In 1988, the BSPP government was ousted and replaced by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). During the last decade of BSPP rule, the struggle between the military and armed nationality groups over territory in the border regions had intensified. The ensuing fights and tactics employed by armed groups, the central military and different armed nationalities, caused thousands of people to lose their homes and land.

The decades-long struggle over the control of territory foremost were at the expense of the civilians living on the respective lands. Regions that were deemed safe for a while, became unsafe because of fights or changing governance. The military used forceful intrusion into people's houses, destruction of livestock and property, and forced labor as ways to intimidate and abuse citizens. Territorial control spoke to the sovereignty and power of the respective parties involved. Demonstrating power was not the only concern of the central government in wanting to establish control and governance over all territories within the borders of the country. Economic considerations such as controlling land to for example implement hydro power projects that dispossessed thousands of peoples were important as well.

The increasing numbers of refugees leaving Burma accelerated a migration pattern that had started in post-colonial Burma: more people left Burma to other countries than newcomers arrived there. There was an important change in the demographic make-up of the emigrants: Refugees had lived within the borders of Burma perpetually and mostly left because their land and homes were forcibly taken from them.

Forming contemporary diaspora

The political situation that made it impossible for people to continue living on their lands and which created thousands of refugees did not only come about in 1988; this was merely when the issue gained international attention. The focus of the global public shifted to Burma after the violent crackdown of the military on demonstrators in 1988. People had taken to the streets to voice their concerns about the abysmal economic situation, worsened by devaluations of the currency. The military responded by violently suppressing demonstrations, resulting in the killings of several hundred people. The brutal actions of the military have remained in the focus of the public until the present and created a paradigm through which many scholars have

interpreted all events following 1988. The scant concern the central government has shown for the protracted refugee situation has come to embody the overall attitude of the military and the Burmese government towards its people: at best one of neglect, at worst one of abuse and exploitation.

There is no doubt that subsequent governments have committed structural human rights abuses and deprived thousands of people of living a dignified life (Back Pack Health Worker Team 2006, Goldston 1990, Horton 2005). I suggest though that the trope of human rights abuses has been used to further shore up the image of Myanmar as out of time. In this dominant portrayal, Myanmar will only have caught up with other countries once human rights abuses seize to dominant politics. The extent to which this claim reflects reality can be seen in the latest political changes in Myanmar. While political reality and the human rights situation have not changed much, the human rights trope has largely been abandoned and at the same time Myanmar has started to emerge from its lingering existence in a time vacuum, at least in recent articles and news reports. Before returning to this point later on, I will first continue to chronicle the growing presence of refugees and migrants outside the borders of Myanmar.

The first refugee camps in Thailand became institutionalized in 1984. An initial wave of approximately 10000 Karen left their homes after the army took over the territories of the Karen National Unions' (KNU) headquarters. The camp in Tak province was followed by camps in Mae Hong Son province for Karenni refugees in 1989. In 1990, in addition to the 30000 Karen and Karenni refugees who meanwhile lived in those camps, approximately 10000 Mon refugees settled in temporary camps in the vicinity of Sangkhlaburi. At first, these camps were mostly administered by the governments of the respective nationalities. As the numbers of refugees continued to grow, international organizations lent support with addressing the needs of camp

populations. In 1993, the Burmese Border Consortium (BBC) had 72366 refugees enrolled on their feeding lists (South 2005). The numbers of refugees increased up to half a million and in 2014, at least 115000 refugees remained in ten camps along the Thai - Myanmar border (The border consortium 2014). Thus, in the late 20th century Myanmars' integration into global trade networks had largely been replaced by integration into global networks of refugee politics.

In addition to the incorporation into international networks of care, more localized cross-border networks emerged as well. In some camps refugees were allowed to leave and enter and movement between the camps and home territories continued. The camps became crucial sites in formulating explicit nationalistic and political identities. Refugees continued to maintain important material practices that helped to re-create home in the refugee camps, but at the same time inspired the formulation of more politicized identities in the camps and in Myanmar alike (Dudley 2007 and 2011, Maung Thawnghmung 2008). Over time, the sense of home started to shift and after an entire generation has grown up in refugee camps, it is increasingly difficult to say where home for refugees lies. Many younger people who have grown up in refugee camps have not had the opportunity to ever visit their parents' homeland. Their understanding of the political situation in Burma was not formed by their first-hand experience, as their parents and grandparents were, but by historical narrative passed on by elders. They have inherited the struggle for return to Myanmar from their parents which by now has become an identifying characteristic of being refugee. Actively pursuing the struggle for autonomy and return has enabled some refugees to leave the refugee camps; not to Myanmar though, but other countries that have offered political asylum. In addition to these refugees who mostly settled in the border areas, students from urban centers had fled after the protests in 1988 in Yangon. Many at these students first joined the larger refugee movement, but then moved on to Bangkok and other

urbanized areas in Thailand (Lang 2002). A few were offered political asylum and moved to other countries.

As I argued above, refugees have played an important role in drawing global attention to Myanmar and shaping its integration into a different kind of international network. Furthermore, they played a crucial role in shaping cross-border identity politics. The international attention though that turned to Myanmar was limited in its focus. This was partly due to the ways in which the exiled refugee community and the institutions that developed around it have channeled the growing global attention. While there were a plethora of organizations and viewpoints among activists, a small minority has been successful in presenting their concerns and solution as the only way forward. As mentioned earlier on, human rights abuses were the sole focus of media attention; emphasizing another way in which Myanmar lacked development and needed to catch up with other countries. This portrayal further contributed to the notion of Myanmar as existing in an alternate time period. Moving into the presence would only be possible once all human rights concerns have been addressed.

Along the border and in northern Thailand, manifold media groups were founded. There were largely two groups, those reporting in English mostly targeting an international audience and those reporting in indigenous languages and mostly focusing on residents in the country and the borderlands (Footnote with distinction Brooten 2006 p.361). These media outlets were often explicitly founded and treated as a tool to influence the political situation in Myanmar. The two internationally most well-known groups are the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) and the Irrawaddy.

The DVB by now encompasses a website, a radio and TV program. It first broadcasted on July 19, 1992 via shortwave transmitter, and was founded by exiled activists in Norway.

During the first years, the DVB was considered the mouthpiece of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) (Humphries 2008). The close association with the NGCUB made it challenging for the DVB to gain the broad support of funders, as journalistic partiality was highly valued in Europe and the US where most of the financial support originated from. In 2005, Khin Maung Win, currently Deputy Executive Director, told me that existing donors pushed for a change in programming. According to Khin Maung Win, the DVB did not merely want to offer political news, but aimed to offer light-hearted TV entertainment for people in Myanmar as well. Both the DVB and the Irrawaddy nevertheless have heavily employed the language of human rights and democracy in their reporting. As Brooten (2004) has argued, the language of democracy and human rights has made it easier for these outlets to get vast international attention in contrast to nationality-run media who are often interested in broader issues like sovereignty as well.

The response to the renaming of Burma into Myanmar in 1989, demonstrated the power these media groups had developed. Those adhering to the name change were publicly portrayed as traitors and received harsh treatment in the exiled media, irrespective of their actual political positions and opinions. Furthermore, anybody supporting different political strategies than those suggested by mainstream exiled media was turned into a pariah. My own personal experience illustrates the power that for example the Irrawaddy had gained.

In 2008, I was in Yangon where I had hoped to conduct research for my Master's thesis. Cyclone Nargis interfered with my plans and I spent most of my time volunteering with a local organization in their Cyclone Nargis relief efforts. I left Yangon after my 10 weeks visa expired and returned to Singapore where I lived at the time. A few days after my return, an article was published in the Irrawaddy that stated that I had been deported from Myanmar because of

politically-motivated research that I had conducted. The article further stated that I was deported despite having volunteered with an organization that was closely affiliated with the government. In the eyes of the Irrawaddy, any interaction with the government was deemed almost traitor-like; irrespective of the fact that any organization operating in Myanmar needed government approval and often support to be able to effectively conduct their work.

The article named several people that I had interacted with. I was shocked to read the article and worried that it would have negative consequences for the organization or individuals mentioned in the article. I contacted the Irrawaddy explaining that I had never been deported, but left the country on my own accounts. I never received a reply. I learned that a personal feud between Aung Zaw, editor of the Irrwaddy with one of the founders of the organization who ran an important newspaper in Myanmar was the main reason for the publication of the article. I was merely a pawn in the struggle for power and influence. I received concerned messages from strangers after the publication who were worried about my well-being. Surprisingly, many refused to believe that I had never been deported and that the article was a ruse. Since then, my visa applications have mostly been rejected. Upon finally gaining a tourist visa in 2012, I, ironically, was deported from the airport in Yangon immediately after my arrival without ever leaving the airport. Briefly after my actual deportation, my name appeared on a list of people who had been taken off the blacklist and were free now to visit Myanmar again.

As this short episode demonstrates, select migrants and refugees have developed great power in shaping the ways in which Myanmar has been perceived and has in one way or another influenced the lives of people in Myanmar. It remains unclear though in how far these powerful media groups have succeeded in providing information to the Myanmar public living inside the country. Media groups operating in exile in countries with strict censorship laws are often

considered an important tool in educating and informing the public (Pidduck 2012). During demonstrations that have come to be known as the Saffron Revolution in 2007 citizen journalists played a crucial role in providing information to people outside the country (Buck 2007). Internet-based information though does not travel far in Myanmar where electricity supply continued to be unreliable. Newspapers and other printed sources travel slowly and only to select destinations. As argued in the paragraphs above, the select focus on human rights abuses has shaped the international image of Myanmar. At the same time, exiled media reach out to a limited audience in Myanmar and have created cross-border information networks. The portrayal of arrested political developments at times overshadows the fact that a stagnant political situation cannot be equated with stagnant personal lives; people have moved on their own terms into the 21st century.

Remaining in touch

In addition to the exchange of information through newspapers, radios, the internet and TVs, the movement of migrants across the borders has increasingly become a productive way of creating ties between Myanmar and other countries. Political developments that allowed for elections in 2010 and a new government have had little impact on the economic situation and many people in Myanmar continued to struggle to make ends meet. Migration emerged as the most important tool in addressing endemic poverty in Myanmar that was caused by decades of poor policies and planning. The political and economic conditions that made thousands of people leave Myanmar have resulted in a diverse, global Myanmar diaspora: Bangladesh (Abrar 2003, Espenilla 2010), India (Datta 2003), Pakistan (Hasan 2010), Thailand (Sai Latt 2011), Singapore and Malaysia (Kaur 2010), Japan (Banki 2006), New Zealand (Cho 2011), Canada (Hyndman

and Walton-Roberts 2000), the US (MacLachlan 2014) and Norway (Banki 2006) are all home to sizable groups of people from Myanmar.

In the eyes of some scholars, the distinction between refugees and migrants is elusive (Arnold and Hewison 2005, Brees 2009). I, however, argue that even if at times the boundaries between the two categories become blurred, in peoples' minds it is no question who falls into either category. During my fieldwork, I witnessed many migrants learning about the political situation in Myanmar and the existing refugee populations. They usually were filled with empathy for refugees, but there was no question in their minds that they were different from each other: migrants emphasized the ability to be able to work for a living. Moreover, their narratives of return were grounded in knowing that their houses and often family and friends awaited them without the risk of persecution. I therefore believe that collapsing the two categories creates homogeneity that might be useful in academic debates, but does not reflect the understanding of people themselves and others in the world.

Maintaining the distinction between migrants and refugees is important as well in understanding and interpreting available statistics about each group. The presence of refugees is far outnumbered by migrants living outside the borders of Myanmar, speaking to the disproportionate attention that has been paid to the situation of refugees. In Thailand alone, there are approximately 2 million migrants from Myanmar. In contrast to the situation of migrants, the development of refugee populations has closely been monitored and documented. Ceasefire agreements and international resettlement programs have decreased the number of refugees residing in Thailand. Between 2002 - 2011 88348 refugees were resettled from Thailand to the US (Vang and Trieu 2014), but more refugees arriving in Thailand, China and Bangladesh from

Myanmar keep up the numbers of refugees. During recent armed conflicts 10000 Kachin refugees left to Yunnan (Clive 2009).

Another prominent group of refugees are Rohingyas who are mostly Muslims living in Rakhine state. Rohingyas have repeatedly been rejected by the Myanmar state as citizens and repeated violent conflicts between Buddhists and Muslisms have caused many Rohingyas to flee from Myanmar. The conflict escalated for the first time during the Second World War when riots flared up between Muslims and Buddhists and Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh. More refugees were forced to flee to Bangladesh after additional conflicts in 1978, 1991 and in recent years (Abrar 2003). 28000 Rohingyas continue to reside in refugee camps in Bangladesh (Espenilla 2010) and additional 28120 Rohingya refugees have found temporary shelter in Malaysia (Letchamanan 2013).

Similar documentation of labor migration is almost entirely absent, statistics are available about migrants in Thailand, but few historical accounts have been written. The scholarly literature available about migrants in Thailand has heavily been influenced by the paradigm of rights abuses that has been so predominant in the scholarship on refugees. The term (labor) migrant or migrant worker mostly conjures images of victimhood, cheap labor, unwanted presence or illegality. Henceforth, exploitation of their labor has been documented and criticized (Arnold and Hewison 2005, Eberle and Holliday 2012, Pearson and Kusakabe 2012). In a similar vein, attention has been paid to human trafficking (Feingold 2013, Toyota 2006). These accounts mostly portray migrants as victims of a larger system trapped in their situations. While these accounts hold true for a select number of migrants, I have found them more restrictive than enlightening in approaching the study of Myanmar migrants' lives. The homogenizing power of these discourses and portrayals always gloss over more nuanced images and realities and turn

victimhood into a timeless identity that has been applied both to refugees and migrants. Considering spatial relocation as a potentially unifying characteristic is, however, misleading and not sufficient to assume commonalities between the two populations.

The ways in which the lives of migrants and their families and friends in Myanmar are connected can easily be seen when taking a trip through southern Myanmar. Migration has been one of the few successful means for people to economically empower themselves and the concrete, well-kept houses in regions that have sent many migrants across the border are a testament to that. These houses are ordinarily in stark contrast to living sites of migrants in Thailand which are often shabby and provide little comfort. As I was repeatedly told, migrants prioritize spending money on their future lives in Myanmar, rather than their contemporary lives in Thailand. Moving to Thailand has enabled migrants to take charge of their futures that are often perceived as geographically bound to Myanmar. While still living in Myanmar, most migrants could not choose whether to prioritize their present or future lives. From their recent economically more empowered positions, choosing not to invest in their present lives in Thailand is an act of agency. To some extent, this agency has been passed on to others through remittance payments. In 2004, remittances to Myanmar amounted to US$ 56.8 million (Turnell, Vicary and Bradford 2008). Thus, moving through space was not only a move through time, but also more importantly has enabled migrants to be able to participate in shaping their presence and futures.

Labor migration has gained attention more recently than refugee movements, but goes back at least 20 years. Because of the geographical proximity and cultural similarities, migration to Thailand is more prominent than to any other country. In addition to mostly menial jobs mentioned in the introduction, a small number of migrants were employed in white-collar jobs (Faucher 2010). For any migrant who could afford to do so, maintaining connections with home

was important, either by phone, family visits or religious networks (Murakami 2012). Travel by one migrant to for example Dawei, kept large numbers of migrants informed about salaries, job opportunities and other recent developments in Myanmar. In a similar vein, migrants traveling to Myanmar told families and friends about their lives in Thailand and political and economic news they had learned about developments in Myanmar. In this way, migrants were always kept abreast of the latest developments in and outside Myanmar.

Economic and political reforms have left most migrants unimpressed. In general, interest in political affairs was low and potential changes in systemic conditions were of no interest, unless they resulted in tangible effects on the ground such as higher salaries. The return of a small number of high profile exiled personalities bore little relevance for the lives of most migrant workers. It will likely take decades before economic reforms will have tangible effects in rural areas and only then, out-migration will start to slow down. High profile developments in Yangon or other cities that mostly cater to middle class populations only tangentially touch the lives of the overwhelming working-class majority of the country.

Transnational connections between Thailand and Myanmar are further maintained by the 30000 strong Nepali community in contemporary Myanmar. Many of the children of Nepali migrants to Myanmar have migrated further to Thailand where they often owned small (tailor) stores. They did not only travel between Thailand and Myanmar, but also Nepal as I was told by Nepali migrants in Phang Nga province.

Staging elections and opening the economy to foreign investment has helped polishing the image of the Myanmar government. In the light of these developments, the concern for human rights abuses has largely disappeared, irrespective of the actual human rights situation in Myanmar. The goodwill that the general public now extends to the Myanmar government has

influenced the access to funding for people and organization situated in Thailand and the Thai-Myanmar borderlands. Irrespective of actual political changes in Myanmar, organizations that formed around political and displacement issues will have less and less access to funding over the coming years. Those refugees who have already been accepted into resettlement programs will join others who have resettled to the US.

Abandoning the human rights paradigm has been accompanied by portrayals of Myanmar as now ready to proverbially move into the 21st century. Over the last five years there has been an influx of large numbers of foreigners: Thais, Chinese, Singaporeans, Americans and European business people and tourists flock in great numbers to Myanmar. These visitors can see traces of Myanmars' long history of transnational connections and exchange in many places: for example in the 2.5 - 3 million descendants of Indian migrants who continue to live in Myanmar (Egreteau 2011). Or the elderly lady I met during a visit to the synagogue in Yangon in 2006. She was there to show her daughter where she had gotten married almost 50 years ago. Her family had lived in Myanmar until the early 60s and left after the Revolutionary Council took power, leaving mostly one extended Jewish family to maintain the synagogue and other Jewish sites in the city. Those who do not visit Myanmar, nevertheless can encounter some aspects of the country in restaurants in Singapore, grocery stores in New York or the many Karen, Chin, Burmans and Shan living all over the globe and bearing witness to the tight integration of Myanmar into global diasporic networks.

The many tourists who in their minds come to bear witness to the anachronistic image of an authentic Myanmar are foremost chasing their own imagination. The only place where Myanmar exists frozen in time is in the memory of those who left and never returned (Egreteau 2014). As I demonstrated in this chapter, since the late 19th century Myanmar has been

integrated into networks of trade, humanitarian relief and labor exchange. Time has not stood still, but merely rhetorical devices that emphasize evolutionary hierarchies of development have created the image of Myanmar as caught in a time vacuum. Travel to Myanmar is, like any other movement travel through time and space, but not a visit to anybody's past. The past and its representation though continue to play an important role in the present as is further explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2: TIMELESS PASTS, PASTS PRESENT

The term (labor) migrant or migrant worker evokes different imaginations in people. It might conjure notions of victimhood, cheap labor, unwanted presence or illegality. In different parts of the world, different images dominate over others, usually depending on respective hegemonic discourses. The homogenizing power of any of these discourses seduces the consumer of information to forget that these portrayals always gloss over more nuanced images and realities.

Migrants from Myanmar are often mentioned in the same breath as refugees from Myanmar and distinctions between the two populations get blurred. Writings about refugees have approached these widely as a victimized population (Espenilla 2010, Hull 2009, Lang 2002). This prominent image of victimhood has been transposed onto migrants as well (Eberle and Holliday 2011, Fujita et al. 2010). The two populations differ not only in numbers: there are approximately 150 000 refugees still living in Thailand, after more than 80 000 have already been resettled to third countries. The number of migrants continues to increase and is estimated at roughly 2 million (1.2 million are legally registered). Oftentimes, no distinctions are made between these groups. Living outside the borders of Myanmar is sufficient to assume commonalities. Considering spatial relocation as a potentially unifying characteristic is, however, misleading.

In most cases, refugees were forced to leave their homes due to fighting, forced relocation, destruction of their land and property or other forms of persecution. In contrast, most migrants leave Myanmar due to economic hardship. They might own land or property, but this still does not allow them to make a livelihood. The structural reasons for the difficulties migrants and refugees experience, both lie in the abuse of power through the authorities (Seekins 2010,

Smith 1999). Upholding a distinction between refugees and migrants is important nevertheless. Most migrants could return home freely at any given point in time. The main reason for not doing so, is the knowledge that they will return into a life of poverty and hardship since no substantial progress has been made in the last decades in alleviating economic mismanagement and infrastructural challenges. Refugees, in contrast, have often been displaced since decades and returning to their homes has almost become impossible for the majority of refugees.

Many of the narratives of migrant victimhood cast their challenges in the light of policy issues (Arnold and Hewison 2005, Asian Research Center for Migration 2013, Myat Mon 2010, Pearson and Kusakabe 2013). While these narratives might be relevant for the lives of some migrants, they gloss over other narratives and realities that might hold true for a many more migrants. Migrants as victims, however, has established itself as a timeless identity with marketing potential that draws the publics' attention.

One of the many realities that disappear behind the narratives of victimhood is social and economic stratification. Salaries vary widely depending on the geographical regions in Thailand where migrants work. Generally speaking, the closer to the border migrants work, the lower the salaries are. Salaries differ not only from region to region, but within regions as well depending on skills, expertise and occupation. In addition to wage differences, there are social distinctions based on educational, urban vs. rural or again occupational backgrounds. These distinctions mostly matter only to the degree that people can translate them into access to privileges and power.

In Myanmar and Thailand alike, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have emerged as powerful agents who advocate on behalf of the marginalized among populations from Myanmar living inside and outside the country. There are countless NGOs, in particular in the

Thai borderlands and their degree of professionalism differs dramatically. NGOs are staffed by Thais, international employees or workers from Myanmar. In Thailand, Myanmar NGO employees often do not earn more than blue collar migrant workers, but as NGO employees they have access to (air-conditioned) office spaces, computers or laptops, organizational cars and most importantly authority and power.

Formal schooling is valued among people living in Myanmar and outside its border. Most people, attend four to ten years of public schools, few finish high schools or go on to university. Even those who finish university, have often problems translating their diplomas into more skilled jobs or higher salaries. The majority of the population continues to work in the agricultural sector (Fujita et al. 2009). Distinctions between agricultural (or manual work in general) and office jobs reflect important hierarchical differences. Office jobs, irrespective of the actual qualifications held by office workers or the skills they develop on the job, are held in high regard and carry prestige and power. NGO workers benefit from this perceived hierarchy and even in the absence of additional formal qualifications are often held in high esteem.

In this chapter, I bring together the development of hierarchical distinctions, the politics of (self-)representation, resulting class stratification and how these are embedded in time and place. I argue that self-proclaimed elites among migrants contribute to commodification of presumably timeless forms of identity that are instrumentalized for place-making strategies by these self-proclaimed elites. While contemporary realities of migrant life are glossed over and their authentic essence is placed in the past, elites use the opportunity to draw class boundaries between themselves and other migrants that they can use for their material benefit.

Education in exile

World Teacher's day is held annually on October 5. I was invited as a teacher to celebrate with a group of students who had come together to perform in front of their teachers, parents, and local bureaucrats. I had taught an introductory class about social science research methods for five months by then at a school for children of migrant workers from Myanmar. The school was organized and funded by an NGO which I will plainly refer to as Organization for migrantion (OFM). OFM primarily hired staff from Myanmar and was funded by donations from organizations from Japan, Denmark, the US and a few other countries. While the core staff at the schools and the NGO were all from Myanmar, the board of directors was entirely made up of Thai nationals. The NGO had built eight schools in Phang Nga province providing education for approximately 500 students from Myanmar. Most subjects were taught in Burmese, but students received instruction in Thai and English as well. The schools offered education for all age ranges, from nursery school to high school. The schools were officially recognized by the Thai state, but had not gone through an accreditation process. They did not offer the students any formal diplomas that would allow them to pursue university or other formalized higher education that required school diplomas. Certificates of the schools had proven helpful though in allowing children who had returned to Myanmar to enter the schools there at a corresponding level. The initial goal of the opening of the schools had been to provide children with enough Thai language skills that would allow them to enter the Thai public school system. Any student could attend Thai public schools for free if they spoke enough Thai, irrespective of the legal status of the parents. Most migrant parents though preferred Burmese-language education over Thai-language education and the schools had continued to grow, while the number of children transitioning into

Thai schools had remained low despite the support of OFM with enrolling students and providing free transport to and back from school.

The expansion of Burmese-language education had been beneficial to children and parents, but placed an increasing financial burden on OFM. Constructing, maintaining and staffing the schools was a challenging financial project. While there were donors willing to fund the actual construction of schools, OFM had faced challenges in raising funds to pay teachers' salaries and to provide transportation for children. Providing transportation was crucial since students lived spread out over Khuan Charoen and few parents had the time or means to provide transportation themselves. Although students payed 300 THB per month to attend school, the raised tuition did not cover all expenses.

The students attending the schools had become important tools in raising funds to cover the running expenses. Visits by existing or potential donors were common and a tour through one or two of the schools with visitors was always an important agenda item. Often, students were asked to stage small performances, tell stories (in English) or to perform dances. These performances served to make long-lasting impressions and allowed the children to take a central role. At the same time, the main goal of all visits was to renew a commitment by donors to continue their financial support, to attract new donors or to ensure other non-monetary support. The performances ultimately had a strongly objectifying quality and the children were utilized as pawns in a strategic game.

The performances on World teacher's day had largely been organized by the teachers. They included students from the Burmese-language schools and migrant children attending Thai schools. I arrived a few minutes after the event had started. The celebration took place in the building that served as a multi-purpose community hall in the Khuan Charoen, the same building

where the daily aerobics classes were held outside. There was no concentrated town or town center in the vicinity; houses, work places and schools were spread out over a large rural area. The first floor of the two-story building was a largely empty space, the celebration took place in the hall on the second floor. A group of Thai snack vendors had gathered outside the building and they were sitting on their carts, chatting while they are waiting for the students to buy snacks and refreshments.

I walked up the staircase and was welcomed by one of the students from my class, Kyaw Naing Oo. Kyaw Naing Oo pointed to a chair in the back and asked me to take a seat. The chairs were arranged on the right and the left side of the room, with an aisle in-between, facing the stage. About 50 students were sitting in front of the stage on the floor on the left side of the room. The students who attended the Burmese-language school were wearing their ordinary school uniforms that mimicked school uniforms in Myanmar: white blouses and green skirts or pants. The students attending Thai-language schools were wearing their respective uniforms: white shirts and blue skirts or pants. Parents, teachers, NGO employees and visitors sat on chairs behind the students.

Learning hierarchies

Skimming the audience for familiar faces, my gaze rested on the first row of chairs. They were markedly different from the rest of the chairs in the hall. They were wide, comfortable looking sofa chairs instead of the smaller, faux-leather optic chairs that the majority of the audience sat on. A small group of Thai Red Cross workers and a Thai government official sat on a sofa that was big enough to accommodate three people. The two vice-directors of the OFM were sitting next to them on wide, deep sofa chairs with armrests.

These demarcations of space and hierarchies were common at many events. Important guests were always offered seating not only in the first row, but commonly extraordinary chairs. During other events organized by OFM I had seen fans pointed only at the visiting Thai politicians; or sofas carried to construction sites for local VIPs while everybody else had to stand or had to sit on plastic chairs. The spatial marking of social hierarchy, however, was not exclusive to events organized by OFM.

Rather, it was a prominent feature of ordinary life in exile - and in Myanmar as well. Laypeople always sat lower than monks; children lowered their heads when they walked in-between grown-ups or; speech was adjusted according to one's position vis-à-vis the person one talked to. These ways of marking hierarchy through objects, on bodies, in language and spatial arrangements were taught to young people from an early age and quickly became internalized as common sense. It was in moments of infraction that attention was drawn to the otherwise naturalized practices. Conversely, these internalized, naturalized practices were not necessarily expected from outsiders. For example, friends and informants took obvious notice that I touched my right elbow with my left hand when handing objects to people. Similarly, my excessive use of the word ရှင် *(shin)*, a sentence tag that can be added to make speech more polite, often resulted in giggles and outright laughter in a community where this was considered pretentious, urban speech and marked me even further as an outsider. The seating arrangement at the teacher's day celebration echoed the importance of marking, teaching and respecting hierarchy in society-at-large.

The performance of social hierarchy was different from other hierarchies that often reflected age, or for example the status that came with a certain profession. It was not only order within a society that was reinforced, but also a hierarchy between nationalities. The few Thai

visitors had been given larger, more comfortable chairs to sit on than the parents of the students and most NGO workers. The two NGO co-directors who were both from Myanmar, vacated their seats a bit later for additional Thai guests.

Although migrants were encouraged in workshops and trainings by NGO employees to not act as inferior to Thai workers or Thais in general, at the event they were reminded that they were in fact different. The social convention to recognize power differentials in seating arrangements between donor organizations and local politicians on the one hand and migrant workers on the other hand was respected and encouraged. Rhetorical devices of platform building from which migrants could approach co-workers and employers as equals were not reaffirmed in the material representation of relationships.

Performing – whom?

Three male and three female students, about 16 years old, had just climbed on the stage and were dancing in pairs with each other to Burmese-language music. The girls wore pink one-sets. A one-set consisted of a longyi with a matching blouse. Longyis were 1x2 m piece of cloth that were sown like a tube. Women and men alike wrapped them around their hips and adjusted the tightness according to their needs. The longyis had colorful, horizontal stripes above the knees which made it easy to recognize them as Shan patterns. The blouses were wrapped around the upper bodies of the girls and tied together with a piece of string at their sides. The girls wore black headdresses that were striped as well. The boys wore black pants and white shirts that had the logo of the schools sponsor printed next to their breast pockets. I asked Soe Moe who worked as an assistant medic for OFM and who was sitting next to me how the dance was called. She responded that it was a traditional Shan - dance ရှမ် ရိုးရာ အက (*Shan yo ya a ga)*. I nodded and responded that I thought so already, but that I was wondering whether there was a more specific

name for the dance. She shrugged her shoulders and shook her head. I got the same response when I asked the dancers themselves after the performance. They told me it was a traditional Shan dance.

Dance did not play an important role in student's private lives, it was only at public occasions that students came together to perform in front of an audience. Usually, the performed identities did not resonate with their self-identification. None of the students on stage identified as Shan, they identified as Dawei and Mon. In general, there were very few people in Phang Nga province who were Shan. I had ever only met one migrant worker who identified as such.

The contrast between performed and lived identities at public events such as this was reflected in the performance of the Burmese Union Dance as well. The Burmese Union Dance was popular and I had seen it performed at at least at four separate events. The officially recognized eight main nationalities of the country were embodied by a male and female student each. The students danced together in unison and every couple took turns stepping to the center of the stage for a few dance steps. Before every performance that I had seen, the students introduced themselves with the names of the nationalities they represented. At one of the occasions, the MC had asked the student representing the Chin people where in Myanmar they lived. The student was baffled by the question and was not able to answer. He shrugged his shoulders and said he did not know. There were Thai donors in the audience and the MC turned towards the audience, translating the short exchange from Burmese to Thai. The MC told the audience that the student did not know where the Chin people lived. I wondered in that situation why the MC did not spare the student the embarrassment and translated the actual answer to the onlookers. Maybe the MC herself was not able to answer the question. Students had been taught to follow "conventions of representation" (Tolen 1999: 23) that they did not know how to place

or understand in a larger national framework. The stylized performances as different national groups turned the event into a spectacle rather than a celebration. As others have argued, the increasing commodification of the human experience has contributed to creating spectacles that objectify and commmodify ethnic identities (Bankston III and Henry 2000). The exchange that takes place, instrumentalized dance performances in exchange for continued support of the NGO and its projects is reminiscent of cultural encounters in tourism where tourists pay to observe events and performances that are absent in their lives (Rossel 1988).

The MCs at world teacher's day were a male and female students, Kyaw Naing Oo and Saung Oo, senior students in the Burmese-language high school. Saung Oo was wearing a black longyi with floral patterns. She had a plastic flower tucked into her long hair that matched her light pink blouse. Her appearance reminded me of the idealized image of a virtuous Myanmar woman who is upheld in high esteem. Kyaw Naing Oo had tucked his white shirt neatly into his green, plaited longyi. Despite their appearance, longyis were not a part of their ordinary wardrobe. Longyis, while widely worn at home, were usually frowned upon if worn in public. One of the first rules that long-term migrant residents shared with newcomers was not to wear longyis in public. By visibly marking one's national belonging, migrants felt that they made themselves more vulnerable to discriminatory practices.

Kyaw Naing Oo had a near native speaker command of Thai and addressed the Thai speaking audience, while Saung Oo made all the announcements in Burmese. The two announced the next agenda item, it was a speech by a local Thai politician. He started his speech by asking how many people in the audience understood Thai. More people than I expected raised their hands, about 2/5 of the audience. His speech was not translated and my Thai was exhausted after the initial comprehension question. While he delivered his speech, a few of the students

carried a large table to the front of the room and placed it in front of the stage. They brought boxes filled with custard cakes and soy milk. It was a donation by the local Red Cross to the migrant students. The custard cakes were wrapped individually. Each package in turn was wrapped in a small plastic bag that had a sticker that read “Provincial Red Cross Chapter of phangnga” on it.

The accepted donation stood in contradiction to the proclaimed desire of OFM to introduce students to a healthier diet. The diet of most students included large amounts of industrialized sugars and the introduction of a healthier diet had been a concern of teachers and NGO workers alike. A new school was in the planning and it had been decided to ban snack sellers from entering the school grounds to avoid children buying unhealthy snacks from the vendors. Instead, the school wanted to run its own store where they would be able to decide which snacks to sell. Enforcing rhetoric through material practices demands a commitment to the actual practices even in situations in which this might be uncomfortable. The commitment to encourage students to eat healthier had been sacrificed in the face of offending a donor and jeopardizing good relations.

Objectifying difference

During the speech, more Thai Red Cross workers entered the hall and took seats on the leather-optic chairs. Their affiliation with the Red Cross was marked by the red-cross emblem on the sleeves of their blue blouses. As soon as the speech ended, the Thai guests, the co-directors, a few of the teachers and the one NGO employee who spook Thai fluently got up. They lined up for a photo opportunity behind the table with the custard cakes. The kids sitting on the floor in their school uniforms were asked to shift over to the table with the donations and framed the table sitting and standing on three sides. All of the students wore their school uniforms. One

NGO employee hastily grabbed his camera and tried to get as many shots as possible. The NGO employees, teachers and Red Cross workers got ready for the photos when one of the Red Cross workers suggested to ask the students who were waiting for their dance performance to join the photo. It took a few more minutes until the students had been moved into the right positions. The Red Cross employees were determined to include the students who were dressed up in dance costumes on the photos. After everybody was satisfied with their photos, a few of the older students picked up the boxes and distributed the custard cakes and soy milk among the audience.

The set-up of the photo highlighted difference much more than similarity. The children dressed in school uniforms could hardly be distinguished from Thai children attending school, in particular since Myanmar and Thai style school uniforms were present. By asking the children dressed up for the next dance performance to join the portray, difference was highlighted and the appearance of the children exoticized. They were further removed from blending into Thai society and the separation that they already experienced in their daily lives was furthered for the benefit of the dominating majority (Swain 1990).

One of the teachers got up on stage to deliver a speech about the relationships between teachers and students. During her speech in which she emphasized the need for students to be nurtured like plants, I watched most of the Red Cross workers leaving the hall, chatting with the Thai-speaking NGO worker. I looked over to the first row that formerly was occupied by the Thai guests. The seats were empty, nobody else had claimed them yet. The last Thai visitors left accompanied by the sound of a song in Thai that students who attended the Thai school were singing.

Embodying the other

A group of seven adorable girls got on the stage. The youngest was around four or five years old, the oldest probably 10 years old. The dresses they wore were tutu style, all in different colors. The skirts were made from netted lace and the leotards in shiny, reflective colors. The dresses stood in stark contrast to the notion of modesty that was expressed frequently among migrants. The idea of the existence of properly modest dress was an important way for migrants to draw a boundary between them and Thai people. Migrants were the ones who wore modest dress; Thais were the ones wearing immodest clothes. I had been reprimanded by my 6-year old twin girl neighbors that I should not expose my ankles when wearing a longyi by pulling it slightly up when I sat down. The dresses the girls on stage wore defied all notions of modesty that I had encountered so far.

The music started playing and the girls start dancing. The voice of the singer was high-pitched and due to the fast-paced music at times it sounded more like shouting than singing. It took me a while to recognize the song as a Thai song. The dancers had a hard time keeping up with the pace of the music. They were wiggling their arms and legs back and forth without moving from the spot. They lifted their arms and shook their hands back and forth next to their heads. Then they tapped their heels on the floor. Saung Oo pushed the youngest girl who was hiding behind the other dancers into the middle of the stage. She looked glorious in her bright green dress and long dangling earrings. Her eyes were glued to the other dancers, not to miss the next step combination. The dance ended with a *wai***,** a greeting that was used among Thais. The girls got off the stage to the applause of the audience.

The performance by the little girls was reminiscent of rituals of status reversal (Turner 1969: 176). In rituals of status reversal, a group that usually is considered permanently inferior to

another belittles the appearance of those higher in status. The girls on stage, although looking adorable, embodied mostly qualities that migrants did not want to be associated with. In addition to the humorous presentation, the Thai dance was located in a fundamentally different category than the dances from Myanmar. The Myanmar dances were all rooted in a historic understanding of the people in the hall as belonging to one nation-state. The dances could be mapped onto territory, costumes could be ascribed to specific historical events and understandings. Different national identities of people living in Myanmar were marked, in contrast to the Thai dance in which the dominant group of the society the migrants live in remained unmarked.

One of the teachers invited all the other teachers up to the stage. A student from my class pulled me over to the stage; I climbed up and sat down in-between all the other teachers. The two vice co-directors were getting up on stage as well and one sat down next to me. Jokingly I asked her what she did to deserve to be up here. She shrugged her shoulder and responded that she guessed she was getting a present as well. The students had prepared presents for all the teachers. A name tag was attached to the wrapping paper and one student handed them to the most senior teacher from where the presents found their ways to each respective teacher. I looked over the heads in the hall and noticed that still nobody was sitting in the front row. The sofa chairs had remained empty since the Thai spectators had left the hall. All the students then knelt down in front of the stage, folded their hands and started chanting. They were asking for our forgiveness if they had wronged us physically or mentally. At the end of the chant, they lowered their foreheads to the floor three times, paying us the respect that usually was reserved for monks. I felt uncomfortable in this performance of respect and obedience. At the same time, I knew that the students did not perceive the same symbolic power in the act as I did. To them it was a

naturalized practice that they had performed as one of the many techniques of their bodies (Mauss 2006).

For lunch every visitor received a pre-packed lunch box with rice, fried egg and pork that was cooked by the staff during the morning. The snack vendors who had waited patiently throughout the morning, were busy selling ice cream, sausages, fruit and toys. The parents, mostly mothers, had grouped together and sat on the floor next to their children. Many of the mothers wore batik longyis, a few one-sets in-between, all of them had thanaka on their faces. Thanaka was a paste made from ground bark. It functioned as protection from the sun, cooled the skin off and at the same time gave an appearance of lighter skin. It was popular with women, men and children alike.

Dancing in the past

One of the last performances of the day was another dance performed by a group of girls. Their entry onto the stage was part of a dramatic performance. The music was heavy and slow and step-by-step, the girls conquered the stage from the left side. They did not face the audience, their silhouettes were turned towards the audience. Their right hands were held up and covered parts of their faces. They were moving forward by tapping the floor with their heels at every step. They were wearing light blue long skirts, blouses and a cape around their shoulders in the same color. They had a wide, golden belt tied around their waists and a golden crown on their heads. As soon as the last dancer had entered the stage, they turned to face the audience. They were taking turns tipping their right and left toes rhythmically towards the back. They turned their palms rhythmically to the audience and their fingertips touched. It was a long, slow dance and after five minutes the girls finally left the stage to the applause of the audience.

I had never seen this dance before and did not know what it was that I was watching. The dresses reminded me of a costume party. While the dancers earlier who performed the Shan dance looked *as if* they were performing at a costume party, their outfits held meaning and were worn by living and breathing people. I could not recognize the costumes of the girls as representing a particular group of people. At the end of the performance I ask Moe Oo, who was a student in my class, whether this was a dance from Myanmar. She nodded and told me that it was an old dance, it was a dance that could be traced back to the kingdom of Bagan.

I had learned to hear the word Bagan from a new perspective during my fieldwork. The majority of migrants were from Dawei. Although most people in Myanmar would not recognize people from Dawei as an existing, separate identity, there was no doubt to people from Dawei that they were culturally and linguistically distinct from other peoples in the country. Dawei people succinctly expressed the distinction between them and Burman people by referring to the latter as ဂံ လူမျိုး (*gan lu myo)* ဂံ (*gan)* as in Bagan. The usage of the term was a result of the occupation of southern Myanmar by soldiers representing the Bagan kingdom. They came to live in villages with Dawei people, but in the eyes of most people from the south, remained distinct people who embodied mostly negative characteristics of an occupying force. The historical roots and meaning of the term continued to remain relevant today. Most recently, the ongoing construction of the Dawei seaport had enforced what many people from Dawei knew to be true and what was expressed in the term gan. When Burman people came to the south it was to act from a position of power and to serve their own needs first before considering the local population.

While dance and the celebration of ethnicity and one's national roots can be a way for peoples in exile to maintain identity and a connection with the homeland (Yeh 2007), the

identities performed during teachers day, did not correspond to any self-identification of the students or their parents. The nation performed was the nation prescribed by national narratives that have been developed as part of the hegemonic discourse the central government is engaged in (Salem-Gervais and Metro 2012). Dawei and Mon dances, the two nationalities present the most in Khuan Charoen, exist, but were not valued as were dances of other groups that had been elevated to greater visibility in a national paradigm. Students were not taught to consider their own identities worthy of public performance, but were taught to value the heritage of others over their own.

Commodified pasts, eclipsed present

It is remarkable that all of the performances by the students were situated in the past. While it is common to wear longyis, the stylized appearance that the audience witnessed on stage bears no relationship to their contemporary lives. The portrayals rather draw on a pristine past. The situation in which the dances were performed was unique. The students were removed from the national context, many were born in exile or were too young when they left Myanmar to remember any details. To them, Myanmar exists through the narratives of their parents and performances as the ones they were engaged in. The dances start to represent a living history in which the performed characters become more real or authentic than the performers themselves (Daniel 1996).

As scholars of tourism have noted, travel often allows tourists to visit countries inside a bubble. They tour a place without noticing any of its realities beyond touristic sites (Garcia 1988). The performance on Teachers Day achieved the opposite: it created the illusion to have visited Myanmar and to learn about its people and history without setting foot into the country. The images put on stage helped OFM not only to further its amicable ties with local Thai

organizations and politicians. Placing the majority of migrants in a perpetual framework of the past and objectifying their appearance, facilitates place-making of OFM in the contemporary landscape of Phang Nga. They draw on these pristine performances that represent the past, to establish their own positions in hierarchies that most migrants are excluded from. The students have been turned into a market that can be consumed by others to the benefit of those who engineered the performances.

Davile (2001) writes about the creation of the label Hispanic in the process of commodification of identities. While in the context above, no new explicit label was created, the illusion of a coherent, authentic, historical identity was performed. This stage identity, however, is confined to the boundaries of Myanmar and does not contribute to portraying migrants in a more equal position vis-à-vis their Thai counterparts. Ethnicities or nationalities, as I refer to them in this context, are frozen in time, resistant to change and are pushed into the limelight in moments of market place transactions (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). In contrast, the performances further contribute to class stratification in which elites among migrants place themselves next to Thais, but refrain from doing so with other. While migrant elites actively work to create place for themselves, they refrain from doing so on behalf of others.

This chapter drew attention to commodified, staged public performances by migrants. It highlighted the limitations for self-expression and the purposeful manipulation in time and space of these forms of expression. Moving away from staged performances, the next chapter will focus on leisure time activities practiced by migrants. While the emphasis again is on a large public event, this time the event is foremost organized for the benefits of migrants.

CHAPTER 3: LIVING IN NON-PLACE

The experience of place for most migrants is informed by their stays in Myanmar. Few migrants have traveled in Myanmar or their provinces before coming to Thailand as migrants. Meanings imbued in place appear mostly given and not the result of individual and communal histories and relations that people develop over time. In a similar vein, distinctions between public and private spheres often go unnoticed since people have developed strategies over time that make navigation between the two appear smooth and seamless.

Moving to another place throws a new light on the taken-for-granted though. For many migrants, this is the first time that they start to see themselves as part of a larger, national hierarchy and that their positionality differs from those of others. Furthermore, their movements and interactions become self-conscious, realizing that not only their self-perceptions are relevant in creating a sense of self-in-place, but that the perceptions of others can play a role as well.

Some scholars have criticized the distinction into private and public sphere as a uniquely European phenomenon that is imposed on other parts of the world without having equivalent forms of local expressions (Bhargava and Reifeld 2005). While there are no Burmese-language terms that commonly describe a distinction between public and private sphere, the words home and outside the home capture a sentiment that came to play an important role in the lives of migrants.

During different times of the week and days various places turned into leisure spaces enabling incidental encounters: the wet market was busy in the early morning hours, exercise enthusiasts could be found around the lake during sunrise and sunset, the afternoon market was lively three afternoons a week and the temple grounds patiently waited for visitors during full moon festivals. Given the rural character of Khuan Charoen though, there were few centralized,

public spaces to congregate or to incidentally meet others. Most people used their motorbikes or the rare public transport to travel from place to place. The market places were the best opportunity to meet and socialize with acquaintances or to meet new people.

It was during one of the first weeks of my fieldwork that I was strolling across the afternoon market. Walking in-between the busy stalls packed with vegetables, fish and meat I found it more difficult than expected to recognize labor migrants. I was surprised because approximately one in four residents in Phang Nga province are migrant workers from Myanmar. Some people at the market had their faces covered in thanaka or their legs wrapped in longyis and unmistakably were from Myanmar. But merely relying on their outward appearance did not seem enough to recognize migrants.

Returning home from my trip to the market I told neighbors, informants and friends who all were from Myanmar that I found it difficult to recognize migrants at the market. They told me that they recommended to newcomers not to wear longyis outside the house; just as they had been told when they arrived here. They felt more vulnerable to state scrutiny and surveillance when it was easier to recognize them. They were afraid of the arsenal of legal weapons that police officers have; concerned with how those discretionary powers were exercised. They were afraid of for example the accusation of illegality, or being stopped on their motorbikes on the suspicion of not having a driver's license. There were other accusations related to work and work permits; for example having the wrong employers name listed in the work permit, missing the 90 day reporting stamp to maintain the validity of one's visa or generally having missed out on the latest changes in bureaucratic requirements for migrants that made it costly and time-consuming to remain a legal alien in the eyes of the law (chapter four will focus on the specificities of legal existence for migrants in Thailand). Bearing these (costly) threats in mind, many migrants

choose to disguise their identities as much as possible by dressing in shirts and shorts bought at the local markets and rubbing their bodies in thanaka only at home.

Publics are a site for producing cultural norms for discourse and action (Ong 1997). The example of changing one's dress when being at home or at the market clearly speaks not only to new norms that are different in Myanmar and Thailand, but also indicates a conceptual distinction between private and public spaces. Migrants experience their bodies differently in these spaces. The different ways we experience our bodies can be a useful way of differentiating between public and private spaces (Hitzler 1985).

This chapter narrates and analyzes an event, a football (soccer) tournament that was set up by OFM and another organization working on behalf of migrants. All members of the 12 teams that participated in the tournament were migrants from Myanmar. I focus on the opening event of the tournament, on December 5, 2010 but will draw on events that unfolded during the weeks that followed as well.

I argue that during the football tournament, the usual hesitation to make one's body visible in public and thereby inadvertently claiming public space, was put aside. Migrants gathered playing sports, and moreover enacted a type of public reminiscent of home in which constituting the numerical majority causes anonymity and invisibility of one's body. In a diasporic context, however, their presence caused greater visibility. Migrants' enactment of difference embodied by their unapologetic presence in public was ameliorated through the use of conspicuous symbols that represented the country they live in. Public symbols can be an effective way for people to attempt to bridge perceived differences. In Thailand, in the face of accusations of wanting to undermine the country, the symbolic image of the King has been often employed to demonstrate belonging to the Thai nation. While some of these symbolic acts are

successful in ameliorating difference, in the case discussed here the physical public presence of migrants outweighed the symbolic tools they evoked to avoid harassment. The ever, luring threat of illegality was evoked to bring the tournament to a halt. Migrants did not succeed in claiming presence in the present and finally the tournament was relocated to a more remote venue.

Competing for the King

December 5 is a national holiday in Thailand on which the birthday of HM the King is celebrated and public schools and governmental offices are closed. The football tournament was scheduled over a period of two weeks and December 5 had been chosen as the opening day for the tournament. It allowed the organizers to instrumentalize the tournament as a way of proclaiming respect and honor for the King of Thailand. The main organizer, OFM, was careful to preach respect for local customs and many of their public events took place on prominent Thai holidays. The tournament was a big event in a community of migrants where public gatherings were rare and few opportunities for respite from work were available. Migrants spent most of their waking hours at work or at home with their families. The main goal of their stay in Thailand was to improve their economic standing and the great majority of migrants worked as many hours as possible to achieve this goal. Spare time, enjoying oneself and lingering with friends were all postponed to the return to Myanmar.

The official start of the tournament was at 2pm and on the way to the tournament I picked up a friend, Ma Shwe, and her 5-year old daughter, Soe Kay Thi Lin. The little girl was wearing a new shirt and shorts, holding on to her hat and her whole face covered in thanaka which was arranged into circular patterns on her cheeks. She brimmed with excitement at the outlook of spending a day outside the house. The tournament took place on the sports field of a Thai public school located right next to Highway 4. This particular highway was the main thoroughfare

connecting south-western Thailand with the center of the country, Bangkok. During the week, nearly every night, a group of men gathered to play football on the sports field of the school, but it was deserted most other times. One entered the school grounds by passing through the gates of the temple that was located behind the school. The highway, the sports field, the public school buildings and then the temple were all located next to each other.

Claiming visibility

We arrived early and only few people had gathered, but the set-up indicated the anticipated grandeur of the event. A blue-yellow striped tent was pitched along the long side of the field. Piles of red, plastic chairs waited to be distributed in the shade. A stereo playing softly the Thai national anthem and eight trophies waiting for the winners of the tournament were set up on a table in the center of the tent. Two guys sitting at the table were testing the microphones, adjusting the sound, shuffling papers around and filling in forms. Two other guys standing right behind them listening to the test announcements had tied the yellow royal flag around their shoulders.

A small poster put together from several printouts announced in Burmese the order in which the teams would play during the coming weeks. A much larger, professionally printed plastic banner, about 2 x 3.5m, hung from the side of the tent, facing the roadside. Its bright yellow matched the yellow of the tent. It announced in large Thai letters and smaller Burmese letters underneath that on behalf of the birthday of the King a football tournament took place between December 5 - 18. The organizers were acknowledged with their logos at the bottom. A portrait photo of the King was printed in the top left corner, framed by the yellow royal flag on the left side of the banner with Thailand's national flag printed on the right side of the banner. The angle in which the poster was hanging made it difficult for people standing around the field

to be able to read the banner. It seemed as if it was meant for the curious passer-by on the highway rather than for the spectators. The organizational set-up provided a material manifestation of the organizer's understanding of the importance of performing respect for the King in public. In their eyes, evoking the King was an appropriate way of demonstrating a sense of respect towards beliefs of Thai people.

A few players were squatting next to the field, the players of each team recognizable by matching jerseys. Children of migrants who attended the Thai school played on the field in their school sport jerseys while other players warmed up next to them. Some of players, their friends and families munched on crushed ice, chewed on sausages on a stick or drank iced tea; purchased from the Thai vendors who had parked their carts in the shade of the trees. Spectators began to arrive and by 2pm, a crowd had gathered around the field. People squatted and stood around the field, engaged in animated conversations. The teams walked onto the field, receiving instructions where to stand and boards with their team names printed on them in Burmese. Most of the names reflected the places where migrants lived or places of work. The team of the nearby fishermen village, known as a stronghold of migrant workers, stood next to the library team and next to them most notably the Hot Shots, a team made up of mainly rubber plantation workers who lived in the same neighborhood as I did. While jogging onto the field, some players still slid their jerseys over their heads, covering the white tank tops that were a popular choice of clothing. All teams had gotten jerseys made for the occasion and their appearance promised a professionally organized competition.

Performing symbolic respect

The teams lined up next to each other facing the banner of HM the King and most of the audience. Serious looking and pregnant with meaning, players in the first row held up additional

royal symbols. A framed, recent photo of the King was next to a framed photo of the much younger ordained King, next to that the Thai flag and a yellow royal flag. The royal symbols evoked the Thai nation at-large and the figure that has been constructed as its backbone, HM the King. The figure of the King lent itself for a wide variety of performances: it channeled genuine emotions that some have for him as a person, while others knew how to instrumentalize it for performances of national belonging, loyalty or respect. The public display of royal imagery was common and often used by groups who felt in need to prove their legitimate belonging to the nation (Johnson 2012, Toyota 2005). It is not simply to evoke the nation through symbols, but often laying claim to being a part of this nation.

While few migrants had an interest in claiming symbolic integration into the Thai nation, they demonstrated their good intent to at least respect existing values rather than undermining them through their sheer presence. In thinking about this performed respect it is important to think about at least two potential different audiences for the symbolism: local Thais and representatives of the Thai state. In my opinion, this performed respect is not aimed to impress the few Thai nationals present. Vendors were eager to sell their products to anybody, irrespective of their national belonging or feelings towards the Thai nation. The performed respect was rather an attempt to ameliorate the discretionary powers of the state and in the end to avoid unpredictable harassment by representatives of the state.

A few months after the tournament I witnessed this entirely random harassment at a wedding. A couple celebrated their marriage outside the local library run by migrants for migrants. They had pitched a tent and as good hosts walked from table to table urging their guests to eat more of the coconut noodle soup. Suddenly a civilian car pulled up and three men in shirts and shorts got out. The woman standing next to me whispered that they were local police.

Without introducing themselves they asked all male guests to take off their shirts. They were looking for a criminal who had tattoos on his upper body and all men at the wedding by virtue of being migrant workers were suspects. Although I was the only one who still bothered to criticize the abuse of power loudly and to make my dismay apparent after the police left; migrants were at all times vigilant to avoid similar situations in which they might have been subjected to uncontrollable powers of the state.

The opening speech of the director of OFM was drowned in the noise of the chatting, excited crowd. The director emphasized the need of the community to come together and sports as a good avenue to do so. The မင်္ဂလာပါ ရှင် *(mingelaba shin)* a formal greeting in Burmese, of the next speaker was welcomed with enthusiastic cheers by the spectators. The speaker was the local representative of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and besides the referees and vendors the only Thai national at the event. She kept her speech brief and despite the presence of a bilingual MC, it was not translated into Burmese.

Each team stepped forward and squatted down under the gaze of the King in front of the yellow banner to take a group photo. It seemed as if the teams stepped into a protected zone created by the benevolent gaze of the King for the time it took to take a photo. The protection of the King, though, proofed to be unreliable.

While the team of the largest town nearby lined up for the photo with their yellow shirts that had printed “Long live the King” on the backs, a group of school children stepped onto the field to deliver a dance performance. The pink and yellow shirts of the dancers were in unison with the yellow shirts of the football team. The children performed to the song “This is Africa” by Shakira, a song hugely popular among migrants. Oblivious to the larger context of the song it was generally referred to as the wakaka song/dance and a song known to cheer up adults and

children alike. As introduced in the last chapter, it was common for school children to perform song and dance at public events. The performance discussed in the preceding chapter reflected a stylized performance of a historical, ethnicized Myanmar identity. At events that solely were organized for migrants rather than a Thai audience, the performances were meant to provide entertainment value merely for migrants as was the case at the soccer tournament.

Each half of a game was thirty minutes long and the first game started slowly. Neither team had a substantial following among the crowd and people were more occupied with catching up and exchanging the latest gossip rather than supporting a team. Despite the holiday, many migrants had to work and I ran into a friend, Min Min, who was dressed in black pants and a polo shirt that indicated his employment at a large hotel in the area. It was close to the peak of the high season and he used his afternoon break to watch parts of the tournament. I asked him about his job, working conditions and salary. In the few hours during the day that migrants were not working, they loved to discuss employers, fellow employees and salaries at length indicating the role that work played in the lives of all migrants. Time passed quickly and by the end of the second game the sounds of a large crowd of people shouting, cheering and clapping filled the air.

By then, the whole field was surrounded by shouting supporters who reflected a diverse migrant population. They were eating snacks, chatting, and cheering for their favorite teams. I recognized a group of teenage girls as friends and family of the Hot Shots team. Many of them dressed in knee length jeans and shirts, others in the Thai version of sweat-pants. The week before this tournament I had been to a football tournament that had brought Thai and migrant worker teams together. The contrast between the two events was startling. The previous week I had been one of the few spectators along the field. It had taken place at another public school during late afternoons and neither supporters of the Thai or migrant worker teams had bothered

to show up. Despite the immense popularity of football among migrants, there had been no enthusiasm for a friendly competition between Thai and migrant teams, in contrast to the all-migrant tournament.

The members of Hot Shot F.C. lined up for their own group photo and a teenage girl from the same neighborhood as the players stepped forward and handed each player a rose to the sounds of Shakira blurting through the speakers again. The shy smile of the girl was met with supportive cheers from family members and other friends. Hot Shot F.C. played against the library team, two teams from the area with a substantial following. The shouts of the wives, daughters and friends of Hot Shot F.C. reached hysterical heights after the first goal. By half time the score board showed one goal for each side. The shouts of the young father who threw his baby in the air to support the library team were met with louder, teasing responses from the Hot Shot F.C. supporters. Towards the end of the game every ball possession by the Hot Shots was greeted by cheers, claps and dances from their mostly female supporters. The father of the baby turned to me and apologized that there were not enough supporters for the library team, they had to work. It became unclear who provided more entertainment for the spectators, the Hot Shot F.C. supporters or the game itself.

An older Caucasian couple walked around the field, equipped with their camera and curious what they were witnessing. Their presence drew little attention among a crowd busy enjoying themselves and their day out. With the onset of rain the spectators started to disperse, exhausted after a relaxing day off from work and hanging out with friends and family.

Marking belonging

The next day, a work day, the tournament continued. I visited the tournament for an hour before I had to teach my class at the local migrant school. One of the teams contending in the

first match of the day had their team name, "Migrant worker organization of place X," printed in Burmese on the backs of their jerseys. The yellow banner continued to remind passers-by that this was a tournament in the honor of HM the King, but gone were the moments of holding flags and photos. On the way to school I pondered the contrast between the teams wearing the yellow "Long live the King" jerseys and the Burmese language migrant worker shirts. I asked the students in class of whom most had attended the tournament about the symbolic meaning of the shirts. The students agreed that the yellow jersey, the King photos and the flag were signs of respect for the King and moreover respect to the habit of Thais to invoke the King. I remarked that I found it odd that so many people paid symbolic obeisance to a King that was not theirs. I suggested that it could be interpreted as submissive rather than respectful. The students met my remarks with fierce head shakes. They told me that my interpretation was misguided. In their eyes, the symbolism should rather be read as nifty migrants paying lip service to customs of their host country. In my last attempt to convince them of my interpretation, I asked how many of the students had photos of the Thai King in their homes. One out of ten students raised his hand and nodded. Kyaw Naing Oo explained that he had read an article about the King that said he had initiated developmental projects in Thailand and supported the poor, therefore he respected him.

The looming specter of illegality

Later that day, I dropped by Ma Shwe's house. She had gone to the tournament after I had left. She told me that later in the afternoon the police had shown up with four trucks, circled the field and made sure that no players or spectators were able to leave. Under the general accusation of illegality all migrants had to show their temporary passports and work permits. Ma Shwe had forgotten her papers at home and was able to call her mother who brought her papers to the field. Of the approximately 120 people present, 6 people were detained and taken to the

police station. They were later released when family members brought their papers to the police station.

The immediate response by the organizers was to put the tournament on hold. 10 days later the competition was resumed, in a different location. The school grounds next to Highway 4 were left behind for a football field in a small town 20 km further down the highway where the tournament had taken place during the previous year. It was a fishermen town known for its large migrant community that had few coincidental passers-by. For potential spectators it was difficult to reach. A woman I had talked to on the opening day told me that she had wanted to go last year already, it had been held in the same town that it was relocated to, but given the remote location it had not been possible for her to go. The more central location chosen by the organizers this year had enabled a substantially larger crowd of onlookers than in the previous years.

Curbing public presence

In the aftermath of the police raid a complex story of personal vengeance unfolded. The police raid had been triggered by a phone call from a local resident who had complained about the competition after the first day. He claimed that the organizers had not obtained appropriate permits and that it was an illegal gathering. The police showed up in full force and suspected everybody of illegality, a state perpetually looming over migrant bodies. The organizers who were experienced in managing public events had not been prepared for this. Overall, they had amicable relations with the local police and were often called upon to mediate between police and detained migrants. They had obtained a permit from the local municipality and the school to hold the tournament. Their social capital and past experience had lulled them into a sense of confidence that organizing and holding a large public event for migrants could take place outside the specter of legal threats, but a disgruntled referee interfered with their plans.

The person who had alerted the police had served as referee at the same tournament in the previous year. The organizers had not asked him to serve as a referee again since they felt that he was not very friendly with the players and seemed to dislike migrants in general. I did not get to talk to the disgruntled referee and do not know whether he was upset about the pay-check he missed out on or whether he indeed had a dislike for migrants, although the latter interpretation seems more likely given the arrival of four police trucks. The raid was justified by pointing out that the organizers had not obtained *all* the permits necessary. There was a bureaucrat beyond the local level who was pointed out as the final arbiter for granting the appropriate permission. A bureaucrat that had not been approached prior to the tournament.

The other, public space and the law

Defining difference has been at the heart of defining Thai-ness and suspicions against people who are constructed and portrayed as the other were a common thread in the history of nation-building of the Thai state (Renard 2006, Pavin 2011, Thongchai 2000). The Thai state was vigilant to maintain the health and well-being of the normative Thai body and polices and regulated the influences others can have on it carefully (Connors 2005). It was a challenging project though to remain alert and to recognize the other; in Thailand the suspect others have been embodied by a wide a range of groups of people (Hayami 2006, Jonsson 2010, Keyes 1966, McCargo 2006, Toyota 2005). Many of these past and present otherness projects aimed to turn people who lived in the same national territory, but did not adhere to the same national imaginaries into loyal subjects. The growing presence of migrants has introduced a new category of otherness, otherness that should not and cannot be contained within the national narrative. Otherness that does not only allow differential treatment from citizens, but much rather *calls* for differential treatment.

It is common for states to evoke the power of the law to control the presence of foreign bodies on national territories. In Europe and the US complex systems of border control and policing have evolved that aim to keep migrants outside the territory; the goal is not to allow their bodies inside the national boundaries in the first place (De Genova 2010, Fassin 2011). In Southeast Asia in general, border control plays a comparatively minor role in regulating the presence of migrant workers. In Thailand, migrant workers are welcome as a source of flexible manpower who hardly ever lay claim to already obscure labor standards. The general stance of many Southeast Asian governments is coined by a certain sense of pragmatism. Migrants are welcome to contribute to the economic development of a respective country; they are treated as itinerant workers who belong elsewhere. Migrant workers are usually not expected to assimilate into the host nation, it is accepted that people's cultural identities do not cease to determine who they are when they cross a border. Assimilative approaches like in Europe or the US are rarely aspired to.

The landscape of contemporary, cheap, flexible labor is constituted by workers from Myanmar, Indonesia or the Philippines in contrast to the past, where most migrants came from China. Many migrants from China ended up staying permanently and their presence has coined Southeast Asian countries differently (Pan 1990, Skinner 1957). Different modes of transportation and increased mobility though have changed the shape of migration in Southeast Asia. Many contemporary migrants have set their minds on returning to their home countries. The overwhelming majority of migrants from Myanmar in this part of Thailand considered their stay in Thailand merely as a means of improving their livelihood, but permanent settlement was not considered a desirable, viable option.

This chapter illustrated one of the manifestations of non-place. The rhetoric of law and legality have become tools to control the presence of migrants in time and place. The gathering of migrants in public spaces has the power to disrupt normative understandings of order and the mere act of claiming public space temporarily can be interpreted as an act of subordination (Law 2010). The narrative above illustrates that the attempts of migrants to demonstrate their loyalties to the host nation might be meaningful symbolic acts, but they are symbolic acts that rather serve to foster a sense of community among migrants than impressing the host nation.

The next chapter will focus on the private sphere and complement this chapter by discussing leisure time activities at home.

CHAPTER 4: PASSING TIME: BOREDOM AND PLACE

The dirt road to the rubber plantation was in bad condition. Rain had eroded parts of the road and the trucks that hauled away rubber sheets and the fruit of palm oil trees had done the rest to create potholes, furrows and ridges. I was focused on avoiding the potholes and slowly navigated around one hole after the next. I barely paid any attention to the captivating beauty of the monotonous rubber plantation landscape interlaced with palm oil trees around me. The driver of the bike behind me became impatient and sped past. A few minutes ago, we had left the paved road and there were no other traffic or pedestrians anymore. The dirt road ended into a field of rubber trees. On the right hand side, a broken fence marked the boundaries of a property where approximately 10 shacks for rubber plantation workers stood.

I entered the property and drove past the field where six men in teams of three were playing chinlone. Chinlone was a popular sport. Most of the time, it was non-competitive; the goal of the game was to keep a rattan ball in the air for as long as possible. The players took turns stepping into the middle of a circle and holding the ball in the air. It was played in many parts of Southeast Asia and in most other countries it was played as a competitive sport; the way the players played today. A net separated the two teams, most of the men wore shorts, one had his longyi pulled up between his legs and had tucked it just above his buttock like a diaper. With much laughter and banter they tried to keep the rattan ball in the air as long as possible. It was 10am and except for the chinlone playing men, few people were outside their shacks.

The workday of a rubber plantation worker came to an end in the early morning hours and most workers were sleeping or still at work. In a large shed, two men were pounding fresh rubber sheets. One started turning the manual press and the other pushed the sheets through the press to flatten them. The rubber sheets needed to be processed as soon as possible after the

collection of the rubber in the morning. While men and women alike went out at night to tap the trees and later to collect the sap that meanwhile had oozed into small pots attached to the trees, it was mostly men who mixed the rubber with the necessary chemicals, pounded it into sheets and pushed it through the manual presses.

A teenager was sitting outside a shack and her mother, wearing a longyi, white T-shirt and amulet around her neck welcomed us. They invited us into their house and the girl grabbed VCDs to show them to Maw Maw Aye who had come with us on the bikes. The small shack was partitioned by a piece of plywood into living and sleeping space. There was only room for one person to stand after entering the shack, the rest of the interior was raised onto wooden platforms: with space to sit, space to sleep and space for the shrines. It made the room feel smaller than it was, but this way the rain would pass through the shack without washing away belongings or making it impossible to sit and sleep on the floor that would be perpetually wet during the rainy season. The two shrines, elevated onto an additional step were pushed into the upper, left corner of the first room. They were decorated with photos of pagodas, Buddha images and flowers. A bowl of water was sitting in front and another bowl, this one golden, was on top of one of the shrines. Except for blankets and pillows, the shrines were the only items inside the house.

I turned to the girl who had been sitting outside the shack and asked her whether she had worked last night. She nodded and I followed up by asking whether she had slept already. She had slept for 1,5 hours, but still felt very tired, she responded. I asked her how long she was in Thailand for and she told me that she had been in Thailand for seven years. She did not look older than 15 and I asked whether she had any memories of Myanmar. Of course she still remembered Myanmar, she had gone to school there for two years, she responded. Since they

had come to Thailand she had helped her family by working on the plantation. All the families living in the surrounding shacks, cut rubber trees for a living. She said that she rarely ever left the plantation. Some of the younger children went to school and were picked up by the school bus every day, but she mostly stayed on the plantations. Her mother left once in a while to do grocery shopping at the market.

We turned to the pavilion next to the shack. It was constructed as a public gathering place for all the people living around. The roof was held up by wooden pillars, there were no walls. A row of bricks that could serve as seats marked the boundaries of the space, usually demarcated by walls. Empty rice bags had been laid out on the dirt floor to provide additional clean, dry sitting space. Slowly some women and children emerged from the other shacks and gathered in the pavilion. The heat was already starting to heavily rest on our bodies, with incidental bursts of wind providing short moments of relief. On the way to the plantation, we had stopped to buy ice cubes and soft drinks. I scooped the ice from the cooler with plastic cups and the woman sitting next to me added soft drinks and passed the cups around. There were 16 women in total, a few had brought infants and toddlers. The men who had played chinlone interrupted their game to have soft drinks as well.

Ma Soe Yi started the training with a game. She asked the women to introduce themselves by spelling their names through hip movements. Ma Soe Yi started and the group of women broke out in hysterical laughter. The gyrating movements of her hips imitated the round letters of the Burmese alphabet. When she was done she asked the other women to follow her example. After much touting, a teenage girl got up and started to spell her name by moving her hips. Her embarrassment and the laughter of everybody else made it impossible for her to finish the assignment. The men had retreated back to their game, embarrassed by what they had

witnessed. Ma Soe Yi cut the game short, sat down and asked everybody to just introduce themselves by saying their names. She came here regularly for trainings and most of the women knew her already. Todays' training was about reproductive health and it always was important to be inventive in teaching and presentation methods: most of the women had worked through the night and only gotten a few hours of sleep. While a few were always interested in the training itself, drinks and snacks were important incentives to make all the participants stay throughout the training.

Before starting the actual presentation, Ma Soe Yi wanted to engage in a casual conversation with the women. She asked what they would characterize as a major concern in their lives. Daw Ohn Hla, the woman whose daughter I had talked to earlier spoke up in response to Ma Soe Yi's question. She sighed and said that boredom was the biggest problem she had. There was nothing to do and nowhere to go. They stayed on the plantation most of the time and only left to go to the market in town. Ma Soe Yi was taken aback by the response. The training was about reproductive health. This mostly included sharing information about sexually transmittable disease and family planning. The large number of children couples had and rising HIV rates among migrants were a major concern in the eyes of OFM that Ma Soe Yi worked for. Regulating family sizes or the spread of HIV felt like achievable goals for them. Boredom, however, was not a problem that she and the NGO were equipped to deal with. No training or policy would relieve migrants off the boredom that plagued their lives. The query went unanswered and Ma Soe Yi started the training.

The emotions shared above were symptomatic of the experiences of many migrants: their life was overwhelmingly boring. Removed from their familiar social lives and environments it became difficult for many to rebuild lives that they recognized as similarly meaningful to their

old lives in Myanmar. Plunged into a vastly rural area with few public spaces to meet and socialize, many felt confined to their homes and work sites. Most public spaces were shared with Thai people and a sense of belonging or partial ownership were more difficult to achieve than in places born into or dominated by others who spoke a similar language and identified in similar ways. A strong emphasis on work resulted in shifting social practices in their spare time which in turn further enhanced the alienation with the space they lived in. Life in Thailand had provided access to technologies that remained more challenging to obtain in Myanmar. Nevertheless, these technologies were not experienced as a valuable addition to other leisure time activities, but rather came to replace them.

Boredom beyond time and progress

In most ethnographic studies, boredom is understood and analyzed as a temporal condition that implies a sense of inactivity, waiting, monotony and often pointlessness (Mushabarash 2007, Schielke 2008, Sjorslev 2013, Torbenfeldt Bengtsson 2012). Jeffrey (2010) and Mains (2007) highlight economic transformations and resulting un- or underemployment in the experience of time and strategies of young men to cope with this condition. It is remarkable how many ethnographers focus on young men, often suggesting that the experience of boredom is structurally different for men and women, not the least due to additional domestic responsibilities that are placed on many women (Mains 2007, Masqualier 2013, Ralph 2008).

It is often assumed that experiencing boredom presupposes expectations of progress or certain events that fail to materialize (Schielke 2008). Some authors argue that boredom is closely related to the advent of modernity (Svendsen 2005) and is rooted in linear understandings of time that emphasize a distinction between work and leisure time (Eberhardt 2006, Thompson 1967). In contrast to these studies, I focus on boredom as inextricably linked to the experience of

place. While my informants certainly at times experienced situational boredom caused by inactivity or monotony, this was not due to unfulfilled expectations or having been disappointed in promises of the future. Migrants did not attempt to escape boredom by waiting for better times in the future or hoping for different forms of progress in their lives. They recognized that their boredom was spatially bound and could only be addressed by moving elsewhere. The concept of elsewhere foremost mimicked the spatial experience of home. Attempts of some migrants to address boredom that many recognized as a heavy burden in their lives, often failed since they mostly addressed temporal aspects of boredom, but usually fell short in recreating spatial experiences of home.

Waiting for home

May Thu had invited me to come and visit her during a slow day in the rainy season at her work site. There were few guests at the hotel where she worked and she would have time to chat for a longer than our usual conversations at the market where she always was in a hurry; needing to return to work. She worked at a three star hotel located at the beach front. The hotels' design and layout conjured fantasies of endless vacation and never-ending relaxation. The main three-story building was built around a pool, additional bungalows were located in a carefully manicured tropical garden and the restaurant was an open space underneath a roof that provided shelter from the sun and rain faced the sea. The staff played a crucial role in maintaining the facade of a carefree paradise which the linguistic barrier between guests and staff facilitated. The rudimentary Thai vocabulary of hello and thanks that tourists usually had acquired was met with friendly smiles by the staff. What many tourists might mistook for the infamous smiles of friendly Thais was mostly performed by migrant workers. At the hotel, two workers were from Cambodia, 26 from Myanmar and a handful, in mostly management functions, were Thai.

I entered the restaurant, looking at the sea that was rough and inhospitable. Two tourists sat at a table, they were the only guests in sight. The narrow beach that had been taken over by the sea was deserted, rain clouds were hanging low. During the rainy season, the sea engulfed most of the beach and the few guests who stayed at the hotel, were gathered around the pool in a different part of the hotel. The tourists called for the bill and May Thu emerged from the kitchen. She greeted me with a silent nod and took the bill to the table of the guests. Once the two had left, we sat down at a table. I asked May Thu whether I should buy a drink in case her boss came by, but she shook her head. We were alone; no other employees or guests were in sight.

May Thu was two years younger than me, married and had a two-year old daughter. Her husband and her lived in a small room in the hotel. The staff quarters were at the backside of the hotel, where no guests ever ventured to. Right now, May Thu was alone. Her husband had returned to Mon state where they were from. The reduced number of guests during the rainy season resulted in less work available for the employees. They received a reduced salary and in their opinion it was not worthwhile staying. Thailand was a good place to live for earning money, but as soon as this incentive for staying was removed, they could not think of many reasons to stay. May Thu wanted to return to Mon State as well, but she did not have a valid passport yet. She had already submitted her paperwork with a broker and waited for the next possible trip to the temporary passport center. Their daughter lived all year round with her parents-in-law. There was nobody to look after her at their workplace and they both wanted to work. Many migrants had to make a choice between having their children with them and working reduced hours or leaving their children behind in the care of other family members.

May Thu had been trained as a teacher and worked for four years as a teacher. She had loved her job, but the salary was too low and therefore she had moved to Thailand. She had

initially stayed for four years, married her husband, returned together with him to Myanmar, gave birth to their daughter and after a while returned with her husband to Thailand to start employment at their current work site, without their daughter.

She did not mind the work at the hotel. During high season they were able to earn tips in addition to their salaries and she got along well with most other employees. Of the 26 employees from Myanmar, 25 were Mon as well and they all spoke Mon among each other, creating an atmosphere of home and comfort. She disliked not being able to work though. Their room was small and cramped and there was nowhere to go. I asked whether she sometimes went to the temple or meditated. She shook her head. In the past, a Mon monk had been at the monastery and every once in while she had attended his sermons. His presence had helped to create a greater sense of familiarity with the place where she lived on. After he returned to Myanmar, she had stopped to meditate at home as well. She said it was enough to know the teachings in her head. She did not feel comfortable establishing a routine here that involved meditating. During high season there was little downtime from work; the few spare hours she had were filled with grocery shopping, cooking and washing their clothes. During low season it was a different story and it was easiest to escape the confinement of their home in the hotel, rather than attempting to establish a social routine reminiscent of their lives in Myanmar. Their return seemed inevitable anyway. There was no doubt in her and her husbands' minds that they would return to live in Myanmar for good, they just did not know when. The Myanmar government had recently announced that salaries for teachers would be raised, but May Thu only laughed at that. A raise would need to be substantial to be able to compete with their current salaries, that she considered their return unlikely for many more years. A family of four entered the restaurant and May Thu got up to get the menus for them. She returned to work for the remainder of the afternoon.

Not only the work hours of hotel employees were cut back severely during rainy season. Anybody working in the service industry as wait staff, gardeners, cleaning or kitchen personnel, many construction workers and rubber plantation workers found themselves with more spare time on their hands than they wanted. During those times that could have served for relaxation, many were forced to recognize the absence of any non-work related routines, habits and activities in their lives.

May Thu and her husband had the opportunity to return to Myanmar which allowed them to escape their boredom by temporarily relocating. Spatial relocation is not an extraordinary response to boredom (Mushabarash 2007), but necessitates the financial resources and sustainable escape strategies. In the case of May Thu and her husband, it worked to the extent that they could postpone their return to Thailand until the beginning of the tourist season. The important point to bear in mind is that the two would not engage in any occupational activities in Myanmar. There, they solely would enjoy time with their families and daughter. Their experience of boredom was not only linked to the absence of fruitful employment, but rather to their experience of place in Thailand. The option of spatial escape was not viable for many migrants: some had no homes to visit in Myanmar anymore, others had relocated with their extended families, and others could not afford the regular trips back and forth. Few people, however, attempted to develop sustainable strategies of place-making that might have ameliorated some of their experiences of boredom.

Watching home

It was another rainy day, late during the morning. I walked down the slippery, rugged slope of the shack settlement where I spent most of my time. It was busy in Ma Shwe's house: her mother, her immediate neighbor Naing Naing, a pregnant friend, and herself were sitting in

front of the TV. Ma Shwe and Daw Tin May ran a VCD rental business on the side and everybody knew that at their house one was able to watch the latest VCDs imported from Myanmar.

In Myanmar, Daw Tin May had supported herself and her daughter and son by working as a maid in a relatives' household. In exchange for her labor they were granted free food and accommodation. When her daughter, Ma Shwe, married in her late twenties, Daw Tin May moved in with her and was able to take a break from being the breadwinner of the family. The income of Daw Tin May's son-in-law who worked in a sawmill was rarely enough though to make ends meet and the family struggled. Her son-in-law had heard from others who had moved to Thailand for work and suggested to move there as well. He wanted to remit money back to them in Myanmar. Daw Tin May warned Ma Shwe that letting her husband migrate alone would destroy their marriage. Ma Shwe was pregnant at that time and Daw Tin May convinced her family to move all together. Daw Tin May eventually would be able to help looking after the baby girl who was on her way. At first, their plan seemed to work out. After only a year, however, Daw Tin May's son-in-law died during a motorcycle accident, leaving the women to make a living by themselves again. Ma Shwe mostly looked after Soe Kay Thi Lin and worked as a cleaner for a few hours a weel. Daw Tin May worked as a dishwasher in a restaurant. The VCD rental business was a welcome addition to their usually dire financial situation.

The VCDs were arranged in a laundry basket for potential customers to look through and throughout the day people would come and go, returning VCDs and taking others home. Most of the VCDs were Burmese films, kept in plastic sleeves with photocopies of the original covers and the titles all hand-written on the reproduced copies. There were a few copies of Korean soaps, always popular and in high demand, but most of the films were produced in Myanmar. Ma

Shwe and Daw Tin May charged 10 THB per VCD. Their clientele was demanding and they exchanged their stock frequently to be able to constantly offer new films. They watched most of the new VCDs at home and many neighbors joined them for that.

Despite the many films that I had been able to watch, I had failed to develop an appreciation for Burmese films. I did not share the sense of comic relief, most often experienced by the others in the audience when violent encounters were performed. Moreover, I found many of the plots too similar. Regularly, class conflicts were part of the plot, but they rarely ever unfolded as I wanted them too. My dislike about plots and story lines were not shared by my informants. While many said they disliked films from Myanmar, it was for entirely different reasons. They had no problems with the plots or repetitive story lines; they rather found the spectacle and stage set-up underwhelming. They compared Burmese films with Korean soaps and often they would point out to me how Korean soaps were of much higher quality because of the stage-settings. Many films were set in upper class people's houses and outside areas such as streets and tea shops. I, in turn, did not mind the setting. In particular the outdoor scenes portrayed a sense of realism that I appreciated. But to my fellow watchers, TV was about stimulating the senses by performing a spectacle and they did not seek realistic portrayals of ordinary lives on screen that they knew inside out.

Naing Naing left in-between to grab instant noodles from his house. He worked as a construction worker, but the rain had made it impossible for him to work during this week and I had found him at Ma Shwe's house every day watching TV. I was the only regular guest at their house who was offered coffee every day. Everybody was welcome to watch films, but it would have turned into an expensive activity to provide snacks and food for their many guests. The film was well underway and I could not get interested by the plot anymore. I chit-chatted with Ma

Shwes' pregnant friend. She was going to deliver soon and planned on doing so at home. She had worked until recently, but now that her employer forced her to take compulsory (unpaid) parental leave, she often came to watch films. Naing Naing returned with his noodles. When a fight ensued on screen everybody burst out laughing. The fight took place in a small teashop on the edge of Yangon; in an area that was characterized by dirt roads, street peddlers and working class commuters. Daw Tin May commented on the simplicity of the set-up. She mentioned that in Korean soaps they would have carefully prepared the tea shop, organized more background actors and would have made it look more like a staged scene. She didn't appreciate the realism that the scene portrayed.

Soe Thinza entered, wearing headphones that were connected to her phone. She kept chatting on the phone while she made herself comfortable on the plywood floor. The film was over, but Daw Tin May started the VCD again and everybody stayed to watch the film in its entire length again. The plot was not more enticing in its full length. The grandfather of a young woman was dying and he wanted her to get married before he passed away. To please her grandfather, she married a poor acquaintance whom she paid a salary to be her husband. To her dismay, her grandfather fully recovered and she was stuck in a faux marriage. In the end, the faux couple fell in love with each other despite the class and other differences.

The Thai lottery ticket vendor stopped on his motorbike outside the house; trying to stay dry by riding his bike and holding an umbrella over his head at the same time. Another neighbor came over to buy her lottery ticket. From her shack loud music was playing that was coming from a karaoke VCD that played on her TV. Daw Tin May played regularly, always betting small sums. She only played the two-digit lottery. This lottery was unofficial and illegal; it was not run by the Thai state, but an elaborate network of brokers. The official, state-sanctioned

lottery required betting on six digits and the chances of winning were too low in everybody's opinion. Playing the lottery was popular in Myanmar as well (Rozenberg 2005 and 2010).

The two digit lottery was played across the border in Myanmar as well and the winning numbers were identical. The first time I had asked about the bets and corresponding returns, Daw Tin May had explained to me that if betting on the correct numbers, an investment of 10 THB would result in a win of 1000 THB in the two-digit lottery in Thailand. Similarly, an investment of 10 kyat in Myanmar resulted in a win of 1000 kyat.[5] Currency exchange rates and the fluctuating values of currencies in different contexts had been entirely new to most migrants. The weak standing of the kyat was a confirmation in many people's minds that their country lacked behind in comparison to many other places: few productive employment opportunities, poor infrastructure and a weak currency that was entirely useless outside the borders of the country and afforded people little within.

Daw Tin May told the lottery man her two digits, paid 50 THB and received a signed slip with her numbers on it. Ma Shwe poked her head into the rain and called a girl over who was running around between the shacks. The girl lived two shacks down the hill and had been home this month since her parents did not have the money to pay her school fees this month. Ma Shwe handed her money and asked her to run to the store to buy two packages of tobacco. Ma Shwe was done cooking and she offered me some of her potato and egg curry. Soe Thinza was still on the phone while she stared at the screen. The pregnant friend had left to eat lunch at her house.

The TV had taken on a prominent role in the households of many migrants in providing relief from unwanted downtime. It was not an entirely new medium of entertainment, as TVs were common in Myanmar, often though in public places like restaurants and tea shops and less common in private households. More reliable electricity supply and greater affordability because

[5] Kyat is the currency used in Myanmar. 1 USD ≈ 1000 kyat

of increased incomes had made it possible for more people to privately own a TV. TVs to some extent continued to serve as a catalyst for bringing people together. Moreover, watching shows from Myanmar together provided a sense of connectedness with home. Films served as a reminder of home, but invited for critical engagement as well. Other reminders of home that similarly invited for comparisons were the lottery. It provided hope that the stay in Thailand might come to an end sooner than expected. At the same time, it reminded migrants that the home they longed for had many shortcomings. Within smaller housing settlements, many of the dynamics that migrants remembered fondly from Myanmar had been recreated: community and providing support for each other.

Preparing for home

After I finished eating, Soe Thinza invited me to join her to go to her house further down the slope. The incessant rain had even further eroded the dirt slope and what usually were furrows in the dirt had turned into small streams. Soe Thinza and her husband, Aung Moe Hein, lived in a small, concrete room of less than 100 square feet. The room was part of a building that offered housing to people who could not afford to pay rent. 16 small rooms were available, built back-to-back in two rows. There was a common bathing area outside and most of the cooking happened outdoors as well. Soe Thinza had moved here when she and her husband had temporarily separated. Even after they decided to move back in together, they continued living in the subsidized housing. The room was furnished very effectively, every bit of space had been put to use. There was a low table to the right side of the door holding plates, cutlery and spices. Pots and pans were hanging above the table on a number of nails. The bed was a narrow mattress tucked into one of the corners. A Buddhist shrine was set up in the corner above the mattress.

On another low table next to the mattress, laminated photos of a young boy were standing. I pointed to the photos and asked whether this was her son. Soe Thinza nodded, picked up the photos and told me how old on each of these photos he was. By now he was six years old and lived with her family in Myanmar. She picked up a photo of herself in the pink robe of a nun, her son and her younger brother in the robes of the monks. Recently, they all were ordained for 15 days in Myanmar. Her short hair that stubbornly pointed in all directions was still a visible reminder of her recent ordination. I asked what she did as a nun the whole day. She said she meditated under the guidance of an experienced monk. As a temporarily ordained nun she did not leave the monastery to collect alms and had no other obligations but to meditate. I asked whether she was bored during her time as a nun, a complaint that many laypeople had shared with me who ordained for short periods of time. She shook her head. While the routine in the monastery was highly repetitive and limited, it provided a welcome relief from her work-focused life in Thailand.

Soe Thinza herself was 25 years old and had lived in Thailand for eight years. She had never meant to move here. When she was 18, she had been in a fight with her parents and ran away from home. She went to Kawthaung the town on the Myanmar side of the Thai - Myanmar border, not far from where her parents lived. She ran into relatives who informed her parents about her whereabouts. Afraid that her parents would come after her, she crossed the border into Thailand with a broker and worked in Ranong, the border town on the Thai side. She met her current husband, got married within two months and had her son soon after. At some point they moved to where they lived now, working in many different jobs: on construction sites, plantations, at restaurants and at the hospital as interpreters. Her son lived with her parents in Dawei. Having him with them made it impossible for both of them to work and they wanted him

to go to school in Myanmar. Soe Thinza was Dawei and her husband Aung Moe Hein was Mon. While she learned to speak Mon, he did not learn to speak Dawei and when he talked to their son on the phone, Soe Thinza acted as an interpreter since her family only spoke Dawei at home.

She had disliked living on a plantation, the loneliness and spatial separation from others made her depressed. When her husband and her separated, she was offered to move into the temporary shelter as it was considered safer for a single woman. Her husband and her, while living together now, had been separated many times during the seven years of their marriage. It was not a secret that he had relationships with other women, during their separations and sometimes when they were back together. Soe Thinza was not shy to talk about it. While many women suffered silently from extramarital affairs their spouses had, Soe Thinza had freed herself from feelings of shame and pointed to her husband as the villain in the story. Extramarital affairs were not uncommon. In particular among male migrants who lived separated from their families, taking a lover or another wife had become a way to deal with some of the challenges of life away from home.

Soe Thinza had learned not to take the affairs of her husband to heart too much. She focused on the benefits of her life in Thailand. With the money she remitted to her family, her parents had been able to expand the rubber plantation that they owned in Myanmar. Next year they would be able to start cutting the new trees that they had added by buying more land. One of her five siblings had a malformed leg that dragged when he walked. He now owned a motorbike in Myanmar that made it much easier for him to remain mobile. Soe Thinza sighed and said that everybody's life was about earning money in Thailand. There might be few things to do, but people had stopped engaging in activities that were commonplace in Myanmar. Soe Thinza said that she for example felt bad for never having had me over for dinner or snacks. To be hospitable

and to share food and drinks with others was an integral part of the self-conception of migrants from Myanmar. Even people I saw on a daily basis and spent a lot of time with, for example neighbors, would often indulge in fantasies how our encounter in Myanmar would be different from our encounters in Thailand. They would have me over to their house and would feed me. I would be able to see who they really were. Practices of hospitality had been relegated to a different spatial context.

In a similar vein, according to Soe Thinza, migrants had lost interest in education, reading or other activities that they enjoyed in Myanmar. Life in Thailand was meaningful because of the opportunity to earn more money than in Myanmar and the many hours everybody worked resulted in constant fatigue and exhaustion. Nobody wanted to pick up a book after working long hours, instead they just switched on the TV. I looked up at the wall toward her TV. Her eyes followed my gaze and she said that everybody owned a TV in Thailand, a radical shift from living in Myanmar. There were few hours of electricity every day and moreover most people could not afford a TV.

Soe Thinza, in contrast to many others, was trying not only to become wrapped up in working. In the end, she wanted to return to live with her family in Myanmar, but she had no intention of returning to a life in poverty. “In Myanmar people want you to have diplomas. I have not finished high school and I don’t stand a chance of finding good employment. I am enrolled in the Thai class here. This will give me a diploma and will make it easier to find employment.” Soe Thinza already spoke excellent Thai. She was talented in learning languages. She had learned to speak Mon from her husband and Thai had followed not much later. If there was demand, she worked at the hospital as a Burmese - Thai interpreter. She did not need a course to learn more Thai; she only needed the certificate that proofed to others on paper that she

was qualified. Close to her hometown in Dawei, constructions for the deep sea port were on its way and investors and companies from Thailand, China and Singapore flooded the area. Bi-lingual workers were in high demand and during her last visit Soe Thinza had met with Thai companies to explore employment opportunities. The salaries they offered her were to low and made it unattractive to return for work at this point in time. Soe Thinza had not eaten yet and suggested that we should return to Ma Shwe's house so that she could continue watching TV while eating her lunch.

Attempting pastime

Soe Thinza was not alone in noticing that there was a decline in reading activities among migrants. While decrying this change among adults might arguably be rooted more in ideological reasons, it had long-lasting impact on generations growing up in Thailand. Removed from an environment where children were exposed to Burmese writing in an everyday context, it already was more difficult to create literacy and interest in reading. Combined with lowered interest among parents to pursue reading themselves, children had fewer opportunities to become curious about books, newspaper and magazines. Partly to address this concern, libraries had been opened in many parts of Thailand where migrants from Myanmar lived in concentrated settlements. A library had recently been opened in Khuan Charoen as well.

In addition to wanting to address issues of difficulty accessing reading materials, decreased fluency in reading and writing Burmese among (children of) migrants, an important reason to open the library had been wanting to provide a space where migrants would be able to gather and socialize with each other in a protected environment. I had found out about the library only after visiting a library elsewhere in a different district. That library was located in a town along the sea with a big port and many migrants had settled there who worked in the fishing

industry or on land sorting fish and shrimp. After my visit to the impressive library there I asked people in Khuan Charoen whether there was a library as well.

My initial inquiries did not lead anywhere, until Daw Tin May got tired about my repeated questioning and started making calls on my behalf to find out whether there was a library and where it might be. I finally learned that it was walking distance from the afternoon market where I went every week. When I looked for it together with Daw Tin May, we were not able to find it. We had asked directions and followed the directions a girl had given us. When we stopped again to ask another person, he laughed and pointed to the building we were standing next to. It was a one-room brick building on a large dirt property. On one of the far ends, two huge dredgers were stored in an open hall. On the other end, the library building was sitting next to four small, wooden shacks. There was no sign or other indication that this was a Burmese-language library.

We entered the small room. The walls of the library were lined with shelves, tables with chairs were set up in the middle of the room and one table stood separately for the librarian on duty that faced the door. The collection of books was not as large as I had expected. The books were not lined up right spine to spine, but were lying on their back covers, this way filling the shelves. We were welcomed by a man in his late fifties who looked well beyond his age. He eagerly pointed to a collection of English language books and addressed Daw Tin May. I was surprised at the comparably large collection of foreign language books and found out later that one of the library members worked at an hotel and collected books that hotel guests left behind there. U Myint Thein was tall, skinny, dark-skinned and his teeth were stained from decades of chewing betel nut. He was the main librarian and spent most of his time when he was not working as a painter, at the library.

He explained the fee structures and rules to us. There was an initial fee of 100 THB to become a member and a 50 THB monthly membership fee. I could borrow four books per week and it was possible to extend them if need be. The library was open every day except Sunday before lunch and after 4pm. The hours were not set in stone, depending on the availability of volunteers to staff the library.

The library had only been constructed four months prior to my first visit and was entirely run by volunteers. While there was a board of members who shared responsibilities in running the library, U Myint Thein had taken on the majority of responsibilities: raising funds, buying books, organizing events, ensuring that the construction of the building would be finished and making sure that one volunteer would be present during the opening hours. The library had about 90 members. Not all of them showed up regularly and their membership fees were an unreliable source of income for maintaining the library. The library struggled to increase the number of members despite various outreach efforts. Many non-profit organizations offered trainings ranging from public health information to human rights education to general education efforts. Often, the library would be the location where these events were housed. It was not only a good way of spreading the word that the library existed, but also a good way for the library to gather the interest of potential future donors.

Its initial construction had been financed with funding from a consortium of local (Thai) organizations. Volunteer labor had been crucial in keeping the construction costs as low as possible to allow for starting an actual book collection. The librarian wanted to add computers that members would be able to use for a small fee and moreover wanted to expand the book collection. He envisioned the library as a place for exchange, social interaction and with plenty of possibilities for low-threshold educational opportunities. It was still a long way to achieve

these goals. At times, one or two people would sit in the library and read books or magazines. Often, these were people living in the direct vicinity of the library already. The number of members hardly increased during the year that I was a member and went to the library regularly. One of the goals that U Myint Thein was successful in implementing was establishing the library as a space for celebrations of all sorts: Buddhist festivals, weddings and other festivities. He was sincere in his efforts to build a communal space that could be enjoyed by any migrant.

At the end of Buddhist lent that coincided with the end of the rainy season in October, laypeople had the opportunity to offer robes to monks during the Kathina ceremony. The celebrations might last up to one full month. U Myint Thein and other volunteers from the library invited a monk from Dawei and organized a donation ceremony for migrant workers. The festival was referred to as မီးထွန်းပွဲ *(mi twun pwe)*, the festival of the lights. By the time I arrived at the library around 8.30am, I had already missed the sermon. The donation ceremony was underway and people were gathering under a large tent outside the library, eating, drinking and socializing. Just outside the library, a table was set up with robes for donations, right next to it a huge pot that contained မုန့်ဟင်းခါး *(mohinga)*, the staple breakfast rice noodle soup, for all the guests. The doorway into the library was crowded, people were waiting for their turn to deliver their donation to the monk sitting inside the library. U Myint Thein was busy sorting robes. Loud music was playing and he had to turn it down whenever he announced the name and place of residence of the next family that could enter the building for their turn to donate through the microphone. While each donor received a number of robes that corresponded to the donation they had made, the material donations of the robes were largely symbolic. The same robes were donated over and over again. The circumstances of donating to a traveling monk who would return to Myanmar required flexibility in preparing the event and the monk would return with

donated money, rather than the robes. The symbolic donation of one robe was 300 THB and families received however many robes they had donated for outside, went inside to hand over their donation, received a blessing and made room for the next family.

The monk was sitting on a sofa with a bucket wrapped in plastic in front of him on the floor. The bucket was filled with a variety of products. They were specifically prepared for donations to monks and were widely available in stores. The bucket had been donated earlier at the end of the sermon. A few people were sitting on the floor, watching individuals and families deliver their donations, receive their blessings and leave again. Most of the onlookers inside the library were women. There were often more women than men at these events. Many wore one-sets, a departure from their ordinary, everyday clothing. A fan was turned toward the monk to keep him cool. The bookshelves, as with all festive events, were covered in white bed sheets. The only items that still were in their ordinary spot were the altar on top of one of the shelves. Even most of the photos on the walls had been taken down and had been placed outside the library. I admired U Myint Thein for his enthusiasm in organizing the event. He himself was a Muslim and was not emotionally invested in celebrating the holiday. He, however, was emotionally invested into realizing his vision of a vibrant community space and recognized the importance of recreating events that migrants already cherished and considered important.

Underneath the tent outside the building, a large row of wooden tables had been set up that could accommodate approximately 60 - 80 people. Bowls with limes, scallions and dried chili flakes were placed all over the table for people to add to their mohinga soups. A woman moved over so that I could sit next to friends of mine at the crowded table. My friends' mother recently had returned to Myanmar and they told me about her experiences there. Somebody poured me a drink and as soon as I had finished my first bowl of mohinga, another person

brought a second serving to the table. I greeted familiar faces and chatted with others who passed by. Many of the volunteers of the library wore a light blue shirt that had the name of the library written on the back and a small Thai, royal emblem on the front. At the far end of the table, a plastic banner read "Southern Migrant Center," the old name of the library before it finally received a Burmese name. The banner was framed by a Thai and yellow royal flag. A new addition was another large banner at the side of the library building. It announced the libraries' name in Burmese. From now on, first time visitors would find it easier to locate the library.

By the time I left, people continued to arrive. On my way back home, I drove past a parade of Thai Buddhists on the main road. They were carrying a tree made from money, accompanied by loud music from the EMS vehicles that drove at the front and end of the parade. Cars and motorbikes slowly passed them, each of them carefully examining the scene. It was not possible to imagine an appearance like this in the public eye for migrants. While their festivities were not secretive, they did not lay claim to much public space beyond the area that they already had appropriated for the purposes of the library.

The presence of the large number of migrants at the Kathina ceremony indicated the success of the event. It was successful in recreating a religious ceremony and meaningfully empowered migrants to maintain their cycles of merit-making. Furthermore, celebrating the event publicly provided a reminder of the passage of time and structures the year. The celebrations, however, mainly provided relief from situational boredom. They remained an isolated event that reminded migrants of home, but did not fundamentally alter their day-to-day experience in Thailand. Ironically, the institution of the library that might have the power to fundamentally alter migrants experiences of the everyday, remained mostly out of sight during

the celebrations. The book shelves were covered with bed sheets and the event did not seem to promote the library, but rather superimposed itself upon it.

Boredom in place

In this chapter, I argued that the experience of boredom as described by migrants is not a temporal condition, but rooted in their experience of place. The migrants, who came to word in this chapter, have found productive employment, achieved economic betterment and oftentimes support their families in Myanmar financially. The progress that they hoped for in their lives has been achieved. They nevertheless suffer from boredom and experiences of meaninglessness. The most effective way of addressing this boredom is through spatial escape. While this provides a temporary relief, in the long run it leads to further entrenchment of the existential boredom that migrants experience.

The chapters so far have highlighted the actions and activities of migrants in establishing place in Thailand. (Il-)legality has repeatedly emerged as an important theme and will be at the center of the next chapter that focuses on the overarching structural conditions under which migrants reside in Thailand.

CHAPTER 5: TEMPORARY PRESENCE: LEGALITY, BELONGING AND BUREAUCRACY

There is arguably no other state intervention that has shaped the lives of migrants as fundamentally as the National Verification (NV) process. It has provided a platform for migrant workers from Myanmar to become legal workers and residents in Thailand. The process started in 2009 and it was the first successful attempt of the Thai and Myanmar governments to register more than one million migrant workers in Thailand. Legal work and residency were desirable in the eyes of many migrants; it made them less vulnerable to detention and extortion by the Thai police for a lack of documentation. The National Verification process, although successful in registering an unprecedented number of migrants, has continued to attract critique (Hall 2012, Mahidol Migration Center 2012). This critique refers mainly to the imperfections inherent to most bureaucratic processes given the multiplicity of actors who are responsible for its implementation.

This chapter focuses on the process of completing the NV process and the emergence of new relationships between migrants, their legal status, their positionality as migrants, the temporality of their lives as migrants and their place in Thailand and Myanmar. I argue that the attitude among migrants towards the NV process is fraught with contradictions. The NV process enshrines migrant identity in a permanently temporary legal state. The short validity (four or six years) of the passports combined with the impossibility of extension suggest legally that migrants will remain migrants only for a short period. This is in line with the overwhelming desire of migrants to return home to Myanmar as soon as they have saved enough money to lead more economically secure lives there. The time period though appears unrealistically short to achieve this goal. Furthermore, the fact that participation in the NV process is not grounded in

legal reasoning, but merely in the financial capacity of migrants to be able to purchase legality places a heavy, financial burden on those who choose to participate. The NV process serves as a concerted introduction to capitalism by playing with desires and needs of migrants. The desire to participate in the NV process which also means becoming a bureaucratic subject of the Myanmar nation is enormous. While it is an opportunity for the Myanmar state to incorporate citizens on an unprecedented scale into its bureaucracy, migrants recognize that it is a process built on capitalistic principles and not emotional attachment to their home country. The process suggests that the permanent place of belonging for migrants is in Myanmar and highlights how precarious place-making in Thailand is.

Attempting legality

In June 2003, the Myanmar and Thai governments negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that was intended to provide formalized guidelines for employment and protection of Myanmar migrants in Thailand. "Being concerned about the negative social and economic impacts caused by illegal employment" (MoU 2003: 127), the Thai and Myanmar governments meant to bring an end to undocumented migration and work. The MoU placed the burden upon the Myanmar government to select, register and equip migrants with legal papers prior to their departure from Myanmar. Attempts to regulate the residence of Myanmar migrants in Thailand had been pursued well before 2003, but had not resulted in any successful registration of undocumented migrants.

In the late 90's there were incidental attempts by the Thai state to encourage registration of undocumented Myanmar migrants. These attempts were highly de-centralized and initiated by different government bodies. The cabinet passed a small number of resolutions that addressed short-term issues only and at times contradicted each other. From 1996 to 2000 the numbers of

registered migrants dropped from 372,000 to 99,650 despite the continuous in-migration of new migrants (Pungpond 2009). In 2001, Thaksin Shinawatra was elected Prime Minister and started to institutionalize the migrant registration process. Employers were encouraged to register migrants for a fee (3250 THB). This registration was valid for six month and was renewable for another six month (for additional 1200 THB). Employers who registered migrants usually deducted the fee from the salary of migrants (3250 THB is approximately equal to a monthly salary of a migrant worker).

The National Committee on Illegal Worker Administration was established and was charged with regulating migration. Although the establishment of the committee accelerated streamlining the registration process, it did not raise the number of actual registrations since it only allowed already registered migrants to extend their stays (Pungpond 2009).

The establishment of the National Committee on Illegal Worker Administration in 2001 pointed to the realization by the Thai government that migration was not going to stop (rather increase) and that it would require more organized efforts to monitor and finally control the process. Pungpond (2009) states that the main goal of any labor migration policies in Thailand were to prevent undocumented migration and more importantly to ensure that migrants would not seek permanent residency in Thailand.

The initial attempts to register migrants since 2001 had resulted in low registration numbers and few renewals of permits. According to Pungpong (2009) there were few incentives for employers to register migrants, they were rarely held accountable for the legal status of their employees and therefore the overall numbers remained low. Between 2003 (signing of the MoU) and 2009 (beginning of the implementation of the MoU) several campaigns were organized to advance the registration of undocumented migrants by the National Committee on Illegal Worker

Administration. In 2004, for the first time undocumented migrants were able to register without the threat of deportation. Amnesties were granted and 1.2 million migrants (from Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos) registered. Few migrants though renewed their work permits after they expired after one year. Although no scholarship is available that conclusively can explain why the NV process finally was implemented in 2009, there are a number of factors that help explain the final transition to a comprehensive implementation process.

Thailand had moved from agriculture to a labor-intensive economy and continued to struggle to move towards a knowledge-based economy (Hall 2011). Initially domestic migration in Thailand had filled the demand for cheap labor, but an increasing unwillingness among Thais to work in unskilled jobs for low salaries paired with a poor economic situation in Myanmar fueled the migration of Myanmar workers to Thailand. By the mid-2000s it was impossible to further ignore that Myanmar workers had become an integral part to the Thai economy and society. An unease among the Thai public with the growing number of foreign workers required the government to take steps to regulate migration and to ensure that the future economic needs of Thailand would be fulfilled.

The lethargy among employers and workers to engage in the registration process was addressed by enforcing police controls. Policing of undocumented migrants was intensified after 2004. Migrants who had lived in Thailand for more than 10, 15 or 20 years told me that papers were not necessary to move freely in public before 2005. Only a concerted effort by the Thai state to decide upon the necessity of punitively enforcing legal documentation among migrants created an atmosphere of insecurity that could be abetted by participating in the NV process.

Formalizing legality

Although the MoU emphasized the responsibility of the Myanmar government to ensure the ownership of legal papers by migrants before their departure, it remained true that thousands/millions of Myanmar migrants already lived in Thailand without any form of legal documentation. The situation of these migrants was finally addressed with the start of the national verification process. The term national verification referred to the verification of the Myanmar nationality of passport applicants in their home country, highlighting a minor aspect of a much larger, complex process. Any migrant wanting to obtain a work permit needed a valid passport and needed to obtain both documents according to the rules laid out in the NV process. The rules, however, were subject to continuous change, resulting in a nontransparent, difficult to understand process.

In June 2011 I had asked a professional working for a migrant advocacy group to explain the NV process to me. Our one-hour long conversation resulted in a complex flowchart that meant to capture different rules for people who had (often unknowingly) entered Thailand under different legal frameworks. There were at least three different procedures depending on the legal status of the migrant at the time of entry into Thailand.

The first procedure was for migrants who had entered Thailand with an international Myanmar passport. This travel document is the only available international travel document in most countries in the world. When a migrant from Myanmar entered Thailand with an international passport it was necessary to obtain a work permit and long-term visa after arrival. The costs for obtaining a regular passport in Yangon were roughly 20000 – 25000 THB. Migrants were most likely to earn between 2500 - 6000 THB in Thailand, in Myanmar they usually earned less than 2500 THB per month. The duration to obtain a passport in Yangon

varied, but was described as approximately one month when applied for with the help of a broker in Yangon and up to one year without the help of a broker. With the passport and an invitation letter from a company that one planned to work for, it was possible to obtain a three month visa at the Thai embassy in Yangon prior to arrival in Thailand. After arrival in Thailand, migrants needed to obtain a work permit at the employment office with a letter of support of their employer. Large companies might provide broker services to assist with this step. Once the work permit was obtained, the three month visa could be extended for up to one year. Both the visa and work permit could be renewed after the first year and would need to be renewed annually thereafter. The costs for the initial visa extension were 6500 THB, 1900 THB for the second year and after that 3100 THB for every following year. Migrants residing in Thailand on an international passport had to pay taxes to the Myanmar government at the embassy in Bangkok. It was possible to negotiate individually how often taxes needed to be paid (each month, each quarter or once a year). Migrants with an international passport, were not eligible for state-subsidized health insurance in Thailand, unless their employers applied on their behalf.

Very few migrants stayed in Thailand on an international passport, over the course of my fieldwork I might have met a dozen migrants who were in Thailand with this document. Few migrants knew their future employers in advance, but rather sought employment only after their arrival. Furthermore, few migrants had experience in obtaining a passport and were not familiar with the procedures, keeping the numbers of migrants with this document low. Citizens in Myanmar preferred to interact as little as possible with government bureaucracies and rarely had reason to do so. Statistics about the number of international Myanmar passport holders living in Thailand are not available. Since international passport-holding migrants do not go through the NV process, their numbers are not captured as part of the process.

The second potential legal framework that migrants could find themselves in were under the regulations of the NV process. Anybody who had entered Thailand without any form of documentation and therefore was considered illegal had the opportunity to participate in the NV process. This was the majority of migrants and it is the process that is discussed in detail in this chapter. As mentioned above, it was called national verification process, hinting to the necessity to confirm that people applying for this passport were actual citizens of the Myanmar state. The verification of one's citizenship was the last step in a long bureaucratic process.

The final legal framework under which migrants could enter Thailand was already holding a temporary passport that they had applied for in Myanmar. It ultimately was the goal that migrants would apply for their temporary passports prior to their departure in Myanmar. I did not meet any migrants who had entered Thailand with a temporary passport, but reported numbers have been growing steadily and institutional frameworks have finally become more elaborate in Myanmar.

There was a legal possibility for Myanmar migrants to become Thai citizens. It was rare to pursue this option though. The overwhelming majority of migrants wanted to return to Myanmar and obtaining Thai citizenship was in contradiction to this goal. Children born to migrants in Thailand with a valid birth certificate could apply for Thai citizenship after six years of residence.

The costs of legal presence

The NV process started with the announcement of amnesties by the Thai government. During these amnesty periods migrants could apply for legal documentation without risking deportation or fines. Amnesties were announced regularly, but always were short-lived and presented as the last opportunity to turn from an illegal into a legal migrant. The first amnesty

during my fieldwork expired in July 2011. Weeks prior to the expiration of the deadline panicked migrants circulated rumors that the police would enforce check-ups after the expiration date and would forcibly deport migrants to Myanmar who had not registered their participation in the NV process yet. Protests that the information provided to migrants had not been sufficiently widely circulated resulted in the opening of a new amnesty period which in turn expired, but was renewed. The expiration and renewal process continues until today.

Making amnesty periods short-lived was meant to encourage migrants to register faster and moreover was meant to create pressure on the Myanmar government to speed up their processes of issuing legal documentation prior to departure in Myanmar. Although registration during each amnesty period resulted in migrants obtaining work permits and temporary passport, the validity and costs of the documents varied depending on the time of registration. There was a stark difference between the official government stipulated prices and the de facto prices migrants paid.

As the first step of the national verification process migrants obtained a work permit that was valid for a year. The official costs for a work permit were between 900 and 1800 THB, depending on the province and district a migrant worked in. The actual price paid in the Khuan Charoen was 3800 THB, roughly one monthly salary. Within this year, migrants needed to start their application process for a temporary passport. A temporary passport bore all the characteristics of an international passport, except that it was only valid for travel from Myanmar to Thailand. Initially air travel from Myanmar to Thailand was not possible with the document, but that has been changed in 2011. Discussions of allowing the temporary passport as travel document for all ASEAN countries were underway by the time I left Thailand in July 2012. The

official costs for a temporary passport were 600 THB, the actual costs paid by my informants was 6500 THB (between one - two monthly salaries).

The application for the temporary passport passed through numerous Thai and Myanmar hands; the following government bodies were involved in the whole process: Ministry of Trade, Department of Employment, Department of Provincial Administration, Ministry of Public Health, the Myanmar embassy in Thailand and finally the Myanmar Ministry of Interior Affairs. Once all stamps were obtained from the respective departments, migrants needed to visit the Myanmar Ministry of Interior Affairs to verify their nationality. In 2009, the Myanmar Ministry of Interior Affairs opened three branch offices called NV centers in Tachilek, Myawaddy and Kawthaung on the Myanmar side along the Thai-Myanmar border. These centers were meant to ease travel for migrants; they would not need to travel to Naypyidaw, the main seat of the Ministry. Many migrants though feared this to be a conspiracy by the Myanmar government and were afraid that they would not be allowed to leave Myanmar again. The NV process only accelerated after opening a NV center on the Thai side of the border in Ranong in July 2010. When I arrived in January 2011, migrants still shared rumors of necessary travel to Myanmar and the dangers of that.

Given the huge number of undocumented migrants (more than two million people), the NV center in Ranong was overwhelmed with the workload and the distances many migrants needed to travel were unreasonable. By now, five additional NV centers (Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Samut Sakorn, Samut Prakarn and Surat Thani provinces) have opened to lower the costs of travel, and to ease and speed up the process. Temporary passports were valid for up to two years and could be extended for an additional two years. After the temporary passport had expired, migrants were meant to return for a minimum of three years to Myanmar before being able to re-

apply for a work permit and temporary passport. The first passports have expired in 2013, but it is still unknown how the Thai state dealt with these workers.

Participation in the NV process resulted in the ownership of work permits and temporary passports, ultimately empowering migrants to regain a measure of control in their relationship to the Thai state. It was misleading though to consider the ownership of legal papers as the ultimate tool to control the interference of the Thai state in one's life. The NV process was a process in its truest sense: it continuously evolved and changed. These changes were often valid retroactively and were relevant to those with valid permits and passports. My belief in having understood the NV process vanished into thin air only a few months after my conversation with the legal professional when I commented on a conversation that the same professional was part of. I remarked that a comment he made then, contradicted what he had told me earlier. He nodded and told me that the rules had changed and that whatever he had told me earlier, was no longer the procedure followed.

By the time this chapter enters public circulation, the procedural detailed information about the process will undoubtedly be outdated. The inevitable out datedness, though, illustrates an important point about the process. By changing regulations constantly, the Thai state maintains the power to intervene in migrant's lives under the pretense of enforcing legality. The empowerment of migrants to mediate discretionary state power only lasts until the next unpredictable procedural adjustment has been decided upon. It was difficult for migrants to know about the latest bureaucratic changes; information was communicated poorly.

Institutionalizing access to legality

Most of the information communicating the procedures to obtain a temporary passport or changes to the process were written in Thai and few migrants knew how to read the Thai script.

Brokers were the party bridging the gap between illiterate (in Thai) migrants and seemingly arbitrary governmental regulations. Brokers emerged as the institutionalized intermediary whose services were available to any migrant who could afford to pay them. In 2009, the Thai government appointed 10 official broker offices throughout Thailand. These officially approved brokers had smaller offices all over the country that were less regulated and there was little general oversight on who was issued permissions locally to represent one of the national broker branches.

With the help of a broker it was ensured that it would not take longer than 45 days to obtain a temporary passport, without a broker it was said to take to up to a year (it is important to mention that I did not know a single migrant who did not go through a broker). Temporary passport holders were exempted from paying taxes to the Myanmar government and were eligible to purchase Thai state-subsidized health insurance. Like holders of an international passport, they needed to report every 90 days to the closest immigration office to confirm their residency in Thailand, a service performed by brokers on their behalf. If temporary passport holders lost their jobs, they had three months to find new jobs before their work permits and passports would expire or they could rely on the help of a broker to maintain the validity of their papers irrespective of their employment situation.

In Khuan Charoen, two broker offices were in indirect competition with each other. They competed for the same clientele, undocumented migrants, but for most of my research period virtually every migrant was undocumented and the pool of customers still seemed inexhaustible. Both broker offices were run by Thai nationals who were related to each other, and most employees were Thai citizens as well. Both offices employed one bilingual (Thai and Burmese) migrant each and paid additional bilingual workers when needed. The offices were a mere 150m

from each other, along the main road in town. The offices did not look any different from other shops surrounding them; an open store front, ceiling fans, a few desks and chairs. One office was next to a small vegetable store, the living quarters of the family visible in the back of the house. The other office was wedged in-between the school for migrant children and a hairdresser. They displayed watches and jewelery for sale in the front section of the office, blending neatly into the short, plain row of houses. The lack of ostentation betrayed the importance of this institution. Without the broker offices, migrants were unlikely to successfully complete the NV process.

On my first visit to a broker's office, one of the employees showed me some of the paperwork that needed to be filled out for a passport application. She showed me paper after paper, explaining to which Thai or Myanmar ministry they needed to be forwarded for approval. Lacking any Thai skills to be able to read the forms, I was lost after only a few forms. Organizations such as the International Organization for Migration produce regular updates and flowcharts that illustrate the process.

Process Flowchart

Employers prepare:

- Demand letter
- Name list
- Migrant's personal profile form (*respective country's* official form)
- Migrant photos
- Authorization to employ migrant workers (quota)
- Employment contract
- Other documents of employers

Thai Provincial Employment Offices verify documents and forward to DOE

Thai DOE forwards applications to *Myanmar/Cambodian /Lao* Embassy in Thailand

Myanmar /Cambodia / Lao PDR:

- Verify documents (*Cambodia*: an officer will interview migrant workers at the working sites)
- Prepare to grant temporary passport / regular passport
- Notify DOE of name list of migrant workers who will be granted temporary Passport/regular passport

DOE

- Notify One Stop Service Centers (OSCCs) in Thailand of name list of migrant workers
- Notify Bangkok/Provincial Employment Offices of the name list for their further notification to employers to bring migrant workers to OSCCs to receive temporary passport/regular passport, apply for work permit and obtain visa. The centers will be located in 12 provinces: Samut Prakan, Samut Sakorn, Suratthani, Songkhla, Pathumthani, Rayong, Kanchanaburi, Khon Kaen, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Tak and Ranong.

At One Stop Service Center

1. DOE checks migrant workers and name list
2. Myanmar/Cambodian/Lao officers interview and grant temporary passport/regular passport
3. DOE collects migrant workers' bio data.
4. The employer submits work permit request form (WP.2) and pays work permit fee to DOE
5. Immigration Bureau stamps Non- Immigrant-LA visa to migrant worker's passport

Remark: Myanmar migrants who have to go to the OSCC in **Tak or Chiang Rai** must cross the border to *Myawaddy* and *Tachilek* to get their temporary passport.

Migrant workers undergo medical exam and bring medical certificate, a copy of temporary passport / regular passport (including personal info page and visa page) to get a work permit at Bangkok/ Provincial Employment Offices.

Source: International Organization for Migration, Migrant info note, issue #18, January 2013

Brokers were regarded with a mix of gratefulness and contempt by most migrants. The Thai government had set official prices that they would charge to any migrant filling out the paper work independently. The prices were modest and the whole process would not cost more than 3000 - 4000 THB; by using brokers the price more than doubled. Assuming literacy in written Thai, it was nevertheless difficult to imagine that one would be able to ever obtain a passport to these conditions. The professional advocacy worker mentioned above, hinted that he believed individually filled out applications would be placed at the bottom of the stack and it would not be possible to obtain the necessary stamps within the time limits set for each step of the paper trail. Brokers, charging hefty fees, had close ties with local bureaucrats and one was guaranteed to pass all the obstacles along the way.

Learning bureaucracy

Although legal papers were an often recurring topic of conversation among migrants, it did not occupy the importance that I had assigned it shortly after my arrival. Ma Shwe was visibly proud to be able to show me the work permit she had received. The work permit was valid for one year and was about to expire in a few months. I asked her what would happen when it expired. She shrugged her shoulders and was not interested in further discussing the issue. I was curious to know what would happen and learned that migrants needed to apply for a temporary passport as long as their work permit was in its first year of validity, as mentioned above. If they failed to apply, they would not be able to extend the work permit or to obtain a temporary passport. Worried that Ma Shwe would miss the deadline to apply I printed information by the IOM for her and took it along on my next visit. My pride to have found what I considered an important piece of information was hurt when I saw her complete disinterest when I handed her the pieces of paper. She took a short look at it and immediately put it down on

the floor, not paying further attention to it. I told her what it was and that she should read it carefully. She just shrugged her shoulders. Daw Tin May was slightly more interested in the document, picked it up and I started my speech all over. What I had taken as her interest in the information printed on the sheet, appeared to be an interest in the document as artifact. Reading materials in Burmese were not widely available and a word document printed from a computer in Burmese script was a novelty to most. She asked questions where I had found the information, who had put it on the internet, how it looked like on my computer and finally where I had printed it. She was curious to learn more about how to use Burmese fonts on a computer, but displayed no interest in learning more about the NV process.

I was puzzled over the apparent disinterest for a long time. I knew that Ma Shwe was indebted to a broker for the work permits that soon were to expire. I knew that it would be very difficult for them to pay upfront for their temporary passports, but at the same time I was wondering why they seemed willing to take the risk of voiding their work permits and losing the investment they had not fully paid for yet. Brokers provided loans to migrants who were not able to pay their work permits and temporary passports upfront which were the majority of migrants. Taking into account the heavy financial burden the NV process placed upon migrants, I did not think that it was sufficient to explain the hesitation of migrants to obtain legal papers.

The importance I placed on having valid legal papers was rooted in my upbringing in a heavily bureaucratic state. I had learned that in the eyes of the state my personhood was constituted by the paper trail that traced my progression through the bureaucratic system: from birth certificate to ID to high school and university diplomas, a passport and a marriage certificate. Knowing that these papers turned me into a legitimate citizen in the eyes of the state, I had stored them in safe places and placed great value on them. My passport, furthermore,

allowed me to move seamlessly from country to country and mostly enabled me to take the privileges and social status of holding a passport of a large, economically powerful European country with me.

The obsession of the German state to document and track their citizens had not been mirrored yet by the Myanmar state. Birth certificates or ID cards were held only by few people and their relevance appeared largely unclear to most migrants. Myanmar babies born in Thai hospitals needed birth certificates to later be registered in Myanmar, but many parents did not grant the piece of paper any importance. The authority that was imbued in marking one's citizen by granting them birth certificates or passports had not been pursued in a structural attempt by the Myanmar state yet. A passport, a symbol of national belonging for many, had been irrelevant for migrants in maintaining symbolic ties with their homeland.

The Myanmar nation-state was founded in 1948, but unlike other countries, the government had made limited use of documentation and certification to validate their existence. Symbols of the nation such as passports, flags and national songs had been created by the Myanmar state, but had not gained widespread validity in the eyes of most citizens. Many citizens had accepted competing nation-building measures and identified much more with their respective local identities or nationality affiliation. The efforts of the central government to impose their authority had largely been limited to coercive measures (Callahan 2003, Nakanishi 2013). The widespread issuing of passports to citizens can be seen as a radical departure from earlier politics of coercion. Nationhood was not imposed upon unwilling peoples anymore, but symbolic participation in the nation was sought by citizens themselves. By participating in the NV process, migrants marked their perpetual legal belonging to the Myanmar state, irrespective of their intention to do so.

Torpey (2000) argued that the invention of the passport foremost served to monopolize the role of states in legitimizing the movement of people across borders. In a historical study based in continental Europe he illustrated how states usurped the power from other private or religious institutions to control border-crossings. He suggested the allegory of states embracing their citizens by issuing them papers that mark them as belonging to a nation-state. For decades, the Myanmar state had failed to develop a monopoly in legitimizing border crossings. Borders remained porous and often under the control of non-state actors (Callahan 2007, Sadan 2013). Torpey pointed to the importance of imposing taxes on citizens as a central aspect of institutionalizing nationhood and embracing citizens. While taxation played a minor role in the NV process (registered migrants are exempted from taxes), the Myanmar state certainly wishes to embrace its citizens. I suggest, though, that it is not for monopolizing the role of states in legitimizing the movement of people across the borders, but rather to monopolize access to the profits that the border-crossing business has created for decades. In the NV process, migrants as border-crossing peoples were marked as a special category of citizens, migrants who hold a temporary passport. It was astonishing to think that the most concerted effort of the Myanmar state to impose its power on its citizens took place outside its national borders in Thailand.

The NV process culminated in a two-day trip to the branch office of the Ministry of Interior Affairs in Ranong which was on the Thai side of the most southern border crossing between Thailand and Myanmar. Thanks to Aung Moe Hein, Soe Thinza's husband, who worked part-time at one of the broker offices, I was able to go along on a trip. Aung Moe Hein and I were the same age and I had first met him at the hospital where he worked as an interpreter. In addition to the work at the broker's office and the hospital, he worked on a rubber plantation and on construction sites when there was no plantation work. Although the work as interpreter

provided him with white collar credentials, he continued to identify and socialize with other working class migrants. I had believed him to be a fervent fan of Che Guevara. He had shirts, a bag, a belt and even a sticker of Che Guevara on his motorbike. One day I asked him why he liked him and he shrugged his shoulders, said he did not know who he was and that he merely liked the image. The next day, I had brought him a print-out in Burmese about the life of Che Guevara and ever since he had tried to help me wherever he could.

The trip was a rare occasion for migrants to leave their homes for long-distance travel. Travel was not only avoided because of the potential hassle of police check-ups, but also because of its high costs. Trips to Ranong were organized whenever a broker office had collected enough applications; about 200 migrants were on the same trip as I was, organized by one office. At the end of the trip, stood for the migrants the valuable possession of a passport, but until that point was reached, the trip reminded me at times of a vacation package tour.

Local fashions

The mood was relaxed and cheerful when Ma Aye, her son and I arrived at the broker's office. Ma Aye and I lived opposite from each other and it had happened to be her turn to travel to Ranong to obtain her passport at the same time that I was able to come along. On my first visit to the broker's office I had been welcomed with suspicion and hesitation; the brokers wondered why I had picked their office to learn about the NV process. By the time I went along on the trip, I had spent 17 months in Khuan Charoen and people were used to my presence. When Aung Moe Hein inquired on my behalf whether I could come along, it was no problem at all. The broker asked me to pay 200 THB, 100 THB for gas and 100 THB as a donation to the monastery where we would stay overnight.

Ma Aye had waited for this trip a long time. Her husband had gotten a passport a few months ago and they did not have enough money to buy her a passport as well. She recently had decided that she wanted to return to Myanmar to stay with her mother until her two-year old son would be weaned. Then she planned to return to Thailand without her son to be able to work as well. The border crossing without a passport was not a problem. Broker services were available to help with the illegal crossing. The costs for crossing the border illegally were 4000 THB though and adding the costs of the return trip she felt that getting a passport was a better investment.

Ma Aye went inside the broker's office to register her arrival and I followed her to pay the 200 THB. There were many familiar faces and I greeted acquaintances and heard surprised voices asking what the foreigner was doing here. Employees of the brokers office were selling fried eggs and rice and many migrants were rushing across the street to buy snacks and drinks at the convenience store on the other side of the road. A former neighbor with whom I had never exchanged more than an occasional *Have you eaten already,* the bare minimum of social interaction, acknowledged my presence by asking whether I could borrow him money. Shortly after my arrival he had been detained by the police because he did not have any legal papers. He was released after paying a 6000 THB bribe.

I was struck that I was one of the few people wearing a longyi, the garment that was common for Myanmar women and men to wear. A woman in her 60s was the only other person around wearing a longyi. Everybody else was wearing brand new pants, skirts and shirts. Ma Aye was dressed in skinny jeans and a pink blouse and her two-year old son was wearing long pants and a black polo shirt; a departure from her everyday longyis and simple blouses; her son usually only ever wore a shirt. I wore longyis for several reasons. They made it easy to connect

with migrants I did not know. Often migrants would comment on them in public which provided a great opening for conversations. Many migrants greatly appreciated when they saw me wearing longyis, they experienced it as a valorization of their culture-at-large. It created an interesting paradox now. Except for the Thai employees of the broker's office, I was the only person there not from Myanmar. My clothes though resembled most closely what many migrants upheld as the ideal representation of a Myanmar woman, yet none of them were resembling this ideal themselves. My clothes were at the same time the most and yet in this setting the least recognizable from Myanmar. The fashionable skinny jeans and shirts worn around me spoke to the ability of migrants to participate in the local consumer economy and marked a clear separation from the work place where migrants wore their oldest worn-out clothes or uniforms. There were limited opportunities for travel or just hanging out with friends in public places. This trip was a rare opportunity to be among other migrants who were not friends, colleagues or family and nearly everybody had chosen to mark this occasion through their choice of clothes.

Most clothes had been purchased locally at the markets and stores. Despite participation in the local economy, migrants remained recognizable as such. The Thai employees of the broker's office looked distinctly different. There were five of them, four men and one woman. The visible difference partly stemmed from all four men being very effeminate; one of them was transsexual. The clothing style of the person who ran the broker's office spoke to his regular trips to Bangkok. He was wearing bright orange suede shoes, a tightly fitting Pink Floyd t-shirt, white linen shorts and big pink shades. The other employees were dressed in similarly flashy clothes; one of the employees carried a purple bag that matched his purple shirt and cream-colored pants. Clothes that were not available locally, but only in the more expensive stores in town an hour car-ride away. Purchasing clothes at the local market provided for migrants an opportunity to

enjoy a sense of empowerment and marked them as different from people in Myanmar, but in contrast to Thais demonstrated the limits of their financial means by not to being able to travel to the more up-market shops in the bigger town 100km away.

Capitalism of the present

Every migrant had received a pin with a number and letter on it upon arrival and had been asked to pin it to their shirts. Four tour buses and a smaller bus similar to a songtaew were parked along the main road. The migrants were asked to get on the buses, organized according to numbers and letters on their pins. I was the last person to step on a bus, filling one of the last spots. I was seated next to a girl from Myanmar who worked full-time for the broker's office. She was 19 years old and had been in Thailand for three years. Despite her comparatively short stay, she was fluent in Thai and had worked at the broker's office for a year. She liked the job, but was unhappy with her salary: 5000 THB. I commented that her salary indeed seemed low, given how profitable the business as broker was. She nodded and said that the broker did make a lot of money.

Another woman on the bus who worked for the broker was from my neighborhood. Lacking a common language, we had only ever exchanged friendly nods outside our houses. Now on the bus, she offered me a portion of rice and fried egg and I took it gladly, munching away during the three hour bus ride. It helped me to stay calm while listening to the deafening Thai youth pop that blared from the speakers on the bus.

The buses stopped three times on their way to Ranong. The first stop was a pee break and the second stop a police road block. All migrants needed to leave the buses and the police compared the numbers on their pins to the paper work. My broker neighbor motioned that I could stay on the bus. I asked the girl sitting next to me and she confirmed that only migrants

needed to get off the bus. Even undocumented migrants on their way to obtain legal papers remained suspect in the eyes of the state. In contrast to my presence that might evoke curiosity, but no action of the law enforcers otherwise.

The last stop was just outside Ranong at the Tesco, a British supermarket chain. When getting off the bus I searched for Ma Aye, to spend the two hours we had here together. I wondered what we were to do for two hours at a supermarket, but upon entering the climate-controlled building, I realized that it was a shopping mall. As mentioned above, there were no shopping malls in Khuan Charoen and I experienced a sense of estrangement when we entered. I seemed out of place in my clothes. The mall was prepared to receive visitors from Myanmar, nearly all signs were bilingual Thai - Burmese. Although in many towns along the Thai - Myanmar border bilingual signs were a common occurrence, they were very rare in Khuan Charoen. It was the first time that I encountered such an overwhelming recognition of the presence of Myanmar migrants in Thailand. Migrants and short-term visitors were initiated to spheres of Thai consumerism and their contribution was welcome, as expressed in all the signs that pointed migrants to gold jewelry, exercise clothes, delicacies and reminders that only people above 18 were allowed to purchase alcohol.

Ma Aye and I strolled through the aisles. I pointed out Burmese signs to her that I did not understand. The word bakery was phonetically rendered in Burmese script and even after reading it out loud to her, I insisted on not knowing what its meaning was. She laughed and asked me whether it was not English, pointing to the English word bakery written right next to it. Many of the goods had until recently not been available in Myanmar and some of the words invented here were merely renderings of English words in the Burmese script. After two hours of strolling the aisles we left the store with a plastic battery-run guitar for Ma Aye's son. Outside the

supermarket, the taxi prices to various destinations were written in Burmese and the two Thai taxi drivers waiting for customers laughed out loud when I took a photo of the sign.

Arriving to borderlands

We continued the journey to the temporary passport center. Although the next day was going to be the day where migrants would need to be at the center for the whole day, todays visit was necessary for filling in additional paper work. The big, blue sign at the entry read "Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Ministry of Home Affairs, Temporary Passport Center Ranong" in Burmese, Thai and English. It was behind gray, concrete walls that were aged and chipped in many places. Passing through the gate by bus, it reminded me of an old abandoned factory under the open sky. There were buildings to the right and left of the walled-in area, but it mostly was an open, concrete area partly covered by roofs. There were roughly twenty buses parked all over. Bricks, construction materials and dirt lay around, indicating decay and renewal at the same time. The Passport Center seemingly had been a port in the past. The sea formed a natural border on the far side of the concrete area; a boat was tied to the jetty.

The migrants who had been on the same bus as I, gathered underneath a roof, seeking shelter from the sun. There were hundreds of migrants all over, many of them sitting and lying underneath the tin roofs. The boss of the broker's office walked up to me and addressed me for the first time. He spoke English and informed me that I had plenty of time to look around, we would be here for three hours. He told me that the migrants needed to fill in the application forms for their passports and would already clear Thai customs. Tomorrow they would enter Myanmar territory, a small area in one of the corners behind make-shift walls that had been delineated Myanmar territory. He told me that he and I would not be able to enter Myanmar territory. Migrants entered, received their passports and would symbolically re-enter Thailand,

this time as legal aliens. The amount of paperwork made it necessary that migrants came for two consecutive days.

Everybody was lined up, waiting to receive their passport application forms. I took a stroll with Ma Aye across the area. There was an open store-front to the far right. Three shops sold food and drinks and other stalls offered anything a migrants' heart could long for: slippers imported from Myanmar, longyis, VCDs, newspapers, medicine and snacks. Ma Aye inquired about the prices of velvet slippers, they were 150 THB. She wrinkled her nose and mumbled that the prices were ridiculous. Migrants were not allowed to leave the walled-in area of the temporary passport center and we purchased drinks with vouchers valid for all the food and drink stalls.

I was the only Caucasian and my presence was noted easily. A middle-aged man in a suit offered me a seat on a bench. He spoke Thai and asked the person who sat next to him to act as interpreter. He asked whether I needed help and I pointed to the group I was here with and told him that I was fine. We chatted for a while and my question why he did not speak any Burmese when he worked the whole day with migrants was met with laughter. The only Thai people I had met who spoke some Burmese were sellers at the local market. Wanting to advertise their products to people they had recognized the advantage they gained from being able to inform customers about the prices of vegetables and fruit in their native language.

There was a huge sign placed next to the bench: "NIKGLOBAL: proof of nationality workers and manpower supply." NIKGLOBAL was one of the officially appointed broker companies whose local branch had allowed me to accompany them on this trip. Ma Aye pulled my sleeve and introduced me to one of her friends, Ma Khine. Ma Khine wanted me to take photos of her and her son (she did not have a camera, but knew that I carried one). Her son lived

with her former husband from her first marriage in Ranong and she rarely got to see him. He was on his way here to meet his mother. A car pulled up and her son, in a Thai school uniform, got out of the car with is father. She went to embrace him, but he remained stiff and was uncomfortable. Ma Khine spoke in rapid Thai and I turned to Ma Aye asking whether the son understood Burmese. Ma Khine turned to me and said that of course the son understood Burmese, he was just not used to speaking it anymore. I took photos of them in front of a stupa that stood in the middle of the concrete field. The arrival of Ma Khine's son made me feel like all migrants were locked up in a huge camp. Guards at the only entry and exit point monitored who entered and left, raising and lowering a barrier.

Ma Aye shared that Ma Khine was thinking about asking her son to live with her again. I responded in hesitation saying that I found it difficult to imagine that he would be able to live with her. Ma Khine lived on a rubber plantation with two other families, all of them Dawei speakers. I continued saying that he did not seem to feel to comfortable around migrants. Ma Aye nodded vehemently and responded that the son had become Thai and that he was too old to live with Myanmar people.

We finally left the passport center and drove to the monastery where we were to spend the night. We were offered soup, rice and chicken curry for dinner. Mats had been distributed over the floor of a large hall in the monastery and we put our bags down on the floor. There were only three showers and two sinks for about 100 women and most of the evening passed waiting for an opportunity to take a shower. All women returned from their showers wearing longyis as nighttime clothing.

Ma Aye and I tried to catch some sleep among the chatter and conversations of people that lasted most of the night. I dozed off and woke to the cries of Ma Aye's son. She had gone to

the bathroom, he woke up and was scared to find her gone. He wanted to be comforted by me, the only other person in the hall he knew. Laughter spread through the hall when his cries and my attempts to console him became more frantic. Word had spread that I was here to learn about migrant life and everybody had made me feel welcome. I had slept a few hours only and had woken up several times to find myself being stared at by migrants who were intrigued by my presence.

Obtaining belonging

We left at 4am in the morning. Most migrants had changed back into pants and everybody (with the exception of me) was wearing a bright orange shirt that they had gotten from the broker the day before. The name of the broker's company (NIK) was printed in lieu of a breast pocket. The shirts marked the migrants not only as a group of people who had approached the same broker for assistance, but also marked their transition from illegality to legality. I had seen other people wear the same shirts in Khuan Charoen, but had not been aware that they had received the shirts during the trip to Ranong or from friends who had completed the trip already. Ma Aye's husband had completed the National Verification process a few months ago and had given his shirt to her. I had seen her wear the shirt many times and only now understood that it blurred the boundaries between legal and illegal migrants in an interesting way.

The buses arrived at the passport center at the break of dawn. The Andaman Sea, here the natural border between Myanmar and Thailand lied ahead calmly. A sign warned in Burmese and Thai that one would be fined for entering the water. The boats tied to the jetty made the passport center an unusual bureaucratic space. The border criss-crossed through the sea and nobody was able to tell me whether the trees on the other side of the water were in Myanmar. The close presence of Myanmar was mirrored in the breakfast that awaited us. A vendor sat on a

box with his son, leaning against a pillar. They had two large baskets next to them, one filled with samosas, deep-fried dough pockets filled with potatoes, the other basket filled with အီကြာကွေး *(I kyar kwe)*, deep fried dough sticks. I kyar kwe was sold in Khuan Charoen as well, but it looked different from the way it was sold in Myanmar. The Thai version was short and shaped like a small x, while the Myanmar version were two long sticks fried together. Ma Aye remarked content that this was the real Myanmar I kyar kwe, unlike the Thai I kyar kwe that only provided little satisfaction for one's money. We bought three-in-one coffee mix and sat down to dip the I kyar kwe into our instant coffees. The prices for instant coffee had risen by 100 % between the visit of another friend who had been in Ranong four months ago until now, from 5 THB to 10 THB per cup.

After finishing our paper cups of instant coffees Ma Aye joined the line of other migrants. All NIKGLOBAL migrants were lining up on the far side of the center in their bright orange shirts. They were lining up in front of a lone copy machine in the open space and two old wooden tables. At first, most people were standing, but slowly most sat down on the floor on mats, blankets or their bags. The wait took long and the exhaustion I experienced made me believe it was noon. Checking the time I realized it was 7.45am only. Most of the day was made up of waiting for papers, stamps and then finally documents. I looked over the shoulder of Ma Aye at the piece of paper that she held. It was written in Thai and I turned to May Thu who finally would get her papers as well. She spoke excellent Thai and I asked her whether she knew what it said and she shrugged her shoulders. A payment of 1100 THB was verified on one of the papers which I was able to read since it was in English. I asked what the payment was for. Again, Ma Aye and May Thu shrugged their shoulders. Few migrants asked about the meaning of the papers they filled in. They NV process robbed migrants of their capacity to seek information and

infantilized them more from step to step. At the end of the paper process, the passport would restore and empower migrants to act more independently, but on the way there migrants signed papers whose significance they did not know and paid fees for nontransparent processes. Here, bureaucracy- and institution-building was void of activity of the people it incorporates. Migrants were led into becoming bureaucratic subjects without actively taking part in the process.

The queue slowly started to move and passed by a Thai worker who stamped their paperwork and gave orders to line up in the next line. This time, the line moved much faster and all migrants left their finger prints on pieces of paper sitting on the wooden table. The line though, did not seem to shorten; one migrant was replaced with the next migrant. The center was packed by now and several thousand people were waiting patiently for their passports. The second line led people to a table where they printed their finger prints on pieces of paper. The wall behind the table was covered in smear prints from people who had cleaned their fingers on the wall. There were sinks, but I wondered how long they had been there. Next to the sinks was a sign announcing in Burmese that cleaning ones fingers on the wall was fined with 1000 THB.

I confirmed later that the collected finger prints were matched with the personal information of migrants and shared by the Thai and Myanmar state. Biometric information about citizens had only recently become standardized as part of the larger package of information collected about citizens by states. While information about bodies such as eye color or special bodily marks have long been documented, the collection of bodily specimens has not been introduced without facing resistance. While Germany, the country whose passport I hold, does not require biometric information about people wanting to enter Germany, it has forced all its citizens wanting to travel internationally to re-apply for passports that include biometric

information. The pressure of other countries that announced to refuse entry of people who hold passports without biometric information coerced them into adapting different standards.

The recent addition of biometric information to passports illustrate the power of the nation-state system. States wanting to be treated as equals need to adapt to the standards that are established by a powerful few. Travel restrictions imposed in the 60s and 70s in Myanmar had been easy to implement by merely refusing citizens to issue passports. The lack of passports made it impossible for citizens to travel legally internationally. The NV project did not only allow the Myanmar state to take stock of citizens living in exile, benefiting from their travels, but also brought them closer to other states on an international playing field.

The group of orange-shirted migrants moved over to the other end of the hall and took a seat outside the Myanmar Ministry of Interior Affairs. There were benches to the right and left of the door that provided entry into *Myanmar*. The space on the other side of the wall was officially considered Myanmar territory and by walking through the door migrants left Thailand to later re-enter Thailand through the same door as legal residents. Anybody not participating in the NV process; vendors, brokers or visitors were not allowed to step through the door. A few seconds after I sat down on the benches a Myanmar official approached me in gray suit pants and a formal shirt. He asked politely in English how he could help me and I responded that I was accompanying friends and did not need any help. In his suit pants and shirt he stood out from the masses in a similar way as I did.

The group of migrants I had arrived with left Thai territory and moved through the door onto symbolic Myanmar territory. The next group of migrants immediately encroached on the area and I was politely asked to vacate my seat for them. I strolled across the center, passing the True Move and DTAC tents, two Thai mobile phone companies that used the opportunity to

inundate the captive audience with information about their products. I sat down on a bench next to a group of guys in their early twenties. They were all immaculately dressed in branded clothes. While many migrants had at least one set of clothes that was different from the casual shirts, shorts or longyis they wore at home, very few people cared for branded clothing. One of the guys turned towards me and asked in English where I was from. I told them and one of them said that they were from Nepal, only to be interrupted by his friend who informed me that their families had moved from Nepal to Myanmar, so they were from Myanmar and here to get their passports. Their interest in me wore off quickly after they found out that I was not a journalist. The seats outside the Myanmar Ministry of Interior Affairs were empty again and I walked back.

The costs of legality

It was quiet and not as overcrowded as in other parts of the hall. Many migrants who had submitted all their paperwork and now waited for their passports to be issued squatted on the floors. There were few seats available and most people usually were more comfortable sitting on the ground. They sat on blankets, bags, shirts or newspapers. A guy I did not know sat down next to me, followed by his wife and addressed me by my name. In surprise I looked at him and he introduced himself as a friend of Aung Moe Hein. Aung Moe Hein was the intermediary between me and the broker and he had made it possible to go on this trip. They were from the same town in Myanmar. In Thailand, he lived close to the Malaysian border in Had Yai where many people from Mon state lived. He was one year older than me, had lived in Thailand for 16 years and told me that his three-year old son lived in Myanmar with his parents. The trip to Ranong had taken 12 hours. He and his wife paid 9000 THB each for the trip to get their passports. When I asked him whether he planned to return to Myanmar, he just laughed and said that of course he would return. 16 years was half his life-time, but there was no doubt in his mind that he would return.

Most times when I asked people about their intention to return they laughed at me as if my question was entirely absurd.

Aung Moe Hein arrived and sat down as well. The three start speaking in Mon with each other. They turned to me and asked about my passport. I took my passport out and showed it to them. Aung Moe Hein asked how much I paid for it and when they learned that I had paid a fraction of what they paid they were astounded. He asked how long it was valid for and when I responded that it was valid for 10 years he shook his head in disbelief. I nodded and said that their passports were very expensive. Aung Moe Hein then wanted to know which countries I could visit with my passport. I responded that I could travel the whole world. His face took an expression of anger and disbelief on while he realized that his passport, highly valued and important to him, was barely more than a scam. A document that remained valid only for four years and provided free travel between Myanmar and Thailand only. His sense of betrayal that he experienced in this moment was in stark contrast with the Myanmar official who had approached me earlier. I had not expected to be received so politely. After all, my presence was unusual and most likely difficult to understand to people. The repeated questions by officials to help me indicated a sense of pride in the entire NV process.

Aung Moe Hein showed his passport to me. It said Temporary Passport on the outside in English and Burmese, but there was no Burmese writing anywhere on the inside of the passport. While everybody was able to read Latin letters, few migrants possessed literacy in English, therefore being excluded from understanding the words printed in their passports. Behind Aung Moe Hein's Burmese name was an additional name printed. I looked up at him pointing to the name behind the name that I knew him by and asked what it was. He said it was his Thai name that he had adapted a few years ago. I asked whether the Burmese name in the passport was the

name his parents had chosen for him and he nodded. Many people changed their names and in particular in the context of the NV process I had met people who had established new identities. The names in their passports did not correspond to the names they used or they had been registered with earlier. There was a lack of understanding that the bureaucratic capture of their new identities had eradicated their bureaucratic pasts in Myanmar and created new persons in the eyes of the state.

Aung Moe Hein was at the center only to assist other migrants, he had obtained his passport a few weeks ago. He still had the sticker from his visit to the passport center on his passport. Every migrant was assigned a number during the NV process. It was attached on stickers to their passports and today all migrants applying for their passports carried the number around their necks. The number marked the difference between the people getting passports and those working here. It enhanced my sense of being imprisoned for the day.

I asked Aung Moe Hein whether he had a work permit as well and he shook his head. He had applied for it only recently and so far only had a passport. The irony that a part-time employee of a brokers office did not have a work permit appeared only striking to me.

Ma Aye and her son walked by and we went for lunch. She had finished all the paperwork and only needed to wait for others to be finished. People with young children got to go first and she managed to find her way very fast through the paper mill, but would need to wait the rest of the day. It was 12 o'clock. The food stalls offered mediocre, overpriced food and snacks. We looked for a spot to sit and crossed the square to sit down on large rocks. She showed me the Myanmar ID card that she already had received. Her passport would be ready later. The brokers though, immediately collected the passports again to take the next bureaucratic steps to apply for visas to stay in Thailand. Ma Aye would not get to see her passport for a while. She

had not paid the broker yet and the passport would only be given to her once the financial commitments to the brokers had been fulfilled.

She mentioned that we might have to wait until late in the day. The broker accepted applications from all people, including Indians she told. She had used the word kala to describe Indians. It was a derogatory term used for usually anybody from South Asia, but was applied to for example Rohingya people as well. I asked her what she meant and she responded that many brokers did not accept applications from Nepalis. Their applications always caused trouble and were not processed as speedily as other applications.

It appeared later that she was right. Our bus left without the 15 people of Nepali descent. They had to stay longer and returned with a separate bus. The broker informed me that their paper work had not been complete, but Aung Moe Hein assured me that it was because they were dark-skinned. They were not equal to other people from Myanmar and were hassled every time during the trips to Ranong. I asked how the problem was usually solved and he responded that it was merely a matter of paying more money. He shared with me that in his opinion anybody could get a Myanmar passport. He knew that I had been refused entry to Myanmar in the past and in this second conceived of a solution to the problem. He asked whether I wanted a passport and when I merely laughed, he told me that it would not be a problem. He did not know how much it would be, but money would be the only obstacle. I pointed to my appearance and awkward accent when speaking Burmese, but he shrugged it away. These minor shortcomings could be explained by turning me into an exotic other from the far hills in the north.

Anybody who has been to Yangon would have noticed the high number of people of South Asian descent living there. Most of the downtown business area were run by the descendants of people who came to Myanmar during the years of colonial rule. I was not sure

whether to interpret their problems now to obtain a passport in exile as a revenge of the Myanmar state for their relative business success or merely an illustration of the racist, discriminatory practices the modern state was built on. Walking to buy a bottle of water, I started a conversation with one of the owners of the stalls. He looked like he came straight from Anayatha Street in Yangon; the busy shopping street dominated by middle-aged Indian men in longyis and casual shirts. He asked whether I was a worker and here to get a passport. I shook my head and said that I was a teacher at a school for migrant children and accompanied friends on this trip. I asked whether working here was his full-time job and he nodded. They were open every day of the week except Sundays for two years now, he told me. It made me dizzy to think of the money that migrants had to spend here every day while eating, drinking and visiting the restrooms. Ma Aye and I dozed for a few hours in the shade of a roof on the second story of an unfinished building. At 5pm we finally left and arrived exhausted at 10pm in Phang Nga province.

Bureaucratizing times

The National Verification process constituted the most comprehensive effort between the Myanmar and Thai governments to enable migrants from Myanmar to obtain work permits and passports that allowed them legal work and residence in Thailand. While it served to take inventory of migrants, in their role as citizens in Myanmar and their role as temporary workers in Thailand, it moreover created institutions and economies that benefit the states involved. The bureaucratic intricacies of the process have made it a necessity that migrants rely on intermediaries to navigate the process successfully and to maintain their status as legal aliens. Fees for brokers, passports, work permits and visas have ensured the entanglements of migrants into nontransparent financial commitments that were out of the control of migrants. It was

apparent to those who have completed the process that money was the key factor in becoming a legal alien in Thailand and legitimate citizen in Myanmar.

The separate passport category of a temporary passport marked the stay of migrants legally as a matter of short-term. This might not reflect realities, but it largely reflected the desires of migrants to return to Myanmar. At the same time, becoming bureaucratic subjects of the Myanmar state, marked them as out-of-place in Thailand. They became permanently, legally bound to the Myanmar state. Whatever emotional attachment they might have to living in Thailand or Myanmar became irrelevant in the NV process. The NV process suggested that migrants only ought to have emotional ties with place in Myanmar. The NV process was one of the aspects that reminded migrants that they were not welcome to establish place in Thailand.

The chapters so far have discussed efforts and the absence thereof by migrants to establish place and structural limitations to do so. Migrants have been unable or reluctant to develop relationships with place that would allow for the beginning of history making in Thailand. The next chapter will focus on a social practice that has remained relevant to many migrants, irrespective of their location.

CHAPTER 6: BUDDHIST PRACTICES, FUTURES AND AGENCY

It was full moon day of the second month of the lunar calendar, ကဆုန်လပြည့် *(ka soun la pye)*. The birth, death and enlightenment of the Buddha was celebrated and it was a public holiday. Many people were off from work and Yu Yu had wanted to spend time with her relatives whom she got to see rarely. Without a motorbike of her own, it was difficult for her to get around and she had asked me to give her a ride to the construction site where her relatives lived. By the time I arrived to give her a lift, she was not ready to leave yet and I decided to wait at Ma Shwe's house. I walked down the short slope to her house. The dirt path was rugged and furrowed from the heavy rains that had poured down the slope on many occasions.

I sat down on the doorstep of Ma Shwe's tiny one-room shack, my legs dangling in the hot sun. As welcome, Ma Shwe asked whether I had eaten already. She then offered me lunch: fish cake, rice and soup. On accepting her offer, she pulled me into her house. The hot season was reaching its peak and the relieving rain had not set in yet. While Ma Shwe prepared the food, three of her friends that I had not met yet poked their heads through the door. I chatted with them for a while and then turned my attention to the food. I looked up to the plywood wall and noticed that the home shrine was gone. I pointed to the gap on the wall and asked Ma Shwe what had happened to their shrine. She pulled me up, we stepped outside, turned to the house next door that was under construction and stepped inside.

10 days ago, Ma Shwes' friends had started to built a new house for her and her family. The shack they lived in was too small and they had decided to build a new house right next to it. The shrine was the first item they had moved to the new house while it was still being readied for human occupation. It was built on a plywood tray and with supporting beams nailed into the wall. Ma Shwes' friends with whom I had chatted earlier, had cut a small banister from wood

that was put on the edge of the plywood tray. A large poster with a Buddha image was attached to the corrugated metal that formed the upper parts of the wall of the house right behind the shrine. A smaller poster with famous pagodas from Myanmar was on its left side. The golden Buddha statue in the middle of the plywood platform was already framed by fresh flowers. The carefully set up shrine was in stark contrast to the rest of the house. Although most of the outer walls stood already, the house continued to be a construction site. Ma Shwes' friends who were here today to finish the constructions were in the middle of setting up a wall in the inside of the house. Ma Shwe explained that there would be a division between the sleeping and living area; the shrine was located in the heart of the living area. The house was her great pride. It would have a separate cooking area and moreover they had their own toilet and space to shower; the residents of the other shacks needed to go to the communal bathing area. The house was mostly built from used materials, plywood and corrugated metal and in some people's eyes it might have already looked dilapidated. The prospect of moving into this spacious shack though was a source of great pride to Ma Shwe and her family.

The early construction of the shrine and the fresh flowers on the right and left of the Buddha statue in the midst of the construction site spoke to the great importance Ma Shwe and her mother placed on marking their intimate relationship with Buddhist practices in material ways. Later that day, when we returned from a visit to the local temple, a small wooden podium had been added to the shrine and the Buddha statue was sitting on it. Buddha's head was framed by an electrically operated halo that turned the shrine into the undisputed center-piece of the new house.

In this chapter, I focus on Buddhist beliefs and the practices they guide, the many ways in which they are practiced among migrants, their gendered nature and their relationship to

temporality. The emphasis in this chapter is on the ways in which Buddhism is practiced and understood by migrant informants. These individual interpretations and practices might stand in contentious relationships to scripts and textual renderings of Buddhism, but are often more relevant to informant's lives. I suggest that Buddhist practices provide a comforting continuation with familiar places and times. They tie the past to the present and moreover provide a constructive outlook to the future.

The future that is enacted in Buddhist practices is not restricted to the current life time of migrants, but often exceeds the boundaries of their physical existence. A certain sense of alienation with the present and the place they live in, as elaborated in other chapters, has further sharpened this focus. In the light of inequalities, migrants focus on the agency that Buddhist practices offer. At the same time, migration has made it possible to act as agentive beings and invest into their futures to an unprecedented amount.

Instrumentalized Buddhisms

Some scholars have characterized Buddhism as otherworldly which portrayed its practitioners as removed from everyday affairs and social concerns (Kirsch 1996, Weber 1958). In a similar vein, others have employed Buddhism as a variable that can explain people's behavior, thoughts and actions (Keyes 1983, Spiro 1966). While religious frameworks can be useful in thinking about people's life worlds, I do not treat it as a factor that can provide causal explanations for the acts of individuals. My claim that Buddhist doctrine enables informants to perceive specific temporalities should not be confused with assertions of otherworldliness. Schober (2011) has eloquently criticized such claims, with specific reference to the work by Max Weber (1958). She considered Webers' analysis and portrayal of Buddhism as indicative of a larger colonial project that continued to cast its shadow over contemporary scholarship. Many

scholars construct an image of Buddhism as pristine, non-violent, and confined to the spiritual realm. This image is dominant among many non-Buddhist lay people such as tourists seeking spiritual relief in meditation trips as well. According to Schober, this portrayal invalidates the past and contemporary practices of Buddhist practitioners and monks as inauthentic who consider themselves to carry a social and political responsibility and act accordingly. Furthermore, it serves to silence the voices of those who have the right to define the authenticity of Buddhism: the Buddhist religious community.

I am not an expert on Buddhist religious doctrine and do not want to engage in debates whether Buddhist doctrine treats men and women as equals. A wide variety of scholarship has, however, demonstrated that women as Buddhist practitioners are often treated differently from men and have access to different tools of merit-making (Cadge 2004, Kawanami 2000, Keyes 1984, Lefferts 2000). In line with the emphasis on practice in this and the following chapter, my point of departure is a differentiation between men and women practitioners and how these play out in their daily lives.

Buddha in exile

Dhamma talks or sermons delivered by monks are an important moment where the teachings of Buddhism are translated into daily practices. Laypeople attend dhamma talks to learn about interpretations of scriptures and how these translate into questions of everyday matters. Dhamma talks can be delivered by monks in public, or listened to in the privacy of one's home. Among migrants, dhamma talks by monks captured on DVD were widespread and I often woke up or went to bed to the sounds of a monk chanting on one of my neighbor's TV screens. Sometimes, migrants would circulate sermons by popular monks among each other, but many had favorite monks and preferred to listen to specific talks repeatedly. In addition to DVDs,

monks regularly came to visit densely populated migrant locales in Thailand. They came by invitation or had initiated contact with communities prior to their visits. The fame and status of the monk was crucial in their ability to attract large audiences.

A week after my departure from the field site, a monk of eminent national fame in Myanmar visited Phang Nga province and preparations were underway when I left. The venue they had chosen for hosting the dhamma talk would allow several hundred people to attend. Other times, only a few people would show up. Monks who were invited from Southern Myanmar often delivered their sermons in the local vernacular which was attractive to migrants from Dawei, but kept migrants from other language groups away. In other words, transnational travel by monks for delivering religious services was not uncommon and provided an important continuation of place with Myanmar. The travel by Myanmar monks to Thailand was mostly initiated by individuals or small groups and was not subjected to formalized, strict regulations as in other parts of Southeast Asia (Pattana 2010).

My neighbors had invited me to attend a dhamma talk that would take place during the evening. I had agreed to go and at 7pm, Ma Soe Yi poked her head through my open front door. The car that would take people to the sermon was waiting outside and she asked whether I wanted to catch a ride. I stepped outside to find a pick-up truck standing outside my door. Its bed was tightly packed with carefully dressed women. The monk, dressed in the yellow robe typical for Thai monks and not the saffron colored robes of Myanmar monks, sat on the passenger seat in the front and looked up at me. When I responded to Ma Soe Yi that I would follow the car on my bike, I could see a smirk around his lips.

I always was reserved in my interactions with monks. This was partly due to my unfamiliarity with the appropriate language to use in the presence of monks. Furthermore, I

found it difficult to perceive them as men who had decided to leave their lay existence behind, but rather perceived them as partly divine. The many encounters with for example monks who wanted to be on a photo with me that had demonstrated their ordinary human curiosities and nature had not yet fully convinced me otherwise. The smirk of the monk sitting on the passenger seat turned into a giggle when I continued talking, asking for directions. Many people, monks included, were stunned when they heard me speak Burmese for the first time. For many migrants, it was the first time in their lives to hear a foreigner speak their language and my word choice and accent only enhanced their amusement.

I followed the pick-up truck on my motorbike until we arrived at a construction site. It was a typical shack settlement in which many migrants lived. There were five, six shacks attached to each other with a common shower area outside. Two women stood next to a tap with water buckets. Their longyis were pulled up to their arm pits and they poured water from the buckets over their heads, enjoying their showers. A small vegetable garden was set up on a plot of land. Next to the shacks, a stage had been set up. A large plastic banner with the photo of the monk announced a special sermon. The banner was framed by flowers and chains of light. Plywood was laid out over the mud in front of the stage for people to sit on. A large, blue tent without side walls was set up to protect the audience from potential rain.

Ma Soe Yi asked me whether I wanted to join her in chatting with the monk. I was hesitant since I was afraid to unwillingly insult the monk by using inappropriate language, but she pulled me along. We entered one of the shacks where the monk was sitting on a blue, red bamboo mat. The shack was tiny and the space we occupied sitting was the sleeping space for the family at night. Their thin mattresses and blankets were piled high on top of a cupboard in the corner. Ma Soe Yi, Ma Thida and another neighbor prostrated in front of the monk. I usually

did not participate in these rituals of respect and had always found others understanding since they knew I did not practice Buddhism. The intimacy of the small space though made me more self-conscious and reluctantly I followed their movements.

An assistant to the monk entered and dropped off plastic bags filled with water, coke, fanta bottles. He poured an energy drink from a can into a cup for the monk. There were three other women already sitting in the room. The conversation mostly circulated among the women and largely ignored the monk. When Ma Soe Yi addressed me with my name, the monk turned to me, repeated my name and said that he was surprised that I knew how to speak Burmese. The monk spoke with a strong Dawei inflection and I responded that I knew how to speak Burmese, but not Dawei. My joke was received well and Ma Soe Yi imitated my dumbstruck face when I was part of a conversation in Dawei. The monk opened his shoulder bag and put a DVD on the floor in front of Ma Soe Yi. He did not address me directly, but said to her that he would like to give it to me as a present. It was another of his chants recorded in a different location.

Donating the future

The assistant entered again and started taking photos. The monk repositioned himself and asked us to move, so we all would be in the photo. Ma Soe Yi took thick envelopes out of her bag. She took a pen and tried to write her name and address on it. The soft wads of money in the envelope made it difficult to write on it, and she removed the money, 2000 THB in total. She wrote her name and Myanmar address on the envelope and returned the money. I turned to Ma Thida and asked who the money was for; she pointed to the monk. The monk would take the money back to his monastery in Myanmar. 2000 THB, slightly less than 70 USD, was an outrageously huge sum of money to donate. It was approximately 1/3 - 1/2 of Ma Soe Yi's monthly salary and the moment in which she removed the money from the envelope could only

be understood as an attempt to publicly display her generosity. The monk would take the money to the monastery and the donors would receive merit for their generous acts.

Informants explained merit to me as the intangible accumulation that resulted as a consequence of good deeds, acts and thoughts. Good deeds such as feeding monks, constructing a pagoda, donating to monasteries or feeding the poor. Their explanation was more encompassing than the definition for example given by Bao (2005) as merit-making of the conversion of economic into social capital. Merit could not only be made through material donations and it in the eyes of most informants it could have material consequences in their next life times.

Merit accompanied an individual throughout their life time and carried over into their next lives. At the transition into the next life, merit played a crucial role in determining the position one will be reborn into. There was a hierarchy among living beings and the final goal was to be able to overcome the cycle of rebirth, something that could only be accomplished by monks. The thought of accumulating merit was important to most migrants who saw it as a means to influence the future position they would be born into. At the same time, merit was a way of thinking about one's past lives. When one was born into poverty and struggled to make ends meet, most informants interpreted it as having led undeserving lives in the past and one's current situation was punishment for the bad deeds in the past. While in my eyes, this placed undue responsibility on individuals for their current positions, my informants preferred to emphasize the power of merit that it offered for manipulating their futures.

Ma Soe Yi took more envelopes from her bag, given to her by friends who were not able to come to the chant, but who wanted to provide donations. All the envelopes had Myanmar addresses written on them, in order for the respective donors to receive merit corresponding to

the sums in the envelopes. Ma Thida put 200 THB into her envelope, a sum that was common to donate to monks, at funerals, at births and at weddings. All the envelopes were placed in a bowl and Ma Soe Yi asked me to hand the bowl to the monk. This would allow me to receive his blessing and merit as well. I responded that I had not donated and did not want to cheat. The monk insisted though and I placed the bowl with the envelopes in front of him while his assistant took photos.

More people tried to enter, but the small shack did not allow for any additional visitors. I excused myself and muttered that I wanted to make room for others. Outside I ran into Min Min who had organized the monk chant. I asked him why this monk was here tonight and Min Min told me that the monk had recently gotten a passport and he wanted to use his newfound freedom to travel in Thailand. The monk had contacted Min Min, they were from the same home town in Myanmar and Min Min had helped organize a dhamma talk tour through Phang Nga and Phuket province. Tomorrow, the monk would be in the next town and the day after he would deliver a sermon in Phuket. I pointed out that the monk was wearing a yellow-colored robe instead of the saffron-colored robe and asked whether he would meet with Thai monks as well. Min Min smirked and shook his head. The monk did not know how to speak Thai and would only spend time with migrants. He wore the robe because despite his passport he wanted to attract as little attention as possible.

The sermon finally started at 8.20pm. Most of the 60 people strong audience were women, many dressed in festive one-sets with a scarf over their shoulders. All the men sat toward the front of the stage, while the women were all crowded in the back. Teenagers sat next to their parents, there was a wide spread in age. I wanted to record the chant and carefully placed the recorder next to me on the floor. I had asked the monks' permission and his assistant

remembered my request. He came to pick up my recorder and placed it right next to the monk on the stage. I regretted having asked permission, now I needed to stay until the end of talk. I found it difficult to follow monotonous long sermons that were partly delivered in Pali and only partly in Burmese. After a few minutes my focus shifted to the discomfort that I experienced sitting on my tucked-in legs on the plywood. The audience listened carefully, but there was a lot of coming and going. Children played loudly and inhabitants of the shacks continued to shower. Tired from sitting on the floor I tried to focus on the sermon that taught about the importance of mental well-being in contrast to the fleeting nature of material wealth. After an hour and forty minutes the talk came to an end, I snatched my recorder and returned home.

Making merit multiple ways

Dhamma talks were delivered throughout the year and while there were not as many opportunities for migrants to attend them in Thailand as there were in Myanmar, every few weeks another monk would be in the vicinity to deliver a sermon. Sermons offered an opportunity to make merit, be inspired by new teachings and moreover to socialize with friends and family. While there were sermons delivered by nuns in Myanmar, they were not as widely attended and not as popular. There were no nuns invited to deliver dhamma talks in Thailand to migrants. While sermons were an opportunity to learn how to translate scriptural knowledge into daily practices and to make merit, it was not the most important merit-making activity. Ordinations marked an extraordinary opportunity for laypeople to participate in the cycle of merit-making.

Men and women alike could be ordained as monks or nuns respectively. The ordination as nun, however, did not weigh as heavily as an ordination as monk (Kawanami 2000). Informants explained to me that nuns did not adhere to as many rules as monks did after

ordination and therefore their ordination did not accrue as much merit as an ordination as monk. In Myanmar, there was no formally recognized order of nuns and in order to reinstate one, seven nuns that had formally been ordained by a recognized order would be needed to start a new order.

There was a distinction between temporary ordinations and more permanent ordinations. Many lay men ordained three times in their lives for short periods of time. The first time after they were at least seven years old, the second time after their teenage years and before marriage and the third time later in life. These were temporary commitments, lasting at least 7 days. The first ordination, ရှင်းပြု *(shin byu)* was the most important and most celebrated event. It required substantial financial investment since it involved donations to monks, festive clothes and inviting friends and family for a feast. During the shin byu, the Buddha's transformation from prince to monk was reenacted. Boys were initially dressed up and would be pampered, but then renounced the clamor of the world, were shaved and donned the robes of monks. This event was an opportunity for boys to return merit to their mothers for bringing them into the world. Since women could not accrue merit to the same extent as men could through ordination, it was important to transfer merit to mothers as a sign of respect and gratefulness.

Temporary ordinations remained important to migrants and many families sent their sons to Myanmar for their shin byu. Some families used the opportunity to travel back together, ordain their sons and afterward return to Thailand. An informant who was in his mid-twenties and unmarried traveled to Myanmar for his second temporary ordination. Jokingly, he said that he had not been able to find a wife, because he had failed to become ordained for a second time. I attended one ordination by migrants in Thailand, the only ordination I was aware off. An extended family had organized the ordination of eleven of their male family members from

different generations for nine days. They were ordained at a Thai monastery by monks from Myanmar who had traveled to Thailand for this purpose. The family had decided to celebrate the ordination in Thailand since it was cheaper than to travel back to Myanmar and to organize it there. The ceremony replicated ordinations in Myanmar, including the shaving of the heads, a sermon by a monk, sharing sweats and money with attendees and a festive meal for the monks and guests. All attendees were dressed up in one-sets, longyis or pasos (the male equivalent of a longyi); the immediate family members even in silk-imitation one-sets. At the end of the sermon, the matriarch of the family threw sweats and money into the crowd accompanied to distinctive Burmese orchestra music. This moment marked the emotional highlight of the celebration and as friends attested, the joyful tears that streamed down the cheeks of the family matriarch completed the event as perfect replication of an ordination in Myanmar.

This ordination brought to the fore an interesting distinction between ordination practices in Myanmar and Thailand. The ordained males of the family were the only temporary monks at the temple. The Thai monks had advanced to old age and the visiting monks from Myanmar exceeded them numerically. During the festivities, the Thai monks almost seemed out-of-place in their temple. Their retreat to a remote area of the temple grounds furthered this impression. The grand ordination festivities indicated the successful appropriation of place by migrants. This appropriation of place, however, occurred in a space that had already largely become obsolete to many Thais.

Gendered ways

The different means of women and men to accrue merit were not the only gender imbalance enacted in daily Buddhist practices. It was later in the year, when Ma Shwe was sitting outside her house chatting with Nay Lin Aung. Nay Lin Aung had been orphaned during

the Tsunami. He had never lived in Myanmar and in the absence of any other relatives, he was raised by a young woman who treated him like her own son. As often, he had headphones plucked into his ears and moved his head rhythmically to the latest Myanmar hip-hop beats. He wanted to be a hip-hop artist and was dressed in the style of famous Myanmar hip-hop artists. Ma Shwe and he were sitting on the wooden step outside her newly constructed shack. The space was usually reserved for slippers or raincoats. Their legs were dangling off the high step.

I had stopped by at her house to drop off a longyi. An acquaintance of Ma Shwe's was sick and dying. She had no family members that could take care of her and the neighbors had gotten together to cook for her and help her to stay clean. Ma Shwe had told me that her dying friend had only one longyi and it was filthy. She had asked whether I could spare a longyi, so she would have at least one additional longyi. I was here to drop it off. Nay Lin Aung was sitting on the left side of Ma Shwe and I in turn stood on his far left side. I put my backpack on the ground, took the longyi out and reached across Nay Lin Aung to hand it to Ma Shwe. Ma Shwe's house was built on a slope and I stood high enough to reach over his head. While I extended my arm, Ma Shwe pushed Nay Lin Aung off the wooden step. He trembled forward and came to stand still a few steps away down the hill. I looked confused at Ma Shwe who was giggling hysterically. Nay Lin Aung looked similarly confused and asked her what was going on. Ma Shwe, still giggling hysterically said that I had wanted to hand the longyi over his head to her. Nay Lin Aung just shrugged his shoulders and went his way.

I knew about taboos associated with female clothing. Anything worn by females below the hips was considered polluted. Menstruation was a perpetual stain on females that could never be washed off. There was a taboo on washing female underwear, pants and longyis together with male clothes. It would diminish the power of males. In a similar vein, my move to hand the

longyi over Nay Lin Aung's head to Ma Shwe would have affected his powers negatively. Despite my familiarity with these taboos, I had violated them on other occasions, not taking their implications seriously. I was stunned that Ma Shwe perceived the imminent threat strong enough to push Nay Lin Aung off the step. In my mind, there were not only hierarchical relationships between men and women, but young people and elders. Nay Lin Aung was a few years too old to could have been considered a son to me. Nevertheless, I worked as a teacher and he was a student attending school, an important hierarchical distinction that I had presumed placed me always higher and therefore more deserving of respect. An assumption that must not only have seemed foolish in Ma Shwe's eyes, but a threat to the existing social order.

The term ဘုန်း *(poun)* that captured in Burmese what I termed power in English was a crucial concept in daily practices and hierarchical conceptions of society. It indicated intangible power that was related to one's meritorious deeds. Men were not the only ones possessing power, but by virtue of being born as men they had more power than women. Women could increase their power by being reborn as men. Rebirth as men would be possible if women earned enough merit in their life times which would result in a slow ascent of the hierarchy of reincarnation. Monks possessed more power than any other living being. The Burmese term for monk ဘုန်းကြီး *(poun kyi)* literally was constituted by the word for power ဘုန်း *(poun)* and the word big ကြီး *(kyi)*. Monks were the men of big power.

Prior to the event described above, I had not taken poun seriously as a concept that warranted attention. The way in which Ma Shwe in my eyes had reinforced the subjugated position of women in relation to poun had disturbed me and I sought answers from others about the meaning of poun in their lives.

Merit, gender, power

It was in May, another sweltering day during the peak of the hot season. The hot sun and the incipient monsoon kept most tourists away. The streets in the nearby tourist town were deserted and driving down the main road felt like driving through a ghost town. Most stores and restaurants were closed for the season, few open, waiting for rare customers. I was looking for Ma Thin Thin who worked in a convenient store that sold the odd medley of tourist souvenirs, beach toys, drinks and snacks. She had asked me to come by during her work hours, the only time of the day she felt she had time to sit down and talk at length to me. When we had met at the library on earlier occasions, I had experienced Ma Thin Thin as outspoken, self-reflective, smart and not shy to talk about any issues. She was one year older than me and the mother of a ten-year old son and a three-year old girl.

Before I saw her I heard her voice shouting my name. She was standing underneath the roof in the front of the store. It was entirely silent on the road and the sound of my bike had attracted her attention. She pointed to the shade behind the store and asked me to park my bike there. The store was at the corner of the main road of the tourist strip and a smaller side road. There were small tables and chairs at the store across on the other side of the side road from where we could watch the store while talking. Ma Thin Thin asked whether I wanted anything to drink or eat and I responded that I should treat her. She disappeared into the store and returned with a bottle of green tea for me and Thai ice tea in a plastic cup for her. A young boy followed her across the street and curiously looked at me. I asked him in Burmese whether he had eaten already and Ma Thin Thin told me that he was Thai, he was the son of the owner of the store. I asked again whether she was sure that it was okay for me to be here during her work hours. This was only the second time that I visited a friend and informant at their work place for an

interview. She assured me that there were no customers at the store and that her boss did not mind her taking time off from work. In fact, she had only worked at the store for three months and tomorrow her boss would close the store and take her and her two children to Phuket for a day-trip. This was the first time that I heard of such a good employer - employee relationship. As if she had heard us talk about her, Ma Thin Thin's boss poked her head around the corner and waved at us from across the street.

I opened the conversation by asking about Ma Thin Thin's history of migration. She told me that she had arrived in Phang Nga one year before the Tsunami in 2004. Her and her husband had initially arrived as a couple, leaving their infant son with their families in Myanmar behind. Ma Thin Thin had lived close to the beach and during the Tsunami saw the wave approaching the coast. She climbed up a tree from where she watched many others around her being swept away and drowning in the floods. This experience had not only influenced her attitude about her stay in Thailand, but also had profoundly shaped her outlook on life in general. In the aftermath of the Tsunami, Ma Thin Thin overwhelmingly felt gratitude for the solidarity that developed between people. She told me that it took a long time for any rescue efforts to start, but when help finally was available, she did not experience any discrimination against migrants. She still felt a sense of closeness to Thai people because of her memories.

The Tsunami had intensified her wish to be a nun. The destruction of life and material goods she witnessed provided her with a vivid illustration of the impermanence of things and lives, a core teaching of Buddhism. If she would not need to provide for her children, she would renounce and live as a nun, she said. As a nun she would be able to devote all her time and energy to the life of her mind and would not need to occupy her time with mundane aspects of life. She missed the time to meditate. In her work-focused life in Thailand, she took no time to

meditate. When she lived in Myanmar, she meditated regularly and went into meditation retreats. When I asked why she had stopped meditating in Thailand she looked at me and asked when she would have time for that. The main reason for their stay in Thailand was to earn money. Any time not spent earning money was wasted time. Activities like meditation or going to the temple had to be postponed until after their return to Myanmar.

Before I could ask any further questions, Ma Thin Thin wanted to know whether I was Christian. I explained that I had grown up in a predominantly Christian country, but that I did not consider myself a practicing Christian, I was not practicing any aspects of the faith: I did not pray, I did not go to Church and most importantly I did not believe in the teachings of Christianity. She asked how I could still lead a mentally rich life if I had nothing to believe in; I could see the pity on her face. She only listened half-heartedly to my response that I derived meaning from other things in my life.

She told me that there were Christians in Myanmar and I nodded, acknowledging that I was aware of that. She asked whether I wanted to know how these Christians had come to be and before I was able to answer she told me that Myanmar had been colonized and together with the colonizers came the missionaries. Missionaries offered people money in return for conversion, so many people decided to convert to Christianity. I was sure that many missionaries and Christians in Myanmar would take objection to her conversion narrative, but it helped me understand the pitiful expression on her face. She did not only pity me because I lacked faith, but also in her eyes I had been raised in a religious tradition that bribed people into believing and following.

The way Ma Thin Thin carried reservations about Christianity, I carried my own reservations about the way I had Buddhism seen practiced in Myanmar and among migrants in Thailand. The incident with the longyi had only been the latest event that in my mind illustrated

the inherent gender inequalities that I perceived as deeply disturbing and at the same time central to Buddhism. I had asked many female informants about their perceptions of gender issues within Buddhism and often their answers highlighted that gender inequality was acknowledged and taken for granted. In the end, it bothered few and did not influence their experience of the other teachings Buddhism had to offer. I was painstakingly aware that I was caught in my own ideologies. I knew that there was no answer that would dispel my reservations about gender inequality. Rather, I was seeking an answer that would help me to see what my informants saw and why it did not bother them.

Telling Ma Thin Thin about the longyi incident, I asked whether she washed her underwear, longyis and pants separately from her husbands' clothes. She nodded and said that of course she did. I prodded her to tell me why this was important to her. She told me that the power of her husband would be diminished if their clothes were washed together. I responded that I knew about this, but that I did not understand what the implications of this would be. Ma Thin Thin turned to a story to explain me the far-reaching ramifications. It was the story of Shin Mwe Nun and Prince Nanda.

> Shin Mwe Nun and Prince Nanda were childhood friends and when they got older they grew to love each other. The king, Prince Nanda's father, however, did not approve of their relationship. Therefore, he sent Prince Nanda to live across the river in Mingeladon, away from Shin Mwe Nun. In the river that separated Thanlwin and Mingeladon, there lived a crocodile, Na Moe Yei. Na Moe Yei observed Prince Nanda when he sat at the bank of the river and longingly stared across to Thanlwin. Na Moe Yei felt for the couple and offered Prince Nanda to carry him back and forth over the river at night in his mouth so the two lovers could meet.
>
> There was another crocodile living in the river. She was in love with Na Moe Yei, but Na Moe Yei did not return her love. She was jealous that Prince Nanda got to travel in Na Moe Yei's mouth every night. The female crocodile disguised herself as a human being and as lady-in-waiting went to serve Shin Mwe Nun. One day, she asked Shin Mwe Nun which side of the bed Prince Nanda rested at night. Shin Mwe Nun told her that he slept on the left side of the bed. If this was the case, the female crocodile responded, then

> Prince Nanda did not really love Shin Mwe Nun. He loved her only truly if he would sleep on the right side of the bed. Shin Mwe Nun believed what the crocodile said and when Prince Nanda arrived that night, she asked him to sleep on the right side of the bed. Prince Nanda objected that sleeping on the right side of the bed would decrease his power and would cause misfortune. Shin Mwe Nun responded that he did not truly love her if he insisted on sleeping on the left side. In the end, Prince Nanda gave in and slept on the right side of the bed.
>
> On the way back to Mingeladon that morning, Na Moe Yei forgot about Prince Nanda in his mouth and swam up and down the river. People in Mingeladon started to search for Prince Nanda. When they came down to the river bank, Na Moe Yei remembered that he was carrying Prince Nanda and opened his mouth. Prince Nanda had not been able to breath and had suffocated. The crocodile went to explain himself to the king. He asked to be executed since it was his fault that Prince Nanda had died. The king responded that Na Moe Yei had been faithful to his son and he forgave him. He asked him to deliver the news of the death of his son to Shin Mwe Nun. Na Moe Yei went to Shin Mwe Nun and told her what had happened. Shin Mwe Nun realized that it was her fault and felt regret. Deeply saddened she died from a broken heart.
>
> Prince Nanda and Shin Mwe Nun were cremated on opposite sides of the river at the same time. The smoke of their ashes rose and united high above the river in the sky. People said that Shin Mwe Nun and Prince Nanda were united together forever in their deaths.

I was familiar with the story before Ma Thin Thin told it to me. I had read it in my Burmese language class where our teacher tried to teach us Burmese language, alongside with cultural knowledge. At that time, I had taken the story between Shin Mwe Nun and Prince Nanda as just that; a story. I had not understood it as a valuable life lesson that had tangible consequences for the ways in which people lived. In hindsight, listening to the recording of my conversation with Ma Thin Thin I snickered about my follow-up question which side of the bed Ma Thin Thin slept on.

Ma Thin Thin's response helped me see that respecting power and nurturing it in men did not only serve to maintain their position in society. It served to maintain social order and its disturbance could have widespread consequences, not only to men.

Next, I asked about merit-making and that I often found it painful to see that people with already few resources, donated their money to monasteries and monks. Daw Tin May had just made a large donation to the monastery she used to go to in their hometown in Myanmar. She had donated 100 000 kyat, roughly 100 USD and had been visibly pride when she told me about it. I tried to share her excitement and mentioned that she would receive a lot of merit in return. She had proudly nodded her head.

100 USD was a huge amount of money to her and her family. Daw Tin May earned 180 USD a month, but had only employment for 7 months of the year since her job as a dish washer depended on the tourist season. During the last months of the off-season, Daw Tin May, her daughter and granddaughter had been eating rice and fish sauce for most of the month since they had no money left for buying vegetables or meat. A friend of theirs had often dropped off fruit and vegetables at their house and reminded them that it was important that at least Soe Kay Thi Lin, the 5 year old girl, would eat more nutritious food. While I tried to share Daw Tin May's excitement in her presence, I was dumb-founded by the donation she had made. I remembered their pain and struggle vividly not to be able to provide better food to Soe Kay Thi Lin and found it hard to understand that they had prioritized donating to the monastery over being able to eat better food and nurture the health of her granddaughter.

As illustrated above, Daw Tin May was no exception, but many (cash-strapped) migrants donated money to traveling monks or remitted it to monasteries. I shared my perception with Ma Thin Thin and she visibly enjoyed being able to act as interlocutor between her and my world, to help me see the importance of merit-making through another story.

> There was a poor father with his daughter. They were so poor, that the father bonded his daughter as a slave for a rich person. Over 4, 5 years the father had saved up money some 500 (Kyat) to finally buy back the freedom of his daughter. On the day that he was on the way to free his daughter from her work as bonded maid, in the woods, he

came across an Arhat, a special monk well advanced on the path to enlightenment who possessed extraordinary skills. The monk, with an intention to test his mind/character, attracted all the attention of the father and he felt, which made the latter feel the urge to offer alms to the monk.

However, the father had no rice with him to offer to the monk. If he wanted to make an offer, he needed to do so before noon after which monks are not allowed to eat anymore. Therefore, he asked a fellow wood worker to sell him his lunch package of rice. The worker, trying to gain as much money as possible, started asking for 20 and smaller amounts, but ended up asking asked all the money the father had. The father was naturally hesitant, since he was desperate to free his daughter and had to save up for years. In the end, he agreed and exchanged all his money for the package of rice. He offered the rice to the monk and felt a deep satisfaction. The merit of offering the meal to the special monk was so great that the monk left, using his special powers to float in the air, which was meant to be a reward for the man's good will and generosity. Seeing this miracle, the father cried out victory victory, as he felt it was worth making a donation (of a meal).

When the monk returned to his monastery, he died and attained Nirvana, the release from any attachment to life. The monk died, thinking that he should reward the old man. When he died, for the funeral, nobody could lift the body, so they could not have the funeral. Then, the father went to see his daughter and explained to her why he was not able to buy back her freedom yet. He told her that he had come across a monk and had used all the money he had saved up for her which was meant to buy her freedom to buy alms for the monk. He asked his daughter to be grateful for the merit received in the act, and as well as to ask for sharing the merit with others. The daughter, saddened and despite her wishes to live with her father, started to chant for the merit to be shared with the worker who had sold the rice to his father. The father had to be separated from his daughter and had to leave her behind, the girl was crying. The father returned and when he got back, the body of the monk could be lifted only by him, so the king rewarded him, the girl was freed from slavery as well and they became rich.

Ma Thin Thin ended the story by affirming that it was a true story. In her eyes, this story answered all my questions about merit. It certainly illustrated the power with which lives could be transformed through merit. The monk who had accumulated enough merit in his life time to finally end the cycle of rebirth had been able to use his powers to free the daughter and moreover make her rich. At the same time, the daughter and her father were deserving through their selfless acts of sharing and giving. The attachment to his daughter had not prevented the father

from selfless giving. Merit had emerged as a transformative force. Ma Thin Thin did not only help me to understand the role that merit played in her eyes better, but she also pointed me to something that was a fact in her eyes, the inevitability of rebirth.

Futures unbound

I always had understood reincarnation as a vague concept at best. To Ma Thin Thin and Daw Tin May, it was part of their futures, as certain as their deaths were. To Daw Tin May and all the other migrants who donated to monasteries in Myanmar, it was a direct investment into their futures and the most accessible way for them to influence it. Moreover, Daw Tin May had taught Soe Kay Thi Lin an important lesson through her donation about selflessness and investment into her own future that I had not been able to see. As Ma Thin Thin had pointed out and many other informants confirmed, life in Thailand was focused on work as a means to earn money. Hopefully, to save enough money to in the end return to Myanmar. One of the benefits of life as a migrant, was the increased capacity of people like Daw Tin May and Ma Thin Thin to send money to monasteries in Myanmar. A donation of the magnitude that Daw Tin May had made, had been out of reach her whole life. Migration had strengthened her capacity to make merit and therefore allowed her to take a more active role in manipulating her own future.

While I struggled with the gendered nature of many practices and their underlying rationale, most of my female informants were more pragmatic in dealing with these. Just as there was no way to prevent reincarnation, gendered power differentials were a given. It was best to acknowledge the status quo, accommodate and live according to it, enhancing one's prospect of a meaningful life and future. Challenging existing social orders, even if they might be inherently unequal, would undermine the agency that migrants perceived they had in their own lives.

Dealing with and engaging the future to a greater extent has become possible through living elsewhere. At the same time, the absence of meaningful place-making possibilities, provides the outlook of a different future as an empowering tool. Perceptions of place and temporality mutually reinforce each other, while increasingly becoming a hallmark of migrant life. The importance of the future and the ways in which place has become entangled in perceiving and engaging with it, are at the core of the following chapter that analyzes funerary rituals as a means to enact productive futures.

CHAPTER 7: FUTURES IN DEATH

The grounds of the monastery seemed abandoned as we slowly entered. Although I did not see any people, the carefully polished reflective white and red tiled square spoke to the presence of people and the great care they took in maintaining the monastery. We parked the motorbike in the shade of a tree and walked past a standing tall, golden Buddha statue towards a white, round building. Ko Kyi Maung pointed to the short staircase that led up into the round building and encouraged me to go inside; "That's where the coffin is," he told me. Suddenly the voice of a young woman greeted us. I turned and saw two young women, three men and a baby sitting in the shade of a tree around a small table with glasses, cookies and a box to keep drinks cool. I recognized one of the women as the daughter of the departed. I had never seen her before, but the facial features of U Zaw Aung who had passed away were repeated in her face. Ko Kyi Maung responded that we would go inside first and then would sit with them. I walked up the short staircase. The silent presence of the white, wooden coffin in the corner of the room stood in contrast to the boisterous presence of the deceased during his life time. Plastic flowers and a blinking chain of lights were placed as decoration on the coffin. The name of the deceased and his age were written on the side of the coffin. Large flower bouquets were arranged on stilts next to the photo of U Zaw Aung. A large pillow still wrapped in its plastic cover with the Burmese word "Regretfully" was placed underneath the coffin, next to it a bowl ready to receive donations. A Buddha statue stood at the center of the room. Arranged in a circle around the Buddha were the figures representing the eight days of the week: the galon bird for Sunday, the tiger for Monday, the lion for Tuesday, the tusked elephant for Wednesday morning, the tuskless elephant for Wednesday afternoon, the rat for Thursday, the guinea pig for Friday and the naga

(snake-dragon) for Saturday. I walked to the Friday corner, the day of the week that I was born, to pour water over the statue.

The voice of U Zaw Aung's daughter broke through the solemnity that I had felt in the room. She approached Ko Kyi Maung who was standing next to the coffin and asked whether he could come outside to help her look over the bills they had to pay. She said that she had just received the bill for the flowers and the costs were overwhelming. I put a donation in the bowl in front of the coffin. She invited us to sit at the table, offered cold drinks and cookies to both of us. I told her that I used to meet her father every Sunday at the market, that he had been a good friend and informant to me. She nodded and replied that he had mentioned our encounters at home. It was the first day of the wake, the funeral would take place in two days and many things still needed to be arranged. In addition to emotionally dealing with the loss of her father, she was overwhelmed with the administrative burden that death had imposed on her family. She was not the only migrant who experienced death as an exceptional administrative challenge.

Unfamiliar bureaucratic steps needed to be taken which required advanced levels of Thai that most migrants did not possess. Monks needed to be invited and ritual experts needed to be found that could organize the funerary rites. These administrative challenges were accompanied by the emotional losses and responsibilities vis-a-vis the departed. The death of a person always meant the beginning of a new life after reincarnation somewhere and sometimes. It was the community of bereaved who needed to make sure that all rites necessary to facilitate the separation of the material and immaterial components of a (dead) body would occur and the transition into the next life could take place. Despite these challenges, death and funerals offered opportunities as well.

In this chapter, I argue that among migrants, death and the ensuing funerals were moments that give life to a public of migrants that created literacy in ritual, material and embodied knowledge. This knowledge reflected ideologies that were rooted in a memory of home, marked by their present and presence as migrants and ultimately pointed to the possibility of living a productive future. The management of death allowed for cultural (re-)production outside the realm of censorship. It was an opportunity to re-invent individual and group values, practices and expertise. Embodied memories of ritualistic acts were (re-)created, shared and passed on. It was an opportunity to envision one's future as migrants, as well as a group of people who shared common values and were attached to a memory of home(land) elsewhere.

Funerary rites

Funerals and rituals have long been considered a constructive site for cultural (re-)production (Metcalf and Huntington 1991). Van Gennep (1960) recognized the different phases that are enacted ritually that symbolize the progression from biological to social death. Hertz (1960) took this insight further and interpreted the symbolism surrounding death and funerals as serving an important social function that allowed communities to re-aggregate after one of its members had passed away. These early accounts portrayed the rituals surrounding death as static and they were the product of the enactment by a re-ified society. The symbolism and functionality of rituals continued to be emphasized in later works. Bloch and Parry (1982) considered social order the result of funerary rituals and emphasized death as a fertile moment for recreating society. In their analysis, they emphasized a causal relationship between rituals influencing the order of society. As Yurchak (2006) pointed out, persons do not predate ritualistic acts, but are produced in the act. He emphasized the productive capacity of rituals to create and generate new forms of existence.

My primary concern is not with the symbolism, purpose or causality of funerary rites. I emphasize the role of death and funerary rituals as fertile ground for unregulated/unrestricted cultural production. As demonstrated in other chapters, publics enacted in other settings such as the football tournament or dance performances point to the limitations of migrant life rather than the productive capacity of migrant life. The continuous cultural reproduction of funerary rites is a unique opportunity to maintain, adapt, create and pass on ideologies that constitute migrant life: the ambivalent relationship to place, hope in the future and an emphasis on community support.

Institutionalized support

Organizing a funeral was a challenging responsibility for the families of deceased migrants. It required knowledge of administrative procedures, funerary rites, Thai language skills and moreover monetary resources. Others passed away without family or relatives around who could ensure that the beginning of their passage into their next lives was organized appropriately. If dead bodies were not claimed or disposed the burden fell on the local government to ensure the burial of the deceased. The local government, though, was hesitant to become involved in building and maintaining infrastructure that benefited the migrant community. While migrants had access to public schools and hospitals, they were usually dependent on the presence of (informal) interpreters who helped them navigate the Thai language world.

A group of migrants stepped forward to provide the (logistical) support that many migrants needed in times of death. Burial societies were common in many parts of the world, offering different services surrounding death and funerals (de Mersan 2012, Nunez & Wheeler 2012). The group that is at the center of attention of this chapter focused on providing logistical support for the organization of funerals of any migrant. They provided financial support to

membership fee-paying group members in times of illness and death. Although the organizations' full name translated as migrant worker support organization, in the remainder of the chapter I refer to them as funerary support group.

The funerary support group was a low profile organization. They were present at many funerals where they helped organizing, arranging and enacting whatever was needed. Their visibility as formal organization was low, it was not yet marked by any formal signs of organizational existence. Would it not have been for the membership of Daw Tin May, I might not have known about their existence.

Preparing for death, preparing for life

Daw Tin May was the only female member of the funerary support group. She, however, never participated in any of the organizational meetings that took place during the evenings of every first Sunday of the month. She had little interest in shaping the decisions made among group members; membership in the group rather gave her peace of mind. Peace of mind that others who were familiar with the organizational and ritualistic requirements of funerals would take care of her dead body when the time came. She was in her early 60's and her body continuously reminded her that the time of death was approaching. She had been widowed young, had never remarried and had worked hard most of her life to support her family. As mentioned earlier, during the first year in Thailand, she had been able to stay at home. After the death of her son-in-law though they had to vacate the free housing on the construction site where the son-in-law had worked. Luckily, they were able to find rent-free housing among other migrants elsewhere. They nevertheless needed money to pay their daily living expenses and to save for their eventual return to Myanmar. Daw Tin May took up work again. Her job as a dish washer in a restaurant required many hours of standing and repetitive motions that resulted in

permanent pain in her arms and back. She always laughed at my well-intended assurance that she was still young and would not die too soon. In response, she listed all her ailments and how the hard physical work that I had never done in my life, had destroyed her body and would result in her death soon. She was worried about her daughter and granddaughter, she did not believe that they had the ability to take care of themselves, a reminder of the precarious economic situations that many migrants continued to live under (Pattana 2005). While it was beyond her capacity to ensure their financial well-being after her death, it was well within her capacity to make sure that at least her funeral would be taken care off. 100 THB membership fee a month bought her piece of mind that her funeral expenses would be covered, monks would be there to chant and her body would be cremated according to Buddhist rites.

In her writing on domestic migrants in South Africa, Lee (2011) discussed the many anxieties that the possibility of death away from home or "death out of place" (Nuney & Wheeler 2012) can cause: concerns about money, the absence of ritual experts or the fear to die far removed from ancestral lands. While some of these concerns are relevant to the situation of migrants from Myanmar in Thailand, it is important to note that to most migrants the actual geographical location in which one died was largely relevant. Heightened anxieties about death away from home were foremost caused by the limited accessibility to organized management networks of death. Throughout her life, Daw Tin May, at the best of her ability, had been careful to demonstrate care and generosity towards the institution, the people, the actions and thoughts that represented Buddhism to her. The karma she had accrued during her life time would play an important role in the moment of death in determining the reincarnation of her soul into next life. The thought of potentially jeopardizing the transition into her next life through, for example, the neglect of important funerary rituals was careless and a great cause of concern. She was not

alone in her fear and concerns like hers had been an important reason to found the funeral support group that would provide a ritual expert well-versed in the management of death.

Debating death

I picked up Ma Shwe who had decided to attend the monthly meeting of the funerary support group on her mother's behalf. It was 8pm and darkness covered the road. The weak front light of my motorbike was not strong enough to compensate for the absence of street lights and only illuminated the immediate area ahead of us. With Ma Shwe's daughter, Soe Kay Thi Lin, squeezed in-between us on the bike, I left the paved main road and entered a small dirt path; cut and trampled in the middle of shrubs. The meeting was held at a housing compound behind a home supplies store. It was after opening hours and the large, iron gate to the right hand side of the store was locked. The only access to the gated property was through the narrow dirt path on the left side of the store that the people living behind the store had cut into the woods. I found it hard to keep the bike upright and it was rocking to the right and left; our legs were scratched in the shrubs. On the last meters of the path I had to balance the bike on wooden planks that were laid out across a short, muddy pot hole in the path. Ma Shwe was filled with indignation that I was not able to hold the motorbike steadier at the low speed that I was driving at and questioned from the back whether I at all knew how to drive a motorbike. Finally, the supply store lay behind us and we rode across the gravel square towards the row-house like compound on the other side of the square.

Loud music greeted us from afar. There were eight studio-like attached houses. A narrow concrete platform outside the houses provided a space to sit and linger. Each house had one glass-blinded window in the front and bricks underneath the roof that allowed for ventilation and light to pass through. The paint of the houses was flaking off in many spots, it had been a while

since it last had been refreshed. Small flags strung up on a thread with advertisement for a beer company were running from one house to the next. Shoes, empty dishes, toys and the packaging of snacks and instant noodles were strewn outside the houses. A bicycle was sitting upside down in front of one of the houses, both wheels had been removed. I parked the motorbike and as soon as I got off a middle-aged man who lived in my neighborhood pulled me into one of the houses.

There were eight men sitting in the middle of the room on the floor. I had seen all of them before, but knew the names of only two or three. A bed, shelf and some boxes for storage were set up against the walls. The back door led to the outside where the cooking area was. The muted satellite TV showed images from the elections taking place in Myanmar. People were interviewed outside the office of the National League for Democracy in Yangon, Aung San Suu Kyi's party. The flamboyant newscaster with long, curly hair and in a slick business suit was in stark contrast to the appearance of all the men in the room. Some were wearing shorts, others were wearing longyis. Their shirts were clean, but most of them were old and ragged. Two of the men were shirtless. Their skins were sun-burnt, their bodies lean and muscular, many had hand-rolled cigarettes hanging from the corner of their mouths, others had small pouches of betel nut resting in their cheeks. The smell of cigarettes, betel, soap and alcohol wafted through the room. All the men earned their livelihoods through demanding physical labor, in the construction industry or on plantations. For these men, migration to Thailand had meant moving from the bottom of the working class in Myanmar, to the middle ranks of the working class in Thailand. Class relations were an intricate topic among migrants. Few migrants moved economically from working to middle class. Some migrants though, as discussed in the first chapter, moved socially from working to middle class through white collar work such as office work. Class stratifications were burgeoning in Thailand.

One of the men ordered Aung Moe Hein to pour me a cold drink. An ice cooler and bottles of orange, red and green Fanta were sitting on the floor and Aung Moe Hein poured me a cup of orange Fanta. U Myo Hlaing turned to me and asked whether I had come alone. Ma Shwe had disappeared into one of the other houses when we arrived to hang out with a friend of hers. I turned to my neighbor, U Myo Hlaing, and asked whether there were other female members in the group. He shook his head and told me that Daw Tin May was the only female member. Women were busy with other things like cooking and had no time to become a member he informed me. Men and women mingled comfortably at most times and any woman participating in the meeting would have been as welcome as all the other male members to share her opinion. Gender separation, however, was an ubiquitous part of life and domestic responsibilities, looking after children, and preparing all the meals was the responsibility of women. These tasks required most of their time after work and made it factually impossible for women to join this or other like-minded organizations.

A large piece of paper on the wall announced the agenda of the meeting of the funerary support group. It listed the income and expenses from the last couple of months. A few more men entered and by the time the meeting began there were 14 men in the room. Ma Shwe poked her head into the door for a second, but immediately left again. I could hear her daughter shout outside while playing with other children.

Formalizing support

The meeting was led by Ko Kyi Maung who was mentioned in the introduction to the chapter. He was the only white-collar worker of the group. He worked as a medic and public health trainer and was the only person in the group professionally employed by a NGO. He had told me before the meeting that he was hesitant to attend all the meetings. Whenever he attended,

he was expected to take over leadership and he believed that his presence altered the decision-making processes of the group. He found that members relied on his opinion too much and he wanted to be sure that everybody participated in the discussion. He opened the meeting by reading from a small booklet. It were the statutes of the migrant worker support organization 35 minutes down route 4. The other organization existed for a longer time and on their way to increased professionalism the funerary support group wanted to establish their own bylaws, based on those of the other group. The next 30 minutes of the discussion centered around the question which of the bylaws to adapt and which ones to forgo.

The first point of discussion was the financial support given to the families of group members in case of death. Everybody agreed that all the expenses of the potential funerals of each group member should be covered fully. The next point on the agenda was the financial support given to families of deceased migrants not affiliated with the group. Everybody agreed that it was their duty to help others in times of need. In addition, everybody agreed that it was different to act as an individual or to act as an organization. The organization had been founded to offer (financial) support to its members and in order to allow for that they needed to increase their budget. Nearly all migrant families were most of the time strapped for cash, in particular when unexpected events such as funerals needed to be financed. Providing for all these cases would make it impossible to fulfill the goals of the organization.

I was impressed by the vivaciousness of the debate. Ko Kyi Maung's remark before the meeting and my attendance at meetings of other organizations in the past had led me to believe that members would be shy to participate. This was not the case at all. Opinions were exchanged freely and oftentimes people cut each other off to voice their point of views. I had not encountered a similarly lively debate anywhere else. I had attended many meetings at OFM that

was run by professionals and not volunteers like this group. The meetings there were all dominated by the reigning patriarch, the managing director, who often asked for alternative viewpoints. He, however, had not instilled the confidence in his employees to actually voice their opinions. Many told me during private conversations that they initially had tried to engage the managing director in discussions, but he only turned angry when people shared alternative opinions. The employees of that organization had learned to deal with disagreement through silence. Social hierarchies based on gender, age and educational status often appeared rigid and I had witnessed few moments where they constructively had been overcome. This meeting was one of those instances.

Everybody addressed Ko Kyi Maung with the term teacher; a term that expressed respect and at the same time created a hierarchy between the educated person in the room and everybody else. Ko Kyi Maung successfully managed to downplay the authority imbued in the term and had created a fruitful space for discussion and dissent. The goal was to seek a consensus among all the members present. This was a challenge, but in the end it was unanimously decided not to provide any financial support to non-member families in need. The next point of debate was the financial support members would receive in cases of hospitalization. This point, an important reason for many to have joined the organization, was contentious as well. Most members had health insurance and they only needed to pay 30 THB a day for staying in the hospital. The money given out by the funerary organization was intended to compensate for the loss of income that their families would suffer. All the men at the meeting were the breadwinners of their families and their absence would mean a painful reduction of the family income. It was finally agreed that for a two-day stay they would be compensated with 1500 THB and from then on they would receive 100 THB a day. Ko Kyi Maung ended the discussion of the financial issues by

sharing the amount of their current savings: 18 000 THB. He reminded everybody to pay their dues and with formally 40 listed members, they soon should be able to have a more comfortable budgetary cushion.

Aung Moe Hein then took out a plastic bag with black shirts and passed them around. The group had printed their own shirts and in Burmese and Thai it read "Migrant worker support organization" on the front and back of the shirt. Next, Aung Moe Hein raised the issue whether they should look for housing to rent or a place to build a house for the organization. I was amazed at this turn of events. I had believed that this group did not fetishize the professional facade of organizational life. The meeting adjourned without a decision regarding the housing matter.

After the meeting Aung Moe Hein explained to me that it was important to have their own space as an organization. There were three organizations in town who worked on behalf of migrants. OFM was staffed by paid professionals. Then there was the group that had formed around the library that was run by volunteers. They had made great strides in fund-raising since they had their own building that had increased their public visibility and presence. Aung Moe Hein argued understandably that they needed a physical space where they could exhibit their work. I carefully asked what aspects of their work they would exhibit and he responded that they could showcase photos of funerals that they had organized. Furthermore, it was more professional to meet with the families of deceased persons in a space designated for this purpose only.

The formation of the funerary support group had been welcomed by the local authorities. Their founding relieved the local authorities off the burden to need to take care of (unclaimed) dead migrants or the hassle of needing to communicate with migrants' families who did not

speak Thai and did not know who to turn to for support. The local government had offered modest financial support to the funerary support group that they now wanted to use towards building their own office.

The deaths of migrants created an opportunity for other migrants to organize and to remain in charge of their own affairs. Death is a powerful reason to make time in their busy lives to create community. The group of migrants introduced above has seized the opportunity to organize for their own good and the benefits of the migrant community-at-large. None of the men were involved in similar groups in their home towns in Myanmar. It was only in exile that they saw the need to built and maintain infrastructure that benefited all migrants. Despite their limited resources, they have demonstrated care and concern for each other and their beliefs about their lives and death. The active support of the local government in this case, however, did not conceal the fact, that the expansion of the formal structures of the group were dependent on tacit approval of governing structures. While within the organizational setting migrants can act independently of government oversight, their existence and public life was only possible when sanctioned officially.

Unexpected transitions

It was not long after this meeting that I was invited to attend another funeral. I had attended multiple funerals, my camera made my presence valuable. I was usually asked to take photos on behalf of the funerary support group, but also for families of deceased persons. The phone cameras of the few people who owned such, did not meet the quality of my digital camera, a commodity owned by hardly anybody. Upon arrival at Ma Shwe's house in the morning, she told me that a funeral would be held in the afternoon. She asked whether I could bring my camera. I asked, whether I knew the person who had died or their family. Ma Shwe shook her

head and told me that a four-year old child had died. A friend of hers and close acquaintance of the family had called her to ask whether I could come to the funeral to take photos. The family was not having the usual three-day wake, but buried their son immediately.

Wakes, as the one described in the introduction of the chapter, were commonly held before most funerals. Just as it had been an opportunity for me, friends and family to say good bye to U Zaw Aung, it also was an opportunity for the family to have time to organize the funeral. The little boy though had died a violent death, these were referred to as raw/green deaths. As was the case with other premature, violent deaths, he was buried without holding a wake.

In an ethnographic account of death and funerals in Arakan state (Myanmar), de Mersan (2012) distinguished between the life-principle, called လိဒ်ပြာ *(lei pya)* from physical remains of the body, emphasizing the distinction between material and immaterial aspects of bodies. The term လိဒ်ပြာ *(lei pya)* can literally be translated as butterfly. Its meaning though was similar to the concept of mind or soul, a matter that transcended corporeality and would live on in a different bodily manifestation after death. The distinction between the physical remains and immaterial aspects of bodies came to the fore in moments of deaths and tending to corpses. Funerary rites served to facilitate the separation of material and immaterial aspects of bodies. In cases of violent deaths, the act of separation was more precarious and urgent. The butterfly needed to find its way into a different body and if the funeral would be held later, there were dangers of it settling in the body of a family member and causing further deaths. The same underlying epistemological principles that guided funerals in Arakan state, continued to remain valid among Buddhist migrants in Thailand.

This was the second premature death of a child during my stay that I knew of. Many parents were faced with the decision to stay at home and tend to their children or to go to work to earn money and leave their children often unattended or looked after by older siblings. Many families decided that husband and wife should work, making the most of their time in Thailand. This unfortunately at times resulted in fatal consequences for the unattended children. The first death of a two-year old child had been caused by the boy drinking an entire bottle of shampoo while his parents were at work. This time, the four-year old boy had drowned while playing in a fountain.

We entered the temple grounds through the arch along the main road. Usually, after the three-day wake at the monastery at the other end of the town, corpses were moved to the grounds of this temple. The gate was splendidly decorated in gold and caught the eyes of most passers-by; the temple though was tucked away at the end of a narrow side lane. It was a dead-end road and not many people found their way past the public school at the corner of the main road. I slowed the motorbike down while driving over the speed-bumps on the small side lane. A statue of a standing Buddha greeted us in the middle of the road, at the center of a small roundabout. The temple grounds opened up on a stretch of land to the right and left of the road. There was a big, imposing hall on the right hand side filled with people dressed in black. I turned my head and asked Ma Shwe whether this was the funeral we were going to. She shook her head and pointed to a smaller hall further down the road. This first funeral was the funeral of a Thai person and it had been assigned the more prominent spot; highlighting the relationship and hierarchies between the local and migrant community. We parked the motorbike in the shade of a tree and walked across the lawn to the smaller funeral hall. The sun tried to break through the clouds and it was getting hotter fast.

A white casket greeted us under the roof of the hall. It was decorated with colorful balloons, a blinking chain of small lights and plastic flower arrangements. Two open bottles of soft drinks, a bottle of water, fried eggs on a plate and a reel with white cotton thread sat next to the plastic flowers. A photo of the little boy in a three-piece suit with a bow tie was attached to the side of the coffin. Next to the photo was a sign that shared the name and age of the dead boy with attendees. A coconut and a machete lay underneath the coffin in a plastic bag. Approximately 80 people were gathered in small groups around the casket, standing or sitting on the stone benches that faced the stage where later the monks would come to chant.

We were welcomed by a friend of Ma Shwe's. Daw Wa Wa was in her early forties and exuded the warm charm of many women her age. Her long hair was tied into a bun at the back of her head. She wore a beige longyi, with an Indonesian batik-style pattern, around her round hips and a faded blouse covered her upper body. She was a relative of the dead boy and I had chatted with her many times. She held a piece of lemon in her hand that she sniffed at once in a while to stifle her tears. Her broad southern accent made me feel welcome instantly. I hugged her. Although few people hugged each other, close bodily contact among members of the same sex was common and not frowned upon. In return, she pushed a bottle of orange juice into my hand and asked whether I had eaten already. I nodded and responded that I was full. She asked a second time, making sure that I was not only being polite and pointed to trays of food standing on a table behind the casket.

Generosity was a defining part of the self-conception that many migrants held of themselves. Not extending one's hospitality to guests indicated a heavily strained personal relationship, the only justification for inhospitable behavior. At a funeral, generosity and hospitality were even more important than usually; they were moments where community could

be created and displayed (Bonsu and DeBerry-Spence 2008). Providing for others created merit, merit that at the end of the funeral would be transferred to the dead boy. If having accrued enough merit, rebirth could be overcome and nirvana could be achieved, a feat that could only be accomplished by monks. For those still trapped in the cycle of rebirth, merit played an important role in the position they would be reborn in during their next lives.

Carbine (2007) has argued that care underlies most Buddhist activities and becomes particularly salient in practices surrounding death. Care is expressed for each other, but also for Buddhism itself and in the end is an important force in maintaining and passing on Buddhist doctrine. Making merit and accruing positive karma were important aspects in creating and sustaining networks of care during times of death. Networks of care extended from family members to those attending the funeral and the other way round. It was as important for family members of deceased, to demonstrate their generosity towards attendees, as it was for the guests attending the funeral to generously support the family of the deceased. By expressing care and community, death rituals could serve to provide solace for those left behind (Lindberg Falk 2010).

Ma Shwe pulled a 100 THB bill note from her small purse, close to 1/3 of the average daily income of an average migrant. She placed it into a bronze bowl that stood in-between two candles at the foot end of the casket. I followed her example and took out 100 THB from my wallet that I placed in the bowl. Others handed their donations to a woman sitting at a table who kept track of the names of people who donated money. The woman at the table had looked up while I talked to Daw Wa Wa and called me over. She was curious to find out who I was. I sat down next to her and while we chatted a number of people stopped at the table to hand over donations or to ask who the parents of the dead boy were. Most attendees did not know the

family, but it was their opportunity to show support and to accrue merit for the family of a fellow migrant.

Ma Shwe pointed to one of the benches and suggested that we could sit there together. She was holding incense, three small white candles and a white paper flower. I asked her where she had gotten those items and she pointed to the foot end of the casket. Three trays were sitting on the floor: one tray with incense and candles, one tray with white paper flowers and a third tray with all the ingredients for making betel nut: leaves, betel nuts, lime and tobacco. The candles, paper flowers and incense constituted integral items for sending a dead body on its final journey. The ingredients for betel nuts embodied the hospitality of the hosts. Betel nut was a central ingredient of any social event and was as important as offering food and drinks.

I watched the father of the dead boy walk through the aisle of the benches, measuring a thin, white thread against the length of his other children and tearing pieces off the reel. Each thread symbolized one family member and by tearing the thread off the reel, the ties between the dead boy and his remaining family members were severed. I listened to the conversations around us. Some groups of people chatted about the weather, others about work, others talked about the death of the boy. The mother of the dead boy sat across the aisle from me. Our eyes met and she moved her hand toward her lips, gesturing eating and silently her mouth formed the question whether I had eaten already. The father, after having finished preparing the threads, placed soy milk and coke onto the stage, a donation for the monks on behalf of his dead son.

U Hla Zaw from the funeral organization squatted next to the coffin and carefully shaved some skin off the coconut. He had emerged as the ritual expert among the group members. He was in charge of making sure that rituals were performed in the right order and that no important steps were forgotten. In Myanmar, he had not been involved in organizing funerals and had

never before acted as a ritual specialist. He had discovered this role for himself in Thailand. His main qualification was his long-time residence in Thailand, nearing 20 years and his advanced Thai skills. As I had found out in conversations, few people thought about the meanings of the different ritual acts and even fewer people felt confident to perform them. U Hla Zaw had seized the opportunity to fill the void. His ascent as ritual expert would have been unlikely in Myanmar, where social hierarchies were often rigid and difficult to overcome. He was confident in his role as ritual expert and his self-assurance made everybody else feel at ease. He had explained the meanings behind the different ritual acts to me.

U Hla Zaw was skilled in his day/night job as rubber plantation worker, but his professional expertise garnered him little respect or authority among other migrants of whom many were equally skilled. His role as ritual expert though, set him apart from other migrants. He effectively bridged the often glaring gaps (of communication) between migrants from Myanmar and Thais. Furthermore, he authoritatively provided guidance and instructions at funerals that provided him with unprecedented power over other migrants. He was in a position to reinforce and to shape rituals that were taken for granted at funerals in Myanmar, but that had become vulnerable in Thailand.

Capturing death

Ma Shwe poked me in the side and asked whether I had taken photos already. I shook my head and she looked at me asking what I was waiting for. Capturing and objectifying the death of a four-year old child through the lens of my camera seemed inappropriate and was in violation of my personal funeral script: trying to remain invisible by performing respectful silence. I knew from past experiences at funerals that it was not the right script to enact here, people's

interactions were unrestricted and conversations touched on all kinds of topics. There were few differences between casual conversations at the market and at funerals.

Reluctantly, I got up and took a few shots of the casket from a safe distance. U Hla Zaw spotted me and approached me to ask whether I could take photos of the family in front of the casket. I nodded and followed him to the coffin. The dead boy had three sisters who now all squatted at the side of the coffin; I recognized one of the girls from the primary school next to my house. The mother, father and grandmother all lined up next to the photo of the dead boy. It was a tragic family portrait. The three girls and grandmother were visibly excited at the prospect of having their photo taken and smiled. The sunken eyes of the mother and father stared into the lens of the camera and their grief is palpable on the image that I captured in this second. I rapidly took three photos. The parents walked away, but the grandmother pushed the older brother next to the coffin, he had not wanted to be in the earlier photos. She asked whether I could take another photo. The boy, maybe six years old wore a beige-brown buttoned-up shirt and had a mischievous, playful smile that only a child could have at a funeral.

Sitting back down, I pointed out to Ma Shwe that nobody was crying. Dumbstruck she looked at me and asked whether I felt like crying. Jokingly she told me that it was okay to cry if I felt like it. I shook my head and said that where I was from, people usually would cry and display their grief in public. She resolutely shook her head and said that people here would cry at home. I had observed at other funerals as well that grief was rarely displayed in public and up to the moment where the casket was burned, the mood was largely relaxed. I later learned that emotions could hold the butterfly spirit back from departure. Emotions like crying were a manifestation of the attachment family or friends continued to experience towards the little boy. If the spirit felt the attachment it would not be able to move on.

Ma Shwe asked Daw Wa Wa and me whether we wanted to accompany her to pray at the other side of the temple grounds. On the way there, I asked Daw Wa Wa whether this funeral was similar to funerals in her home town in Dawei. She shook her head and said it was very different. I encouraged her to say more about the differences and she responded that in Dawei everybody would come to the funeral, the whole of the community would show up. I responded that I thought that a remarkable number of people had turned up to this funeral. She again shook her head and said that it was nothing compared to funerals in Dawei. I was surprised at her remark. Many migrants decried that there was no tangible community in Khuan Charoen. People lived widely dispersed and there were few occasions where migrants had the opportunity to come together in public. I had interpreted the gathering at the funeral as a manifestation of a supportive migrant community. In contrast, the funeral mostly reflected the absence of community to Daw Wa Wa.

After finishing their prayers, we followed the three monks that were walking across the lawn back to the funeral hall. The appearance of the monks indicated that the formal ceremony was about to start. A few people had already taken seats on the benches and the floors. A woman walked from person to person, giving everybody the chance to place some money into a glass of water that she carried in a slightly larger bowl. Throwing the coins into the water was perceived as having a protective function; it kept dangers away from the living. Ma Shwe threw a 5 THB coin into the water and afterward touched it. I followed her example, took a 10 THB coin from my wallet, placed it into the water and lightly touched the water. My neighbor did not have any money on her and I handed her a coin to put into the water.

Four monks climbed up on stage and sat down in their dark yellow robes. U Hla Zaw took a reel with white cotton thread from the top of the coffin, attached the end of the thread to

the coffin and with the help of U Myo Hlaing slowly pulled the reel across the hall towards the stage. He handed the reel to the monk sitting on the far left side of the stage. The wall fan was buzzing over their heads and monotonously moved from the right to the left and back. Two of the monks looked like they were in their late 80's while the other two monks appeared to be in their thirties. A woman started chanting in Burmese and slowly the audience joined in. In unison, the audience chanted together and ended the chant by prostrating. The monks started to deliver the sermon Thai. An exchange between the monks and the audience ensued. It was a bi-lingual exchange, the monks chanted in Thai and the audience responded in Burmese.

I turned to Ma Shwe and in a hushed voice asked her whether people understood what the monks said. She shook her head and whispered back that people were familiar with the chants in Burmese and just responded what they would have said facing Burmese-speaking monks. The atmosphere continued to be relaxed and the mutual incomprehension gave the event a bizarre feel. In-between the silence of the chants a young man in his twenties commented that the oldest monk on the stage did not have any teeth left and the whole audience burst out laughing.

Tears for departure

At the end of the chant, the mother of the dead boy and his siblings got up and handed a donation to the monks. The final chant was dedicated to sharing the merit the family had gathered with their dead son. The monks assed the thread from the reel from one monk to the next, all of them holding on to the thread. The only sound audible was U Hla Zaw rushing to take the thread from the monks and wrapping it back up onto the spool. This was the final moment of departure for the boy's butterfly soul: the thread was detached from the coffin, symbolizing the release of the soul into its next life. The last presence of the dead boy was gone.

Although the boy's final departure had been enacted, his family would continue to renew their ties with their son. Holt (2007) characterized the relationship that the living maintain with the dead in many groups whose epistemologies and ontologies have been deeply influenced by Buddhism as "gone but not departed"(326). While it is arguable whether the boy is considered "not departed," the responsibilities and ties between his family and the dead boy have not come to an end with his death. The funeral will only be considered complete when monks will have been invited for a sermon seven days after the death. Many families invite monks again after three months and the first anniversary of the death. Holt has argued that ensuring merit for the dead is the ultimate marker of family relations among Buddhists (2007: 343).

On the 5th anniversary of the death of Ma Shwe's husband, she sponsored lunch for children in a primary school. The glow on her face during the event indicated her pleasure and the importance she assigned to feeding 90 children on behalf of her deceased husband. All the merit accrued would be transferred to him.

Meanwhile, three members of the funerary support group had cleared the plastic flowers, fried eggs and bottles with drinks off the coffin. U Hla Zaw put on rubber gloves and announced that he was going to open the coffin. The atmosphere turned from relaxed to frantic. People pushed and shoved their way to the coffin to take a last look at the corpse. After what seemed like only a few seconds, 10 men picked up the coffin and started to carry it toward the furnace. The mother and sisters of the dead boy started to wail heart-breakingly. Their grief was no longer a danger to the departure of the soul of the boy and the tears that had been held back for the last hours streamed uncontrollably down their faces.

The coffin-bearers walked in fast pace over to the furnace, bouncing the coffin on their shoulders into the air. A shiny, silver tower housed the furnace underneath a roof that was held

up by four pillars. A few meters in front of the furnace the coffin-bearers stopped and started turning in circles and spinning the coffin. Their goal was to disorient the butterfly soul, so it would not be able to find his way back to this life, but rather would seek a different body elsewhere. It was time for the butterfly soul to move on and it was the responsibility of the coffin-bearers to facilitate the process.

The coffin was lowered onto a stand in front of the furnace; the silver flap of the furnace already opened and the sound of lingering flames quietly crackling. U Hla Zaw removed the cover of the coffin again, placed a 10 THB coin in-between the lips of the corpse; this money would serve to pay the fare into his next life. He cut the coconut open with the machete, poured the juice over the face of the boy as a gesture of cleansing and dropped the shell into the coffin. People pushed their way to the coffin to leave their paper flowers, incenses and candles in the coffin; providing contributions of aesthetic value for the next life. The frantic sense that earlier had seized the atmosphere continued to be felt in the shouting, shuffling and pushing towards the coffin.

The mother of the dead boy stood in front of me when she collapsed. Bystanders caught her in time and carried her away from the pushing and screaming masses. As soon as the last guests had put their gifts into the coffin, it was pushed into the furnace. The front lid of the furnace remained open until most people had moved around the furnace to its backside. On a chair, a bowl of water was sitting that everybody washed their hands in. The front lid was closed, the back lid opened and the fire finally fully turned on. The gazes of many guests were fixated on the coffin in the flames. U Hla Zaw encouraged me to watch from closer by as well. Reluctantly I shook my head, while watching the black, spiral smoke meeting the clouds and and inhaling the

sweet smell that slowly spread through the air. Many guests left after the burning of the corpse, but throughout the afternoon more guests continued to arrive.

Emergent futures – here and after

The funeral, compared to other social events such as weddings or name-giving ceremonies, stood out in a unique way. It was one of the few events I attended in Thai public space that remained undisturbed and largely unregulated by Thai (public officials). While the event had been relegated to the remote area of the temple grounds, migrants had the opportunity to (re-)create a ritual event that maintained their own self-conception. Individuals like U Hla Zaw have seized the opportunity to gain new skills and to emerge as experts in ritual forms thereby turning funerals into events that (re-)produce social life as envisioned by migrants themselves and not prescribed by others. Funerals organized in exile might not reproduce social life identical to social lives at home as remembered by migrants, but they opened possibilities for social interactions that were creative and censored mostly by self-imposed social taboos and norms. Migrants' presence continued to be reliant on the acquiescence of the Thai public, but death nevertheless has opened up unequaled spaces for migrants to maintain cultural and material literacy.

U Hla Zaw and others from the funerary support group have taken it upon themselves to provide continuity of place that many migrants wish for. They consider it their responsibility to support others in helping to achieve their ultimate goals: the transition into their next lives. Without the infrastructural support, the efforts of many migrants to earn more money in this life time to enable better lives in the next, might be in vain. The funerary support group does not provide support for this transition, but also provides an avenue for migrants to remain engaged in envisioning a productive future during their current life times. Death and funerals have opened

up possibilities to come together, learn and teach about embodied knowledge that is rooted in their common pasts in Myanmar.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation began by introducing and contextualizing the lives of labor migrants from Myanmar in Thailand. The overall focus has been on the experience of place and time among these migrants, explored through detailed, ethnographic episodes. The thematic organization of the chapters mirrors reflections by migrants: thoughts about the past, the present and the future. The considerable ethnographic detail is not always offset with larger, contextual information. This is a deliberate attempt to share specific, ethnographic material of particular moments that bear relevance to the lives-at-large of migrants, but that are unique. I have chosen to present them as singular events rather than presenting them as one event in a larger assembly of occurrences. This was to avoid compromising the power of a detailed presentation that might get lost when placed in larger contextual frameworks.

A key part of my argument has been made that place and time are inextricably linked and cannot be understood independently of each other. I developed this argument by suggesting that there is a distinction between place and non-place. Place is a site in which we choose to invest; contrastingly, non-place is a site which we do not develop meaningful ties with, by choice. The respective chapters illustrated many reasons why one might not want to develop meaningful ties to place, despite living there for the long-term. In chapter four, Soe Thinza for example noted how the unitary focus on work became overwhelming in many migrants lives and left little room for engaging in any other more enjoyable activities. If one sees place foremost through one activity that is mostly associated with exhaustion and fatigue - work - then a hesitant stance towards investing into this very site emotionally is understandable.

Place has often been highlighted as an important ground on which for example regional, national or other identities can be formulated (Basso 1996). In a similar vein, transnational labor

migrants have often been described through their ties to at least two different places (Clifford 1997, Glick Schiller et al. 1992). In contrast to this literature, non-place as conceptualized in this dissertation does not provide a common source of identification for people from Myanmar. The category of migrant was rarely, if ever, employed by mobile workers to express who they were. Merely living and working outside their home country and therefore being absorbed into a category that likewise describes all of them was not a meaningful exercise of self-recognition. Despite the hesitation to employ the term migrant for self-recognition, throughout this dissertation I argued that the term migrant nevertheless emerges as a meaningful descriptive category. Migrants share a common, subjective temporal orientation - it is the strong focus on the future and the feelings of empowerment that result from it that migrants share and highly value. The temporal frame that interpretations of the future are subjected to are not limited to understandings of life and death as finite categories. The future extends into lives that cannot be known yet, but that one works to build in the present. Thus, the term migrant as defined through a common temporal perspective provides a shared platform of description, albeit a characterization that is not self employed by migrants.

This dissertation has also looked at the role that structural conditions and individual orientations play in shaping migrants experiences in Thailand. The public imagination about Myanmar migrants in Thailand is captured by reports of abuse and exploitation. More than a decade ago trafficking of sex workers was in the news and perceived as an urgent issue (Beyrer 2001, Grundy-Warr et al. 1996); over the last few years trafficking and forced captivity of fishermen has emerged as the prominent topic that requires urgent attention (Farrelly 2012, Seltzer 2013). These reports without doubt hold true for those unfortunate migrants trapped in these deplorable situations. The image of the abused migrant though has arguably received such

prominent treatment as an extension of the portrayal of the generally abused citizen of Myanmar (Fink 2009, Skidmore 2004). The violent suppression of the student demonstrations in 1988 that turned the worlds attention to Myanmar have coined the way most developments related to Myanmar people have been viewed since. Structural conditions such as legal regulations, government implementations, and employment structures no doubt play an important role in determining the work conditions of migrants as illustrated in chapter five. It is often forgotten, however, that work conditions are not the only factor that define in how far migrants are content with their lives. As I have illustrated for example in chapter three, it is often the failure to carry out leisure activities outside work that makes life in Thailand unfulfilled and boring. This argument should not be considered a case against the importance of structural frameworks. It, however, should be read as a call to balance portrayals of migrants' lives by taking into account factors other than governmental regulations and their impact. Scholarly works about Myanmar's migrant workers rarely ever acknowledge that it is not only regulatory power structures that influence migrant workers lives. Power relations between migrants structure relationships and have an effect not only upon interactions among migrants, but also can change how others outside the group see migrants, as argued in chapter two.

One dyadic theme that emerges from the ethnographic episodes is the desire for a strong communal life and the void that is experienced as its implementation falls short in the eyes of many migrants. I considered the strong show of migrants at events like sermons, annual holidays, name-giving ceremonies or funerals an embodiment of vivid community life. In general, I experienced a strong social cohesion and supportive atmosphere among migrants. The sheer number of migrants from Myanmar in Phang Nga province created a support network, in my eyes. I rarely ever for example faced communication problems due to my lack of Thai skills;

wherever I went a Burmese-speaking migrant would be at hand to mediate the different linguistic worlds. Notwithstanding my interpretation of these networks as expressions of community, most migrants perceived of a meaningful community life as fundamentally different. In their eyes, meaningful community life meant to be able to leave ones house without fear of conflict. According to migrants in Khuan Charoen, there was a small town not far where migrants were able to live as envisioned. So many migrants lived there that encountering Thais on the street was unusual. To migrants, thus, this fear of conflict was embodied by Thais. Thinking about implications of this insight for applied developmental work, we could argue that there is a need for creating spaces in which Thais and Myanmar migrant workers are able to meet and get to know each other under safe conditions. One such place where this is already possible is public schools in Thailand. Irrespective of their legal status, children of migrants can attend public schools which can be a suitable site for overcoming fear and stereotypes of each other. Currently, however, schools represent this fear to many migrant parents as they feel powerless without appropriate language skills and few means to understand learning environments and interactions between teachers and students. Moreover, interventionist measures by development experts should be complemented to speak to a broader range of migrants. Human rights trainings are a common interventionist tool of empowerment applied developmental work (Merry 2006), as they were in my field site. In addition to providing opportunities to learn about legal frameworks, they bring migrants together for purposes other than work. Human rights education though appeals to a limited number of migrants. The research for this dissertation suggests that it would be beneficial to add a broader array of activities, for example recreational activities that many migrants cannot afford to engage in otherwise. While it can be argued that it is not the responsibility of development professionals to provide entertainment to migrants, this

dissertation suggests that creating safe spaces in which migrants can meet and interact can help overcome social isolation that many (young) migrants experience and that has a greater impact on their lives than for example work-place abuse.

The future and the potential that it represents have emerged as the most crucial analytical concern of this dissertation. While some scholars have argued that migration as a future-oriented process is an act of hope (Pine 2014), I believe that this characterization does not capture the certainty with which migrants know that there is change in their future. I struggled to understand that investments into the future needed to be read as such: donations to monks and temples for example were not only a highly visible act of generosity they were also one of the many steps to a better life in the future. Often, these donations were at the expense of, at least in my opinion, other important potential expenditures: school fees, health care costs or saving up for other unforeseeable urgent needs. The short-term benefits of these possible expenses though paled at the potential of rebirth into a different socio-economic position - the future ultimately imagined and worked for. When conceptualizing future in this way, these investments become radical tool of empowerment that speak to the patience that such long-term investments require. This future connects migrants to their homes in Myanmar. While most migrants hoped to return to Myanmar before their deaths, I never heard about the possibility of rebirth anywhere outside Myanmar. A close informant who died during the first half of my fieldwork had laughed when I asked whether one would be reborn in Thailand if one died there. There was no doubt in his mind that this was not a possibility. Although his untimely death prevented him from returning to Myanmar, I trust that upon rebirth he will return to Myanmar.

The future is not only a source of empowerment, but also a bridge to the past. Life in Myanmar was marked by economic struggles for many migrants. Despite these challenges, life

in Myanmar provided opportunities as well that are unattainable in Thailand. Living away from one's children or family is a difficult choice to make, but the outlook of a different future justifies decisions made in the past. While the past serves as a nostalgic source of inspiration, very few migrants were willing to return to their past struggles. The wait for the future in the end is the wait for living elsewhere - at home in Myanmar again.

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