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Migrating Into Tourist Business.

Agency and Embeddedness of Ethnic Minority Street
Vendors in Thailand

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 MOTIVATION AND RATIONALE

I gained my first fieldwork experiences in Thailand in an Akha ethnic minority village in 2006 in the context of my master thesis exploring the question of perception of tourists and tourism by villagers. One of the main and, for me, quite surprising results was that ethnic minority tourism in the village – despite being a daily occurrence – played a less important role for Akha villagers than expected, especially in the light of other processes and events such as agricultural transformations, issues of citizenship, and above all, migration into urban areas (Trupp 2014a). I spent the entire time of that research stay in minority villages in Northern Thailand and the northern city of Chiang Mai where my host university institution was located. I avoided the capital city Bangkok and only stayed there to pick up my research permit, check out some libraries, and to return to the airport. Also, I had no motivation to visit Thailand's famous beach areas along the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand. At the time, I felt that a researcher pursuing studies on highland minorities should work and physically be present in Thailand's hill and village areas. Like many other students and scholars in this field, I was more attracted to the highlands than to crowded cities or mass tourist beach destinations. Toyota (1999) once stated that hardly any research on ethnic minorities in Thai urban contexts exists because anthropologists (and perhaps also social geographers with an interest in ethnic minority studies) have been inclined to consider it their task to gather information from 'less spoiled' villages and to record it while it lasts (p. 2). However, due to the evidence provided by research participants in the villages and my own observations in the context of subsequent visits to Thailand, I realized that questions of urban-based ethnic minorities and city-directed migration is an interesting yet under-researched field of enquiry, especially in the Thai context.

I eventually decided to study the migration of self-employed Akha souvenir sellers¹ into Thailand's urban tourist areas and the expansion of Akha souvenir business over time and space. The core interest hereby lies in analyzing and understanding structural

¹ In this thesis I use the terms souvenir sellers, street vendors, micro-entrepreneurs, ethnic minority entrepreneurs, and own-account workers interchangeably in order to refer to self-employed Akha souvenir sellers in Thailand's urban and beachside destinations. Refer to chapter 2.1 for further term clarifications and chapter 6 for further distinctions within the field of Akha micro-entrepreneurs.

conditions and strategies as well as everyday practices that shape economic action of Akha micro-entrepreneurs. The study is relevant from a social and political perspective entering fields of tourism, migration, and urban studies.

First, the work and everyday life experiences of Akha own-account workers are situated at the intersection of tourism and migration, the two most central social and economic phenomena of contemporary society (Hall and Williams 2002). The areas of sale of Akha internal migrants, such as the famous traveler Khaosan road in Bangkok or the notorious Walking Street in Patong on Phuket Island, have become interfaces between ethnic minority entrepreneurs and a wider economy consisting of national and international travelers, expatriates, other business owners and workers, officials, and various members of Thai mainstream society.

Second, due to their active involvement in tourism production and distribution processes along the roads of international urban tourist centers, Akha vendors have become highly visible. While most urban-based hilltribes² as well as other actors of the informal sector remain mostly invisible to visitors and other outsiders, this particular migrant group stands out visually and has become an integral feature of Thailand's urban and beachside tourist centers. Eye-catching female Akha souvenir sellers, often wearing colorful and richly decorated hats, have become part of an informal sector that is linked to the global tourism economy.

Moreover, the ethnic minority group of the Akha represents the most popular ethnic highland group working in tourist businesses in Thailand's urban and beachside destinations. They prominently feature in tourist media and advertisements in Thailand and international contexts (see figure 1). In a study about "hilltribe postcards from Northern Thailand" Erik Cohen (1992) found that the most commonly used minority names on these postcards were Hmong and Akha. Also, when landing at Suvarnabhumi international airport in Bangkok, visitors waiting for their luggage can spot advertisements by Thailand's national Tourism Organization (TAT) displaying the country's major attractions such as pristine beaches, temples, and markets. One billboard shows an Akha woman working in a rice field, fully dressed in the traditional

² The term 'hilltribes' is an exonym referring to highland ethnic minorities in Thailand and Southeast Asia. See chapter 4.2 for a critical discussion of the term in the Thai context.

Akha silver headdress and costume, which markets a romanticized minority and Akha image that has probably never existed this way. In addition, Akha and their souvenir products can also be found in the context of international tourism and marketing. For example, the 2013 travel catalogue on Asia of the well-known German tour operator *Meier's Weltreisen* embellishes its cover with a woman wearing an Akha headdress, and even while on holiday in Southern France, I encountered a shop in the center of Saint-Tropez selling a souvenir version of an Akha headdress.

FIGURE 1: AKHA TOURISM PROMOTION IN PROVINCIAL TOURISM BROCHURE, BANGKOK INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, AND INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL CATALOGUE



Sources: TAT 2014a; own picture; Meier's Weltreisen 2013

Fourth, by working as colorful ethnic minority street vendors offering souvenirs, they may enhance the 'exotic' image of the city or urban neighborhood. As economic actors in popular travel destinations, they contribute to the production and consumption of urban and tourist places from which both cities and migrants can benefit (Hall and Rath 2007). Migrants are carving out their own niches in the tourism industry by entering into self-employment and/or commodifying some of their cultural features.

There is, however, also another side of the coin. Frequently, such processes of migrant or minority integration are linked with xenophobic stereotypes (re)produced by dominant societies. Economic advancements do not necessarily enhance social status. Furthermore, street vending takes place in a context of competition, risk, and insecurity in informal sectors and often evokes conflicts with authorities (Bhowmik 2005; Etzold 2013).

Sixth, this research on ethnic minority street vendors in Thailand's urban tourist areas represents a highly gendered case study. Based on my own fieldwork material it can be

stated that the vast majority of Akha souvenir vendors are women leaving their husbands and families behind in the villages. In Southeast Asia, women have often been depicted as more autonomous compared to the social and economic positions of women from neighboring regions in South and East Asia (Hayami 2012). Yet, as elsewhere, women in Southeast Asia were traditionally seen to be mainly involved in domestic spheres focusing on housework, child-bearing, and parenting which was segregated from the male-dominated sphere of capitalist production, politics, religious life, and the wider society (King 2008, pp. 197–198). Studies, however, show that changing economic relations can transform cultural constructions of gender (Swain 1993). Yet, despite the meanwhile widely acknowledged fact that as entrepreneurs, women make a valuable contribution to local and national economies around the world in terms of job creation and wealth generation, they are still the largest underrepresented group in studies of entrepreneurship (Halkias 2011).

Finally, this study is located within the field of internal migration studies. Skeldon (2006) identified a dominance of transnational and international migration research agendas, but reminded us that the majority of people who migrate do so within the borders of their country of birth. Elmhirst (2012) criticizes that other forms of mobilities like internal migration mistakenly generate less attention because they seem less central to policy and development concerns related to citizenship or nation building. Yet, “internal migration is more likely to decrease inequality than is international out-migration since the former is less selective, less costly, and less risky than the latter” (Pholphirul 2011, p. 58).

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

It is the aim of this research to conduct a multi-level analysis by exploring the agency and embeddedness of ethnic minority micro-entrepreneurs in social, economic, and political contexts. Current literature predominantly focuses on personal relations as a form of social capital, analyzes structural conditions as opportunity structures in the migrant destination areas or analyzes motivational factors of migration and self-employment. Moreover, in the Thai context, existing research on ethnic minorities remains limited to their highland home regions and the northern city of Chiang Mai. This study attempts to reconstruct Akha urban migration into the souvenir business

over time and space, and to bridge micro, meso, and macro perspectives by synthesizing structure and agency approaches. Such a holistic approach enhances our understanding of ethnic minority incorporation into urban contexts and transforming societies. In particular, this research aims to:

1. *describe and explain the spatial expansion of Akha souvenir businesses in Thailand,*
2. *contribute to ethnic minority studies in the Thai urban context,*
3. *assess the structural obstacles Akha entrepreneurs in the souvenir business are confronted with,*
4. *understand the strategies, everyday practices, and social relations of and between unequally powerful actors,*
5. *contribute to a critical social geography and the structure-agency debate.*

The first two objectives aim at explaining the evolvement of Akha urban migration and the spatial expansion of souvenir businesses over time and space. The study thereby contributes to the neglected research on the phenomenon of urban-based or urban-directed migration of hilltribes in Thailand.

A lot of village-based research on the hilltribes, even especially concerning the Akha people (for example Bernatzik³ 1947; Feingold 1976; Geusau 1983; Kammerer 1986; Cohen 2001; Tooker 2004; Trupp 2014a) has been carried out, but only a few studies (see Toyota 1998 and 1999; Boonyasaranai 2001; Fuji 2010; Ishii 2012) have examined the hilltribes in the urban context. There is research on 'urban hilltribes' available in the field of development studies, which has generally been viewed as part of the "hilltribe problems" or as a result of uneven development (Toyota 1999, p. 2). Existing studies, however, are limited to Chiang Mai only. One of the earliest works by Vatikiotis (1984) focused on the complex issue of the roles minority groups play in urban society and the extent of their assimilation with Thai mainstream society. Mika Toyota (1998, 1999) has written about Akha identity in urban and transnational contexts finding that Akha migrants maintain several identities that enable them to simultaneously link to more than one locality and social setting. Buadaeng, Boonyasaranai and Leepreecha (2002) developed a quantitative and qualitative profile

³ The Austrian anthropologist Hugo Adolf Bernatzik produced the first ethnographic monograph about the Akha people based on field research in the 1930s.

of hilltribe migrants in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai providing an overview on migration motives and fields of occupation. Their research focuses on groups rather than on individuals and neglects the differences and inequalities within the hilltribe groups. A study conducted by Fuengfusakul (2008) explores the networks and strategies of vendors and small entrepreneurs in the Chiang Mai night bazaar. And research in the field of souvenirs, culture, and commodification has explained the dynamics of commercialized arts and has shown how crafts initially produced for the own community were transformed into souvenir products for outsiders (Cohen 1983, 2000). This study goes further by reconstructing migration trajectories of Akha migrant souvenirs over time and space. Their migration and economic activities did not end in Northern Thailand, but have rather expanded towards Thailand's southern tourist destinations, which have not yet been documented. This study aims to enrich existing literature by integrating data from empirical research carried out in urban and tourist areas in the capital city Bangkok and the southern beachside destinations.

Objectives three to five aim at assessing structural obstacles on economic, political, and social levels and at understanding strategies, everyday practices, and social relations of and between unequally powerful actors. The study thereby contributes to a critical social geography and the structure-agency debate.

A comprehensive assessment of ethnic minority entrepreneurs in Thailand's urban and beachside areas needs to integrate structural and action-oriented perspectives. "Often in contemporary qualitative research the emphasis on interactions (and on immediately contextual aspects in relation to interaction) is so strong that it overwhelms or prevents attention to the larger structural conditions" (Strauss 1987, p. 78). In order to understand the dialectic between structure (contextual conditions on social, economic, and politico-institutional levels) and agency (the capacity of people to take action), a theoretical concept is needed which integrates individual and collective action systematically into socio-economic and politico-institutional contexts, and which moreover acknowledges confined opportunities as an everyday reality. The question of agency versus structure or self-determination versus external determination is still unclear and is one of the pivotal issues in the entire debate about ethnic minority enterprise (Jones and Ram 2007, p. 60).

Most of the existing studies and conceptual perspectives do not do justice to the complexity of human action. Generally, street vending and ethnic minority/migrant entrepreneurship are either discussed with concepts of migration theory, social or mixed embeddedness or livelihood strategies, but most of these approaches do not make the connection to other social theories (Thieme 2008). The concept of social capital has become popular for studies of migrant incorporation and entrepreneurship as it highlights the social dimension of economic behavior. However, its usability without combining it with other concepts can be questioned for two reasons. First, it is not able to grasp the complexity of migrants' situations, their motivations, aspirations, and agency (Hellermann 2006) and second, it ignores much of the embeddedness⁴ necessary for a comprehensive understanding of minority migrant populations.

Therefore, other authors (Kloosterman, van der Leun and Rath 1999; Kloosterman and Rath 2001) propose a broader and more comprehensive concept of (mixed) embeddedness that also acknowledges the economic and politico-institutional environment of the actors in question. Their work follows and further develops the studies of Aldrich, Waldinger and Ward (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990; Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward 1990) who claimed that in order to explain ethnic entrepreneurial strategies, it is necessary to combine ethnic and socio-cultural factors with politico-economic factors. By all means, the consideration of market conditions, the argumentations of the niche market approach, and the impact of legal regulations (e.g. migration laws or business regulations) are crucial to understand ethnic minority or immigrant entrepreneurship, especially in highly contested street vending contexts. It has also been noted that the economic and politico-institutional environment can differ not only among nation states but also among or even within cities, as this study will demonstrate. The comparison of divergent urban regions within one country and their relationship to the opportunity structures for migrant entrepreneurs has been identified as a lacuna in existing research (Kloosterman and Rath 2001, p. 198). Kloosterman and Rath point to the importance of actors' agency, but they fail to elaborate on this central dimension. Mixed approaches of embeddedness are mainly

⁴ The term "embeddedness" was initially coined by Karl Polanyi (1944) referring to non-economic structures shaping economic action. See chapter 2.2 and 2.3 for a review on concepts of social and mixed embeddedness.

based on structuralist patterns of interpretation, which explain economic action as a response to larger structures that are beyond their influence. While these models can be strong tools for analyzing the constraints and structural forces entrepreneurs are confronted with, actors' economic agency remains invisible. There is a need "for more qualitative, interpretative, action-oriented studies, which focus on the entrepreneur as an individual human agent" and hitherto existing models need to be extended by agency perspectives (Pütz 2003, p. 557). In order to overcome the dichotomy of structure and agency, Bourdieu's concepts of forms of capital and habitus were integrated into the theoretical framework (see chapter 2.4 and 2.5).

The notion of habitus refers to a set of deeply internalized dispositions through which individuals or collectives perceive, understand, and (inter)act in the world. It is argued that the practice derived from the habitus "operates beneath the level of consciousness and discourse" (Wacquant 2011, p. 86) and thus argues against the *homo intentionalis*. However, habitus structures (but does not determine) an agent's actions and perceptions. Everyday activities as social practice are "shaped by both, the habitus which disposes people to act in particular ways and the availability for various species of capital" (Sakdapolrak 2007, p. 56). Migrants bring a repository of various forms of capital with them and are able to accumulate further capital during and after migration. Bourdieu (1986) highlights the need to reintroduce capital in all its forms by distinguishing four forms of capital (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic), which enter into human agency and the achievements of economic action. The structural conditions connected to the specific actions of individuals or collectives take place on (inter)national, urban, and local levels while it is necessary to trace the relations between micro and macro situations and events. The presumptions about embeddedness, capital endowment, and habitus outlined in this chapter go along well with a grounded theory approach developed by Strauss (1987), Corbin and Strauss (2008), and Hildenbrand (2010) as it acknowledges and integrates structure and agency into research design and analysis (see chapter 3.3).

Finally, this study aims at contributing to critical social geography. "Social science cannot be neutral, detached or apolitical" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 51). In this quotation, I see two tasks for critical social geographers. First, it is our task to study the

“hidden mechanisms of power” (Bourdieu 1992) by – as in my particular case – looking at the power relations between ethnic minority vendors and other actors of the urban and tourism landscape such as state authorities, members of dominant societies, and tourists. Human geographers have a “responsibility for knowledge” (*Wissensverantwortung*) and should also report or warn about issues concerning inequality (Weichhart 2009a, pp. 72–73). Second, this also means that we researchers, especially when working in the Global South, are “vested with symbolic and economic power, and the intercultural conversations we conduct are not free from dominance, much as we may wish them to be” (Rothfuß 2009, p. 178). It is thus necessary to reflect on one’s own role as researcher as well as on one’s research results (see chapter 3.4.2). For a decade, a growing number of German-speaking social and development geographers have employed Bourdieu’s concepts as general presumptions for their empirical work in countries of the Global South (Rothfuß 2004; Sakdapolrak 2007; Etzold 2013). I partly build upon these emerging studies by critical social geographers, but link these concepts more closely to the work of grounded theorists Strauss (1987) and Corbin and Strauss (2008).

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

On the basis of the review of sensitizing⁵ theoretical concepts outlined above and more thoroughly discussed in chapter 2 as well as of evolving knowledge about my research topic, this dissertation aims to address the following themes and research questions. The research is based on a literature review, analysis of secondary data including tourism statistics and street vending regulations as well as on ethnographic fieldwork in various migrant destination and souvenir selling areas across Thailand. The following major questions also structured the empirical part of this study.

1. Evolvement of Akha urban migration and development of tourist businesses over time and space [chapter 4 and 5]
 - a. Which economic and political developments in the migrant source and migrant target destinations have driven the spatial expansion of Akha souvenir businesses?

⁵ Although grounded theory is critical of the use of technical literature and conceptual frameworks for early stages of the research, approaches pursued by Corbin, Hildenbrand, Kelle and Strauss allow and recommend its usage for the purpose of enhancing a researcher’s sensitivity, providing frame and loose direction, and facilitating comparison (see chapter 3).

- b. What are the actions and motivations of Akha micro-entrepreneurs to pursue these developments?
 - c. How have Akha souvenir products developed and changed?
- 2. Structure and distinction: Forms, organization, and gendered practice of Akha tourist businesses [chapter 6]
 - a. What types of migrants and migration can be identified in the field of Akha urban souvenir businesses?
 - b. What forms of Akha souvenir businesses and types of vending exist at the various locations?
 - c. What is the role of gender for migration as well as for souvenir production and distribution processes?
- 3. The social dimensions of economic action [chapter 7]
 - a. What are the social relations and interactions within the Akha migrant group?
 - b. What are the relations and interactions between Akha migrants and the other players? Who are the other players?
 - c. How are these insider and outsider relations created, maintained, and transformed?
 - d. What is the role of negative social capital?
- 4. Embeddedness in economic and politico-legal structures [chapter 8]
 - a. What are the barriers to entering and sustaining work in Akha souvenir businesses?
 - b. What are the impacts and constraints of national and regional rules and (in)formal regulations on Akha entrepreneurs?
 - c. How do economic and politico-legal structures differ at various migrant destination and selling areas?
 - d. How do Akha vendors deal with or circumvent constraining rules and regulations?
- 5. Synthesis: Main actions and strategies of ethnic minority entrepreneurs in order to succeed in urban tourist businesses [chapter 9]
 - a. What strategies do they adopt in order to succeed in urban tourist businesses?
 - b. What are their strategies to obtain, mobilize, and transform the different forms of capital?

In order to answer the research questions outlined above, I carried out extensive field research in different regions across Thailand between August 2008 and December

2013. Akha souvenir sellers in Thailand's urban and beachside tourist areas were my main research partners. In order to reconstruct the evolvement of Akha souvenir businesses over time and space, to explore migrants' actions and interactions as well as their multiple forms of embeddedness, I used different forms of observation including informal conversations, semistructured interviews, and personal network analysis. Moreover, I drew on tourism and street vending statistics, informal conversations with representatives of urban authorities, related research, and ILO (International Labour Organization) reports on street vending.

In order to grasp the spatio-temporal developments of Akha businesses, the different structural conditions at various selling locations as well as the various actions and strategies employed by the Akha vendors at those locations, I followed Marcus' (1995) approach of "multi-sited ethnography". Data analysis in grounded theory involved different steps of coding leading to theoretical concepts, which emerged from the data. I followed the advice of Corbin and Strauss (2008) by employing a combination of inductive (deriving concepts, their properties, and dimensions from the data) and deductive (hypothesizing about the relationships between concepts) thinking; a position that takes into account that the development of categories and theories are also theory-guided (Reichert 2010, p. 215). As will be discussed in chapter 3, grounded theorists develop codes which are very close to the empirical data and then develop more abstract hypotheses, concepts, and categories as well as their properties and dimensions. These preliminary categories have to be tested and (re)studied in the field by searching the data for discrepant evidence and negative cases, which can lead to modification or even rejection of concepts and categories; a research logic that is also referred to as abductive reasoning (see chapter 3.2).

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

After introducing the personal and general background of this study and outlining research objectives and research questions, this section presents the structure of the thesis. *Chapter two* brings together a literature review and a clarification and discussion of the key terms of ethnic minority entrepreneurs, self-employment and informality, street vending, and souvenirs (chapter 2.1). The following sections refer to concepts of social embeddedness and social capital (2.2) as well as to more

comprehensive approaches of embeddedness that also take into account economic, political, and institutional structures (2.3). These approaches are linked with Bourdieu's key theorems of agency, i.e. the forms of capital (2.4) and habitus concepts (2.5). Even though gender as a social and cultural construct can be regarded as part of the habitus, gendered practices are discussed with reference to divisions of labor in tourism contexts (2.6).

Chapter three then introduces the research design of this study by explicating the methodological approach of grounded theory (3.1), a research logic combining inductive and deductive thinking (3.2), and guidelines for analyzing structures and action (3.3). Chapter 3.4 outlines the challenges and advantages of multi-sited fieldwork and addresses questions of positionality and reflexivity, thus my own role as well as that of my research assistant. In the following two sections, phases of data collection (3.5) using different forms of interviews, conversations, observations and photography for documentation processes, and overlapping steps of data analysis (3.6) are discussed.

Chapter four presents the regional context of Thai internal migration (4.1) and discusses political changes in Thailand's highland minority regions since the 1950s which have led to negatively connoted hilltribe images persistently remaining until today (4.2). In chapter 4.3, I introduce the highland ethnic minority group of Akha more thoroughly with special reference to current and former migration patterns, sociocultural traits, and gender roles.

Chapter five marks the start of the presentation, analysis, and discussion of empirical findings and answers research question one concerning the evolvement of Akha urban migration and development of tourist businesses over time and space. It describes the spatial expansion of Akha souvenir businesses from the villages to the northern city of Chiang Mai (5.1), the further moves to the capital city Bangkok (5.2) and towards beachside tourist destinations (5.3) by analyzing changes of structural conditions in the Akha highland and migrant destination areas as well as Akha agency components. Section 5.4 provides an overview of the development of souvenir products.

In *chapter six*, which corresponds with research question two, I look at differences within the seemingly homogenous ethnic minority group. Different types of migrants and migration could be identified (6.1), and micro-entrepreneurs pursue various styles of vending which also represent an unequal endowment with forms of capital (6.2). Moreover, gender as a dimension of their habitus serves as a criterion of distinction which structures processes of souvenir production and distribution (6.3). Even though habitus represents durable embodied dispositions, the prevailing gender order has been partially contested by Akha men.

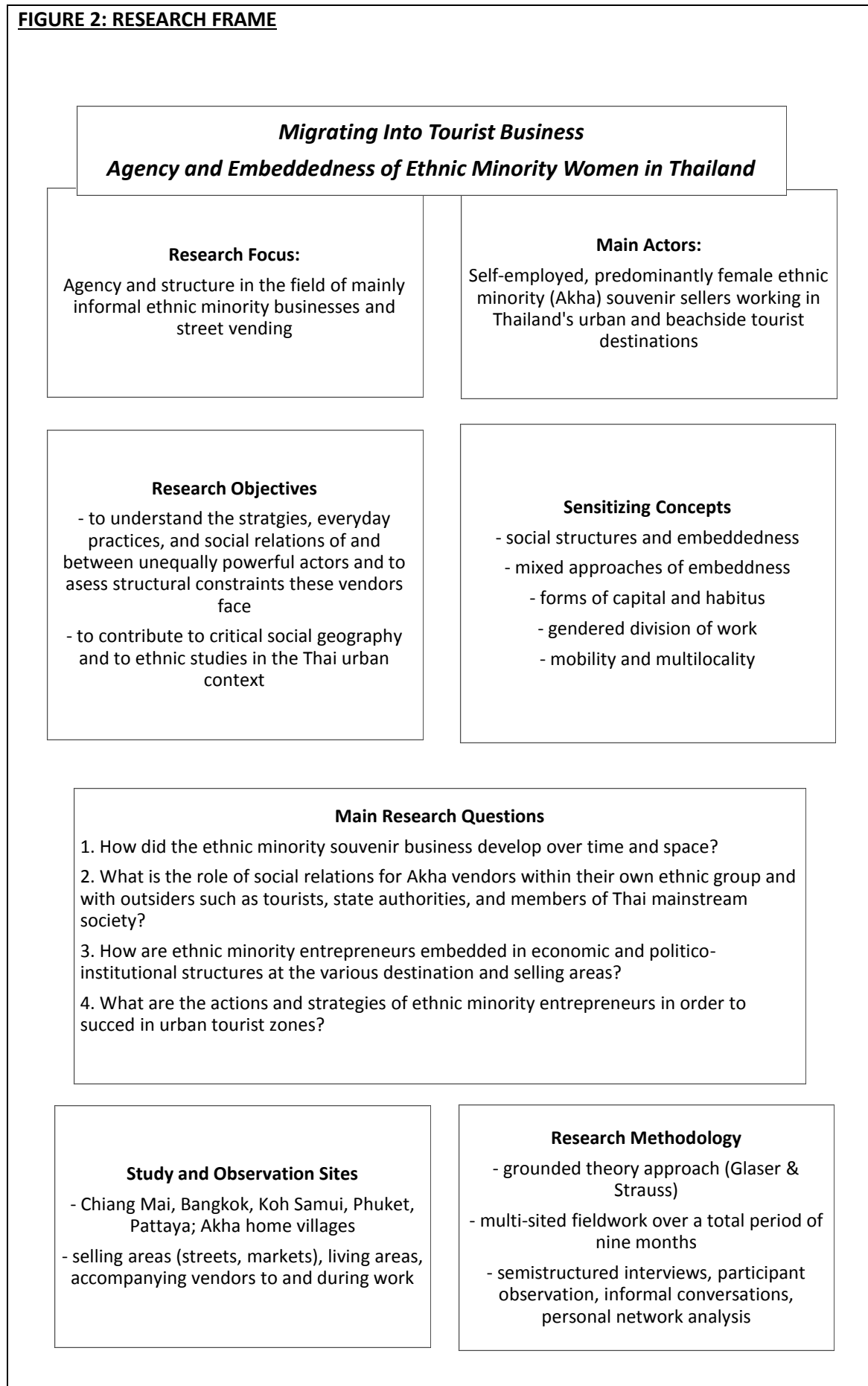
Chapter seven, seeking answers to research question three, analyzes the social dimensions of economic action, thus how Akha vendors generate, mobilize, and transform social relations. Section 7.1 discusses foundations and outcomes of social capital on individual and collective levels created within the Akha vending group(s) and section 7.2 demonstrates how souvenir vendors bridge social relations to members outside of their own ethnic group such as tourists, other vendors, or members of Thai mainstream society. Though primarily a positive asset, social relations can also feature negative impacts such as constraining action or distracting it from its original intention. Parallel to processes of bonding and bridging social relations, Akha vendors have and pursue quests for independence and individualization (7.3).

Chapter eight relates to research question four and outlines the varying opportunity structures in terms of economic and politico-legal conditions at different migrant and selling destinations. Section 8.1 describes economic and market conditions in reference to economic and international tourism development as well as to regional and local characteristics of living and vending areas. Moreover, as state authorities and their powers of regulation and enforcement structure the conditions of the informal economy and the mobility of highland ethnic minorities, laws and their enforcement concerning street vending and ethnic minorities are explained (8.2). In section 8.3, I show how Akha vendors deal with these varying conditions.

In the concluding *chapter nine*, I bring together main strategies of Akha micro-entrepreneurs which are summarized into two main categories and which highlight the importance of both conscious and unconscious levels of practice and interaction. First, a high level of mobility referring to rural-urban migration, urban-urban movements,

and everyday mobilities, enables Akha souvenir vendors to be flexible and cope with varying and difficult opportunity structures (9.1) and second, their ability to mobilize and transform their limited available resources makes them not mere victims but active agents who can succeed in the contested and competitive field of informal urban souvenir business (9.2). The dissertation closes with a résumé and outlook summarizing relevant contributions and pointing to future perspectives of ethnic minority street vending and entrepreneurship in Thai contexts (9.3). Figure 2 summarizes the main ideas and approaches of this research.

FIGURE 2: RESEARCH FRAME



2 STATE OF THE ART AND CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

There is a discussion within qualitative research circles about the usefulness of working with a predefined set of concepts (see for example Creswell 2003; Maxwell 2005). It is argued that the thorough study of literature beforehand can paralyze young researchers and may delude them into reproducing existing knowledge rather than producing new one (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 36). The early publications on the discovery of grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967) literally requested to ignore theoretical literature in order to ensure that the grounded development of categories would not be spoiled. Indeed, my first research proposal was so strongly focused on concepts of social relations and social capital that it was not able to grasp further important dimensions (such as a more nuanced understanding of agency and structural constraints on economic and political levels) to understand ethnic minority enterprise and street vending in the Thai context. However, more recent formulations of grounded theory approaches also acknowledge that the right use of technical literature has proven to be useful in qualitative research as it can become a source for making comparisons, enhance the researcher's sensitivity to subtle nuances in the data, provide a cache of descriptive data, provide questions for initial observations and interviews, stimulate questions during data analysis, suggest areas for theoretical sampling, and can eventually be used to confirm, disconfirm, complement or extend previous research (Corbin and Strauss 2008). The literature review and the formulation of conceptual foundations presented in this chapter are the result of a process that started at the beginning of the research but was expanded and altered during the research process. This chapter provides a short overview of the state of the intersecting fields of research and introduces a conceptual framework providing direction and a range of sensitizing concepts. Yet, "a researcher should remain open to new ideas and concepts and be willing to let go if he or she discovers that certain 'imported' concepts do not fit the data" (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 40).

No single theory is widely accepted or able to account for the emergence, perpetuation, and complexity of migration processes. Indeed, no single concept is able to grasp human action in migratory processes in a complex global political economy (Van Hear 2010) in the context of new technologies, socio-economic and cultural

change, and different forms of mobility including tourism and migration. In the following, I introduce seven different but interconnected fields of inquiry that inform my study: (1) I start with a short literature review on the interrelated issues of ethnic minority entrepreneurs, informality, and street vending and (2) critically discuss the *concepts of social embeddedness* which offer a strong tool for analyzing the social dimension of economic action. In order to understand the multiple embeddedness of the migrant entrepreneurs in question, I review (3) more comprehensive concepts of embeddedness (Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward 1990; Kloosterman and Rath 2001) that also acknowledge economic and politico-institutional structures. In order to tackle the weakness of this structural approach, I integrate (4) *Bourdieu's forms of capital* along with (5) *agency-structure approaches* (habitus) that offer an understanding of the inherent power relations and the individual's agency. In order to understand the highly gendered case study, it is necessary to (6) integrate concepts related to the *gender-based division of work*. Eventually, the high mobility of Akha street vendors/entrepreneurs has to be taken into account, which means acknowledging that their activities are embedded in (7) *mobile and multilocal living or working arrangements*. After that, in section 2.8, I present the integrated framework of this study. Such an approach is able to indicate that migrants are not entirely controlled by some external structural forces but have shown themselves – to a certain extent – to be active agents who pursue their own goals and ideas. This chapter thus involves a review and discussion on key concepts and outlines general assumptions about human action and the relationship between structure and action (see also chapter 3.3).

2.1 ETHNIC MINORITY ENTREPRENEURS, STREET VENDING AND INFORMALITY

“We have to look beyond the likes of Bill Gates, Richard Branson and Steve Jobs, and study seemingly lesser mortals who have started take-aways, small restaurants, temping agencies, groceries, video rental stores and other not very eye-catching entrepreneurial activities.” (Kloosterman and Rath 2001, p. 198)

This section provides some clarification of terms and concepts I use and refer to in this PhD study. These include ethnic minority entrepreneurs (an academic term for self-employed workers and their employees of migrant or ethnic minority origin), self-employment and informality (the connection between self-employment and the informal sector), street vending (the type of vending the ethnic minority entrepreneurs

of this study can be classified to), and souvenirs (the type of products the vendors of this study sell).

2.1.1 ETHNIC MINORITY ENTREPRENEURS

Since the 1980s, one can observe growing interest in the studies of ethnic minority entrepreneurship, especially in the United States and also in European countries (Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward 1990; Kloosterman and Rath 2003; Dana 2007; Dabringer and Trupp 2012). Many of the existing studies of migrant entrepreneurship are policy-driven and lack theoretical depth because government agencies as well as international development organizations have limited time for theoretical reflections; in addition, “contract research is strongly geared towards more pragmatic questions” (Rath and Kloosterman 2000, p. 667).

In a first simple definition, an ethnic economy consists of co-ethnic self-employed persons as well as employers and their co-ethnic employees (Light and Gold 2007, p. 4). I use a non-elitist approach of ‘entrepreneurship’ similar to that of Valenzuela (2001), where ethnic entrepreneurs are defined as self-employed members of ethnic minority groups, regardless of whether they employ other people and regardless of whether they own small businesses on the margins of economy or large multimillion enterprises (Basu 2007). It is criticized that the literature on entrepreneurship is conceptually problematic because it mainly focuses on firm size, location, proprietorship, capital start-up, and innovation (Valenzuela 2001). Most entrepreneurs, however, do not come up with brilliant ideas or new combinations of resources and make a fortune, but rather copy or follow existing models (Kloosterman and Rath 2001, p. 192). This does not mean that they lack creativity or agency. In fact, they can open up new horizons but in a more modest way – e.g. by introducing “immigrant” food to mainstream society or producing and selling handicrafts and souvenirs to international tourists. Another important criterion of ethnic entrepreneurs is that they are mostly both owners and managers (or operators) of their own businesses. In this understanding, self-employed souvenir sellers such as the Akha vendors of this study can be categorized as ethnic minority entrepreneurs.

Studies have shown that group membership plays an important role in ethnic minority businesses. It is tied to a cultural heritage or origin, which can refer to a common language, religion or migration experience (Zhou 2004, p. 1040). Moreover, ethnic and social embeddedness (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; see chapters 2.2 and 7) as well as economic transactions are central. It is further important to distinguish whether the attribution to a certain group is based on self- or external ascription. The ascription of persons with a specific ethnic group becomes problematic if their action or behavior is explained by a simplified cultural link to their origin (Dabringer and Trupp 2012). “The attribution of collective identities by others based on the belief that a homogenous community of origin exists” is an example of ethnicization, which stresses the argument of the influence or determination of a specific culture on immigrants or ethnic groups (Pütz 2003, p. 558).

Perspectives of ethnic minority entrepreneurship either highlight the benefits of ethnic businesses, especially in terms of economic development, urban diversity, and integration or warn about precarious working conditions or the formation of enclave economies.

2.1.2 SELF-EMPLOYMENT AND INFORMALITY

A considerable amount of entrepreneurs operate in the informal sector. In Thailand, the share of informal employment in the non-agricultural sector accounts for 51%, whereas two thirds of them are considered to be self-employed (ILO 2002). Officially, a self-employed migrant worker is a person who is “engaged in a remunerated activity otherwise than under a contract of employment and who earns his or her living through this activity normally working alone or together with members of his or her family, and to any other migrant worker recognized as self-employed by applicable legislation of the State of employment or bilateral or multilateral agreements” (IOM 2004, p. 59).

Self-employment in informal enterprises, however, often misses this legal aspect and can be classified into three groups (Chen 2007, p. 2): First, employees, second, own-account operators including both heads of family enterprises and single person operators and third, unpaid family workers. The informal economy which has also been labeled ‘shadow’, ‘black’ or ‘hidden’ economy has been associated with work-

intensive production, simple technology, bad payment, low formal education, low grade of organization, lack of social security systems, and non-registered, partly illegal economic activities (Portes, Castells and Benton 1989; ILO 2002; Nuscheler 2004).

The concept of the informal sector was first formulated in the early 1970s, but has regained popularity in recent years. This re-emergence of the informal sector is attributed to the fact that it is – in contradistinction to earlier prospects – a growing (not declining) and permanent (not short-term) phenomenon as well as a feature of modern capitalist (not only traditional) economies (Chen 2007). During the last decades, different approaches have evolved (Castells and Portes 1989; Komlosy, Parnreiter, Stacher and Zimmermann 1997; Chen 2007): The structural perspective views the informal sector as a result of marginality, insecurity, and inequality where individuals are subject to the forces of global capitalism with which they cannot contend. For the Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto (1989), the informal sector is the response of those excluded from the modern formalized sector who cannot afford time- and money-related official registration. He characterizes the workers in the informal sector as dynamic and competitive entrepreneurs who are able to build up a market economy ‘from below’ and improve their livelihoods. “To make capitalism work for everyone, property rights, laws, and enforcement of contracts must be developed from the bottom up” (de Soto 1989, p. 73). Ironically, the self-help of the urban poor “has been praised by some analysts of the informal economy as ‘new’ entrepreneurship, social and economic avant-garde and pool for innovation” (Etzold 2012, p. 49).

Informal entrepreneurs are owners, managers or operators of businesses who participate “in the paid production and sale of goods and services that are legitimate in all respects besides the fact that they are unregistered by, or hidden from the state for tax and/or benefit purposes” (Williams and Nadin 2010, p. 263). It is thus different from trading illicit goods and services (e.g. human trafficking, drug trafficking or gun running) that is part of the broader criminal economy (see Pasuk, Sungsidh and Nualnoi 1998 for a thorough report on Thailand’s illegal and criminal economy). So, there is a difference between illegal processes or activities and illegal goods and services. Despite the legality of their products, the flexible business model which does

not require licenses, taxes or high entrance qualifications, is – in most areas of the world – considered to be unlawful or at least not authorized and thus not legally protected (Castells and Portes 1989, p. 15). The fact that many informal entrepreneurs operate illegally or semi-illegally is due to a too punitive, fuzzy or non-existent regulatory frame. This position makes them vulnerable in conflict with state authorities. It is furthermore argued that many operators would be willing to pay registration fees and/or taxes if they were able to receive the advantages of formality (Chen 2007, p. 4). Generally, most informal workers and entrepreneurs operating outside the legal regulatory framework experience disadvantages rather than benefits (ibid).

Most of the studies related to informal economies in Thailand deal with street vendors such as food or clothes hawkers in the capital city Bangkok (Kusakabe 2006; Nirathron 2006; Walsh and Maneepong 2012) and fewer studies explore the informal practices in tourist settings, mainly at the mass tourist beach destinations Phuket (Smith and Henderson 2008; Gantner 2012) and Pattaya (Wahnschafft 1982). The migration of ethnic minorities and their economic engagements in urban and tourist areas is only examined in the context of the northern city of Chiang Mai (Fuengfusakul 2008; Ishii 2012).

2.1.3 STREET VENDING

Street vendors belong to the largest subgroup of the informal workforce (ILO 2002, p. 8). They can be found in every major city of the world and enrich these urban areas by contributing economic activities and providing services for urban dwellers or tourists alike (Bromley 2000). Street vendors can be broadly defined as persons who offer “goods for sale to the public without having a permanent built-up structure from which to sell” (Bhowmik 2005, p. 2256). They may be stationary or semi-mobile by occupying space on pavements or public/private areas or, they may be mobile by moving their stands or pushcarts or by carrying their baskets from one place to another (McGee and Yeung 1977). Street vendors differ from many other actors in the informal economy (e.g. domestic workers) because they are often highly visible in public spaces (ILO 2002, p. 8; Brown, Lyons and Dankoco 2010); a fact that enhances their conflict potential with state authorities (Etzold 2013). Studies on street vendors in

Asia conclude that governments have more or less failed to recognize street vending as a legal activity and that they are viewed as obstacles or irritants to cities' modern development (Bhowmik 2005; Kusakabe 2006). Working in public spaces usually also means working outdoors and thus being directly exposed to heat or cold, strong sunlight, rain or snow as well as to dust and air pollution.

The literature on street vending can broadly be categorized into four branches of study (Kusakabe 2006). The first two stretches of literature deal with the economic dimensions of street vending by examining income opportunities, livelihood, and survival strategies of rural-urban migrants or the urban poor (Iyenda 2005; Nirathron 2006). The first set of literature characterizes vendors as vulnerable and passive, unlikely to be able to improve their lives and upgrade their businesses (Kusakabe 2006; Walsh 2010) while the second set portrays street vending as means of social and economic upward mobility of one's own and one family's status (Tinker 1999; Walsh and Maneepong 2012). Another set of literature explores the conflicts over urban public space between street vendors and state authorities. Turner and Schoenberger (2012) in this context analyze the conflicts between Hanoi's municipal authorities who have a specific image of security, orderliness, and modernity, and the heterogeneous responses in form of subtle covert and overt resistance tactics by the traders. Conflicts between state authorities and street vendors can be particularly strong if vendors are ethnic minorities or indigenous people who do not fully belong to the state they are living in socially, culturally or politically. In Quito, the capital city of Ecuador, authorities have initiated regeneration projects to clean the streets from indigenous informal street workers (Swanson 2007). Also in South and Southeast Asia, relocations and evictions of street vendors are a common practice (Walsh and Maneepong, p. 256), especially in the context of new and 'modern' infrastructure projects or under the official concerns of health and hygiene. The fourth set of literature pursues a dramatically different view by examining ethnic minority business and street vending as a means of revitalization of urban spaces. Studies show that street vending and food hawking in major cities remain important economic activities that enhance life experiences of both urban residents and tourists (Rath 2007; Henderson 2010). When this perspective is applied, "it often translates into the beautification of the city using vendors as tourist attractions" (Kusakabe 2006, p. 8).

2.1.4 SOUVENIRS

Migrants and ethnic minorities can carve out their own niches in the tourism industry by entering self-employment and commodifying some of their cultural features into souvenirs. When profit-oriented motives and the economic pressure to earn money outweighs aesthetic standards and when it is more important to satisfy the customer (tourist) than the artist, these artifacts can be called souvenirs (Graburn 1976, p. 6). It is thus a tourist commodity, which “has exchange value in the marketplace and is produced, distributed, and consumed with few emotional attachments” (Swanson and Timothy 2012, p. 490). Souvenirs represent a wide spectrum of commodities including ethnic crafts, mass-manufactured items, traditional travel mementos including books, clothing, jewelry, antiques, food, toys, and even goods that were not intentionally produced to be souvenirs but fulfill the functions of a memory holder (Swanson and Timothy 2012). The commercialized use of cultural capital is especially relevant in tourism contexts where traditional clothing, arts and artifacts, music, dances but also ethnic people and even whole villages are turned into simplified souvenirs, tourism attractions, and ‘human zoos’ (Graburn 1976; Cohen 2000; Trupp 2011). Some scholars point to the advantages such processes can involve. Tourism can bring economic benefits, human capital (e.g. the practice of foreign languages), but also a sense of pride and identity as well as a political resource to manipulate (Cole 2007; Rath 2007; Trupp 2014a). Others agree that commodification incorporates those people into the new economy, but criticize that they simultaneously keep them at the margins of society culturally (Azarya 2004). For tourists, however, souvenirs can help preserve and memorialize travel experiences.

The thematic and conceptual contributions to the study of souvenirs cover a broad range of issues including authenticity, commodification, consumer behavior, cultural property, gift giving, shopping and retail, and souvenir messages and meanings (see Swanson and Timothy 2012 for a thorough literature review). In the context of this study, the topics of souvenir production and distribution, gender, and economic development are relevant.

Two processes in the context of production and distribution of souvenirs seem to be relevant for the context of this study. The first relates to the source of the (initial) commercialization, thus to the question whether the commercialization of the products is based on the own initiative or whether it was/has been driven by external agents such as government agencies, non-governmental organizations or private business people who ordered and promoted these products (Cohen 1983; Cohen 2000). The second relates to the intended consumers or buyers of the products and the question of whether this audience shares the cultural background of the producers or whether they are unfamiliar with it (Graburn 1976; Cohen 2000). Souvenirs can originate either from small-scale local producers who in some cases are also the sellers of the products or from larger mass manufacturers who distribute the products locally, nationally, and sometime globally. Moreover, local production networks exist which are composed of individual producers who work independently or in cooperatives. They may sell their goods directly to tourists or channel them through intermediaries to distribute them elsewhere (Swanson and Timothy 2012). Gender has received increasing attention in tourism studies (Swain 1995; Sinclair 1997; Pritchard, Morgan, Ateljevic and Harris 2007), but “less has been said about women as producers of handicrafts and souvenirs” (Swanson and Timothy 2012, p. 493).

2.2 SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND EMBEDDEDNESS

The question of how human action is influenced by social relations is seminal to social theory. Neoclassical economies assume that human action is economically rational, self-interested, and therefore only minimally affected by social relations: Migrants calculate the differences of expected income between home and destination area summed up over a specific time frame and consider the expenses of the migration. Migration – so the argument – takes place if net gains are expected from such movements (Todaro 1969). Flows of labor (migrants) or entrepreneurs simply move from low-wage to expected high-wage regions. Until the 1980s, the majority of social scientists as well as historians believed that economic action was strongly embedded in social structures such as kinship ties in pre-market societies, but that this social embeddedness declined and that economic behavior became much more independent and self-interested with ongoing processes of modernization (Polanyi 1944).

Granovetter (1985) however claims that the social embeddedness of economic behavior is lower in pre-market societies than asserted by Polanyi and colleagues, and that its role has changed less than they believe. In other words, social structures still advance as well as constrain individual goals and economic action as the concept of social capital in the context of (im)migrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship can demonstrate.

2.2.1 NETWORKS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social networks consist of more or less homogenous sets of ties between three or more actors (Faist 1997, p. 193). These actors can be individuals in kinship groups, friendship cycles, households, neighborhoods or organizations. Therefore, the understanding of a social network is based on the assumption of the importance of social relations between the interacting units. Wassermann and Faust (1994) note that actors and their actions in a network are rather interdependent than independent and that relational ties (linkages) between actors are channels for the transfer or 'flow' of resources (either material or nonmaterial) (p. 4). Migrant networks are sets of interpersonal relations that connect migrants, non-migrants, and former migrants that can be transformed into social (and other forms of) capital (Massey et al. 1994, p. 728). These networks are said to reduce the social, economic, and emotional costs of migration and can lead to the cumulative causation of migration. Once pioneer migrants have moved away, family, relatives, friends, and acquaintances can draw upon social capital and processes of chain migration develop (Faist 1997, p. 188).

There is a difference between the somewhat unspecific term of network and the more precise and useful concept of social capital (Anthias 2007). Social capital is the ability to secure resources through networks or larger social structures (Portes 2000, p. 1). It is confined to those social ties and networks which are also mobilizable, as not every network based on kin or ethnic relations brings about benefits: "If we do not make this distinction, social capital becomes a value laden synonym for networks and ties" (Anthias 2007, p. 789). Furthermore, we have to note that social networks are neither static nor necessarily bound to a specific place; they can transcend geographical and political boundaries. Studies on transnational (Basch, Glick-Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1997; Faist 2000), translocal (Brickell and Datta 2011), and multilocal migration

(Schmidt-Kallert 2012) emphasize the strong linkages between places of origin and destination. Both, (1) mediums such as mobile phones, fax, internet, and jet flights that have facilitated new forms of communication and transportation, and (2) the restructuring of the world economy along with the globalization of labor and capital give rise to new structures and forces that determine the multilocal, translocal or transnational embeddedness of ethnic entrepreneurs (cf. Zhou 2004, p. 1056; see also chapter 2.7).

The concept of social capital is useful in explaining various migration patterns that do not follow the beliefs of neoclassical migration theory (Silvey and Elmhirst 2003, p. 866). So far, the concept has been used for a plethora of studies: e.g. to explain the differential educational achievements of young British Pakistanis (Dwyer et al. 2006), to analyze the situation of children of immigrants in the US (Portes 1995) or to explain development and government efficiency of cities, regions, and even nations (Putnam 2000). Academics, international organizations, and NGOs make use of the concept and “it has become a key term in development literature since the early 1990s to consider the resources available to individuals and groups through social connections and social relations with others” (Turner and An Nguyen 2005, p. 1695). The main controversy concerns the question of whether the resources are accrued to individuals or collectives (Lin 1999; Woolcock and Narayan 2000). In dealing with social capital as a community feature (Putnam 2000), the relevant question to be answered is how communities develop and maintain social capital as a collective asset. In my approach, however, I mainly refer to Akha individuals and their personal social networks, and thereby agree with Portes (1998) who acknowledges “that the greatest theoretical promise of social capital lies at the individual level” (p. 21).

Groundbreaking research on the theoretical development of the concept by Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and James Coleman (1988) focused on individuals or small groups such as the family. Bourdieu, by considering conversions and transformations of capital, points to the (individual’s) need of economic and cultural capital in order to accrue and activate social capital (see also chapter 2.4). Hence, social capital links economic, social, and political spheres and it affects (and is affected by) economic outcomes. But still, unlike economic or human-cultural capital, social capital can be

available to all classes of migrants. It is “spontaneously produced and reproduced within the institution of the family and extended family group, and through recurrent social exchanges within the immigrant community” (Nee and Sanders 2001, p. 407). The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent, however, depends on the size of network connections one can effectively mobilize and on “the volume of capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his [sic] own right by each of those to whom he [sic] is connected” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 249). In the following, I outline several types of social relations and social capital.

2.2.2 TYPES OF SOCIAL RELATIONS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Bonding and Bridging

In this context, Putnam (2000) highlights two dimensions of social capital: First, bonding (or exclusive) social capital refers to networks within a community that tend to reinforce homogenous groups such as family networks (Boyd 1989), business organizations or ethnic enclaves (Bonacich 1973; Logan, Alba and Stults 2003), strengthen specific reciprocity, and mobilize solidarity. Such networks play a central role in ethnic enclaves by providing social and psychological support for unfortunate community members while offering financial help and labor for migrant entrepreneurs (Putnam 2000, p. 22). In this context, the family plays a central role. On the one hand, the family (nuclear or extended) can provide the required financial capital and on the other, the family provides emotional resources in case of other problems associated with living in a new area (Nee and Sanders 2001, pp. 389–390). In many Asian societies, children have much stronger obligations to their parents than in Western contexts, thus their decision might be rather interdependent than independent (Markus and Kitayama 1991).

The second dimension, bridging (or inclusive) social capital, refers to open networks that connect or “bridge” different groups and communities, and are thus much more heterogeneous (Turner and An Nguyen 2005, p. 1695). Both dimensions can be of great importance, whereas bridging social capital is given higher significance: “Bonding social capital is good for getting by, but bridging capital is crucial for getting ahead” (Putnam 2000, p. 23). This citation suggests that kinship or ethnic ties may provide a

safe social environment, but that ties to diverse sources or outsiders (e.g. to customers, business partners from various socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds) may be more useful than ties to relatives and friends. However, by drawing on a variety of outside resources (from social approval to business opportunities), the power of bonding social capital within a community becomes weaker (Portes and Sensenberenner 1993, p. 1336).

Weak and Strong Ties

In his studies on job searches, Mark Granovetter (1983) uncovered the advantages of weak over strong ties. Strong ties are characterized by a long-time relation, emotional intensity, intimacy, and the reciprocal services between the relevant actors and are thus said to have substantial significance. “Absent ties”, by contrast, are ties which lack any relationship or ties without relevance such as a relation between people living in the same street, or ties to a vendor from whom one usually buys a newspaper or milk in the morning (Granovetter 1973, p. 1361).

Weak ties are positioned in-between and are less intimate and emotional relations, which are not maintained on a regular basis. Granovetter found that many people used personal contacts to find a job. More surprisingly, however, he showed that these personal contacts were described as acquaintances (weak ties) and not as close friends or family members (strong ties). So if a person (the Ego) has a densely knit network of close friends (where most are in touch with each other) and a network of acquaintances (where few know one another), it is likely that each acquaintance in turn also has a densely knit network of close friends in his or her own right. “The weak tie between Ego and his [sic] acquaintance, therefore, becomes not merely a trivial acquaintance tie but rather a crucial bridge between the two densely knit clumps of close friends” (Granovetter 1983, p. 202). So while the members of the Ego’s densely knit network tend to be exposed to similar sources of information and opinions, the Ego’s ‘weak’ tie to an acquaintance offers him or her information they otherwise would not receive. Granovetter’s notion of bridges as expressed in the strength of weak ties is further elaborated on and formalized by Ronald Burt (2001) in his concept of structural holes. According to the structural hole argument, “social capital is created

by a network in which people can broker connections between otherwise disconnected segments (Burt 2001, p. 31) .

The concepts of bridges in social networks (Granovetter 1983; Putnam 2000; Burt 2001) are relevant to the understanding of social embeddedness because they stress the importance of “outside relations” that may facilitate other material or immaterial flows between loosely connected actors. “To argue that closure or density is a requirement for social capital is to deny the significance of bridges, structural holes, or weaker ties” (Lin 2001, p. 10).

Local and Non-Local Ties

A further distinction can be drawn between local and non-local social relations, where urban geographers and sociologists dissent about the importance of the local setting for people’s lives and social capital (Schutjens and Völker 2010, p. 942). In this context, Peter Dirksmeier (2012) coined the term residential capital referring to social capital that can be developed through residence in a specific location. He argues that exceptional, enduring social relationships only emerge locally and that this type of social capital is thus bonded to the place of birth or residence. On these grounds, residential capital “can function as the conceptual link between habitus and spaces” (Dirksmeier 2012, p. 80; see also chapter 2.5 on habitus). In migration theory, daVanzo (1981) coined the term “location-specific capital”, a form of individual or family- and place-dependent resource which may refer to such various things as home ownership, seniority, knowledge of an area or friendships. These assets are costly and very difficult to replace or to transfer to another locality. Therefore, “the more location-specific capital a family possesses in its current locality, the less likely the family should be to leave” (daVanzo 1981, p. 47). The notion of location-specific capital embraces various types of Bourdieu’s forms of capital such the economic (home ownership), the symbolic (seniority) or the social (friendship) and thus makes it difficult to use it as a conceptual or methodological tool. But both more place-centered concepts (residential and location-specific capital) point to the existence of spatial variations which are tied to the individual’s habitus. However, several existing studies on

migration networks and social relations have shown that social capital can transcend geographical borders and is not limited to one specific place (see chapter 2.7).

Horizontal and Vertical Ties

Another distinction of social capital can be made when looking more closely at the individual's relations in terms of the person's status and interest. Due to the strong tendency to view groups or communities as a homogenous unit, the different power relations within the group, especially in terms of gender, class, and generation are often ignored. So even though different people may have access to the same social network, they may have differing positions within it (Anthias 2007, p. 797). In order to analyze the hierarchy of social ties within the networks, I distinguish, referring to Mayoux (2001), horizontal and vertical linkages.

While the former involve people of similar status and interests, the latter link people of unequal status and complementary interests. Bourdieu (1997) views social capital as an investment of members in the dominant class who, by engaging in mutual recognition and support, reproduce group solidarity and maintain the group's dominant position. Group membership is based on a clear demarcation such as nobility, family or economic status. In my research, I recognize the internal dynamics and differences within the researched communities (cf. Hillmann 2006; Moore 1993). That way, both social differences (such as gender, age, migration experience, earning, kind of ownership, etc.) and the intersectional affectedness of the (female) informants by these differences are taken into account methodologically. Critical accounts of social capital have the "potential value to enhance geographical analysis of inequality and privilege" (Holt 2008, p. 241). Although Ben Fine (2001) criticizes that social capital is not a surrogate for the analysis of power, inequality, and conflict in contemporary capitalist societies, I rather agree with Bebbington (2002) who argues that such counterpositions are misplaced, as there is plenty of scope to bring social capital and theories of development and political economy together. Holt argues that "human geographers have tended to underplay the analytical value of social capital, by equating the concept with dominant policy recommendations" (Holt 2008, p. 227) by,

for example, the World Bank and other neoliberal institutions: “Geographers could more explicitly contribute to pervasive critical social science accounts” (ibid, p. 227).

2.2.3 SOURCES OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

“Networks are compared with regard to density, size and even composition, much in the way butterfly collectors compare the coloring, wingspread and number of spots of their favorite species” (Boissevain 1979, p. 393). This early quote by Boissevain is an important reminder to look beyond the pure description of network characteristics and to advance both methodologically and theoretically to answer the questions of how such structures are created and why they can(not) be maintained and further developed/mobilized. The above definitions of social capital and its subtypes still neglect the mechanisms involved in the creation of social capital, thus the motivations of the social actors in these networks and transfers: “Social capital is accumulated through social exchange over time, and is reflected in the sentiments of obligation and solidarity” (Nee and Sanders 2001, p. 389). More precisely, one distinguishes four specific sources of social capital (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Portes and Landolt 2000):

1. “Value introjections” emphasize the moral character of granting resources (e.g. alms to the poor) that is motivated by values other than greed. Such gestures are learned and introjected during the process of socialization and can thus be seen as part of the habitus (see chapter 2.5).
2. Social capital out of a situational reaction of a class of people facing similar challenges is termed “bounded or internal solidarity”. Solidarity is grounded on a group identity that creates a self and an other (Faist 1997, p. 202). This type of social capital focuses on situational circumstances that can lead to group-orientated behavior and is therefore based on specific loyalties to a relevant in-group (e.g. endowing a scholarship to co-ethnics) (Portes 2000, p. 533) and should be distinguished from self-interest-based reciprocity or norm-related value introjection. Consequently, this type does not emerge out of the introjections of established values or from reciprocity, but out of a situational reaction of a class of people facing similar situations or problems. Internal or bounded solidarity is limited to the members of a specific group who are

affected by common events in a particular time and place (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993, p. 1327) and can, for instance, be born out of a common awareness or experience of discrimination or exploitation. Especially in the case of Thailand, where the members of ethnic groups are seen as marginal “Others” within the state (see chapter 4.2), this source is relevant. Possibilities to mobilize ethnicity-based social capital are related to immigrants’ connections within the ethnic community as well as to their size and growth rate (Nee and Sanders 2001, p. 391). The in-group solidarity rises the more distinct a group is in terms of cultural characteristics from the mainstream society and the bigger the prejudice is with these traits (Portes and Sensenbrenner, p. 1329).

3. Reciprocity is a pattern of a mutual exchange of gratifications (Gouldner 1960). Reciprocal transfers are based on the “accumulation of ‘chits’ based on previous good deeds on the others, backed by the norm of reciprocity” (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993, p. 1324). Hence, individuals only help those who have helped them or those from whom they expect support in the future. Faist (1997) points out that reciprocity does not imply that favors given and received must be of the same value or identical (p. 201). This type of social capital – in contrast to the previous type – meets selfish ends.
4. The main argument of the final source on enforceable trust is that individuals subordinate their present desires to group expectations in anticipation of long-term market advantages on grounds of their group membership.

While sources (1) and (2) are considered as altruistic, (3) and (4) are instrumental. Most studies on ethnic entrepreneurship emphasize the positive effects of social relations and capital, but the role of the ‘dark side’ of social capital is still unclear.

2.2.4 THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

During the last years, researchers have increasingly begun to recognize the other side of the coin of social capital. Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) were among the first who highlighted the less desirable effects such as “exclusion of outsiders as a result of community solidarity” as well as “constraints on individual freedoms and outside contacts due to community norms”. Hence, if single group members seek to bridge

promising social capital to outsiders, in-group members could block such breakout opportunities. Simultaneously, it would be difficult for outsiders to get access to the peer group. A third negative effect termed “levelling pressures” conspires against individual efforts of social mobility by exerting leveling pressures to keep members of downtrodden groups in the same situation as their peers (p. 1342). The constraining actors embedded in negative social capital are not necessarily the so-called community, but can also be found in the household or the family. Power relations within families, especially along lines of gender and generation, can have great impact on the outcomes of positive or negative social capital (Zontini 2010). There is silence on gender issues in the debate of social capital (Molyneux 2002), lacking a discussion of “how gender inequality structures the way in which different types of social capital can operate to the disbenefit of women” (Mayoux 2001, p. 426).

2.2.5 LIMITATIONS AND APPRAISAL

Bourdieu (1986) makes clear that social capital mainly exists in relation to other forms of capital and thus, that these various resources have to be taken into consideration when analyzing the social practice of economic behavior of migrant populations (see chapter 2.4). Also, Hellermann (2006) questions the usability of the concept as it is not able to grasp the complexity of migrants’ situations, their motivations, aspirations, and agency. Moreover, relations between actors are always related to socio-cultural (Turner and An Nguyen 2005), but also to economic and political contexts within which such networks are operationalized. The concept of social capital ignores much of the embeddedness necessary for a comprehensive understanding of minority migrant populations by lacking “ways of taking into account the historical depth and the geographical interconnections constituting the here-and-now situation as a social fact” (Fuglerud and Engebrigsten 2006, p. 1123). Also Kloosterman and Rath (1999, 2000) criticize that the concept of embeddedness has mainly been used in a rather one-sided way, focusing almost exclusively on social and ethnic dimensions, while the underlying structural changes of the economy and specific markets (such as the tourism market in this study) have widely been neglected. Thus, a broader concept of mixed embeddedness conjoined with concepts of human action and agency seems fruitful.

2.3 MIXED APPROACHES OF EMBEDDEDNESS

Kloosterman and Rath (1999, 2001) propose a more comprehensive concept of (mixed) embeddedness that also acknowledges the economic and politico-institutional environment of the actors in question. Their work follows and further develops the studies of Aldrich, Waldinger and Ward (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990; Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward 1990) who claimed that in order to explain ethnic entrepreneurial strategies, it is necessary to combine ethnic and socio-cultural factors with politico-economic factors. In this chapter, I introduce the two most popular concepts (the “interactive model” and the “mixed embeddedness” approach) and outline their differences as well as their strengths and flaws.

2.3.1 THE INTERACTIVE MODEL

Their “interactive model of ethnic business development”, which is supposed to explain “ethnic strategies” of migrant entrepreneurs, is based on two dimensions: First, the opportunity structure (market conditions and access to ownership) and second, ethnic group characteristics (predisposing factors and resource mobilization) (see figure 3).

2.3.1.1 OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES

Opportunity structures firstly consist of *market conditions* “that may favor products or services oriented toward co-ethnics and situations in which a wider, non-ethnic market might be served” (Waldinger et al. 1990, p. 21). Each type of business needs a demand for the services and products it offers. In many cases, ethnic entrepreneurs start selling their products within their community, as they know the needs and preferences of their co-ethnics well. “Cultural products” such as food (e.g. dishes or herbs from Thailand), newspapers or music (e.g. Bollywood films from India) may establish a connection with the migrant’s home region. Furthermore, migrants often face different challenges due to their immigrant status. Consequently, businesses such as law firms, translators or real estate brokers specialize in these niches. It is further argued that the market serving purely co-ethnics is limited and that the growth potential of ethnic businesses depends on its access to clients and customers beyond the own ethnic community (ibid., p. 25).

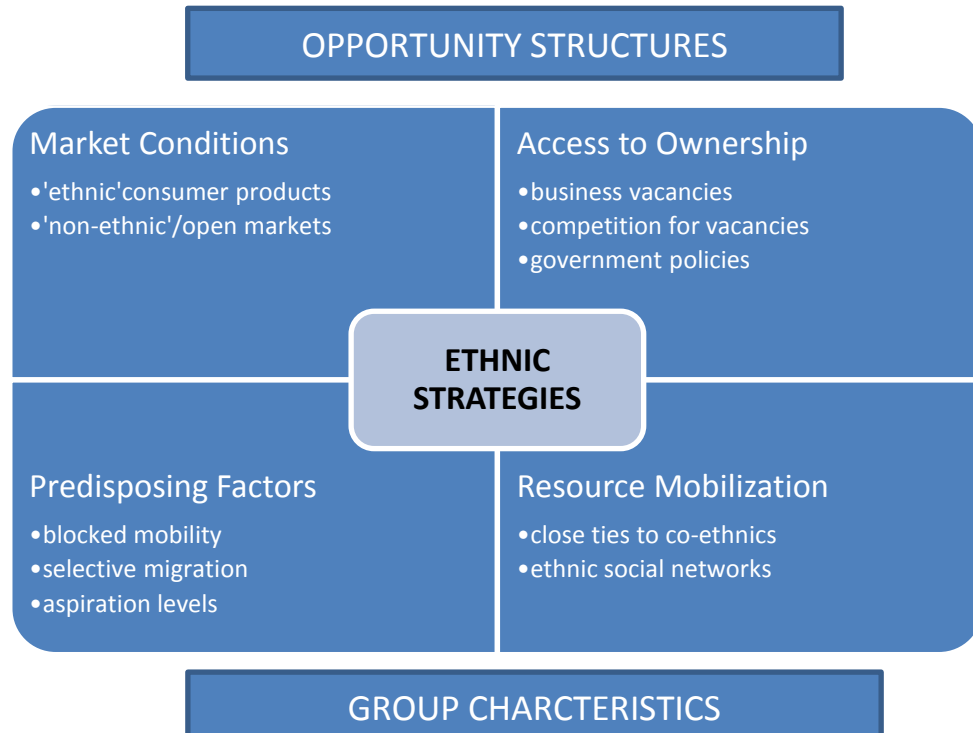
Open markets, in contrast, also address non-co-ethnic customers, but are often blocked through high entry barriers. They mainly enter the following segments: First, underserved or abandoned markets; these can be particular streets or neighborhoods that have been left alone by indigenous/mainstream businesses and experience revitalization through the entrepreneurial activities (e.g. opening of restaurants and bars) of immigrants (cf. Jones and Ram 2007). Second, low economies of scale refer to markets where migrant entrepreneurs become successful by engaging in self-exploitation. Self-exploitation is a strategy that small store owners or self-employed street vendors can successfully pursue by providing special services such as longer working and opening hours, year-round operation or easily available credits (Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward 1990, p. 26). Finally, the authors identify a niche for ethnic and exotic goods: Demand among the native population for such products enables immigrants to transform contents and symbols of culture and ethnic identity into profit-making commodities. This niche seems to be a fruitful path as only members of the specific ethnic group know how to produce, supply or, at the very least, can present and sell these goods in a seemingly authentic way (ibid., p. 27).

Another characteristic of ethnic minority entrepreneurship's market condition is that the barriers to enter business are low in terms of required capital and educational qualifications (Volery 2007, p. 31). Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward (1990) illustrate the example of taxi driving which does not require high levels of specialization but can be learned through informal, on-the-job training and further developed through driving experience (p. 28). These arguments contradict their previous explanation on the supply of exotic products that is only available to a certain group which possesses specific skills or an apparent authenticity. Other shortcomings and contradictions of this model will be discussed later on in this chapter.

The second dimension of the outlined opportunity structure refers to the challenge of *access to ownership*, which depends on the level of interethnic competition for jobs and businesses as well as on state policies that vary considerably among different nation states. In the context of direct interethnic competition, Aldrich and Waldinger (1990) identify two outcomes of businesses opportunities (p. 118): (1) In light of high competition, ethnic groups concentrate in a limited range of industries and (2) in light

of very high competition, a group might be pushed out of more lucrative activities or forced out of business altogether.

FIGURE 3: THE INTERACTIVE MODEL



Source: Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward 1990, p. 22; own illustration

2.3.1.2 GROUP CHARACTERISTICS

While opportunity structures provide the “niches and routes of access for potential entrepreneurs”, group characteristics help answer the question “why particular ethnic groups are disproportionately concentrated in ethnic enterprises” (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990, p. 122). In *culturalistic* approaches, immigrants are supposed to have culturally determined features such as dedication to work, membership in a strong social network, solidarity and loyalty, acceptance of risk, and a propensity towards self-employment (Masurel, Nijkamp and Vindigni 2004, p. 74). This explanation has become especially popular to describe the alleged propensity of Asians towards self-employment which is rooted in the strong visibility of Chinese in the economic sector (Volery 2007, p. 33). In *structuralist* approaches, however, the external environment of migrants as partly discussed in the context of opportunity structures plays the crucial

role. The interactive model proposed by Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward (1990) attempts to offer a synthesis between these perspectives.

Group characteristics, the second part of the model, focus on the characteristics and resources shared by migrants of the same origin. They consist of two main dimensions: First, *predisposing factors* including blocked mobility, selective migration, and aspiration levels as well as second, *resource mobilization* including networks, ethnic social ties, and government policies that constrain or facilitate resource acquisition.

I start with a discussion of *predisposing factors*: Blocked mobility is a result of the various obstacles that migrants experience on the labor market. They are unfamiliar with the language or local culture of the host society, lack education or work experience, and are moreover disadvantaged by lack of mobility due to poverty or discrimination. "Racial exclusion and discrimination erect structural barriers to prevent immigrants from competing with the native born on an equal basis in the mainstream economy" (Zhou 2004, p. 1047). Such a situation prevents them from obtaining salary jobs, and self-employment remains as the only alternative. This explanation views entrepreneurship "not as a sign of success but simply as an alternative to unemployment" (Volery 2007, p. 33).

Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward (1990) allege a self-selective migration process stating that workers who enter minority enterprises tend to be better prepared and more inclined towards risk than those who stay at home (p. 32). Household-strategy theorists would argue that migration decisions are not made by individuals, but by households. In order to insure the income, property, and wellbeing of the household or the family against various risks, one or more household members are sent to foreign labor markets (Stark 1991). Indeed, the decision-making process is even more complex as it "is also a response to larger structural conditions in sending and receiving societies, factors that cannot be studied easily by using surveys of individuals or households" (Durand and Massey 1992, p. 13). Selective migration also includes prior economic (e.g. buying and selling) experiences for migrants entering businesses. Massey et al. (1994) argue that migration perpetuates itself over time. Migrants in general can benefit from the experiences of living and working elsewhere and as a

result are quite likely to migrate again. Still, the question of whether economic experiences are a necessary condition for business success is still unclear as some immigrant groups have not been able to transform their previous education and work experience into positions comparable to those they had prior to migrating (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990, p. 123). The reason for this lies in the lacking or not acknowledged credentials, in the lack of language skills or in xenophobic tendencies among the host society. Finally, several studies show that economic capital is a prerequisite for migration, thus it is not the poorest who move but those who have access to resources (Stark 1991; Skeldon 1997).

By *resource mobilization*, the second dimension of group characteristics, Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward (1990) refer to close ties between co-ethnics that are transmitted through communication or personal interaction between immigrants and their home communities. The depiction, stories, and information provided by migrants prompts other co-ethnics to move and take their chances as well; even if the new home and job are not as glamorous as newcomers might have imagined. Piore (1979) argued that most migrants see their work as temporary and therefore more often accept lower-status jobs than members of the host society do. It is more important to enhance one's economic status in order to invest in (im)material goods and maintain the status back home than to aim for social upward mobility in the society to which one has migrated. In migrant destination areas as well, ethnic social networks are supposed to be strong. Because of a search for familiarity, the efficiency of personal contacts (e.g. to find a job or a home), and social distance to the host society's institutions of support, immigrants rely on these ties between co-ethnics "and find themselves in the ethnic occupational and residential ghetto" (Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward 1990, p. 35).

2.3.1.3 ETHNIC STRATEGIES

In the outlined model, opportunity structures and group characteristics constantly interact in the sense that some aspects of the opportunity structure can be influenced and improved with help, for example of strong social ties to co-ethnics (cf. Volery 2007). Ethnic strategies are seen as solutions to specific challenges ethnic entrepreneurs face as a result of the interplay of opportunity structures and group characteristics. In this context, Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward (1990) identified seven

problems in founding and operating businesses: (1) Acquiring information needed for the establishment and continued existence of their business, (2) obtaining capital needed for the establishment and expansion of their business, (3) acquiring training and skills needed to run their business, (4) recruiting and managing efficient, honest, and cheap workers, (5) managing relations with customers and suppliers, (5) protecting themselves from political attacks. Another challenge can emerge after the business setup in light of intensive competition in the niches occupied by ethnic entrepreneurs. This situation is countered through (1) self-exploitation, (2) expanding the business by opening other shops, and (3) founding and joining ethnic trade associations.

2.3.1.4 LIMITATIONS AND APPRAISAL

The concepts outlined above have both strengths and flaws. They are not purely based on social explanations, but also take economic and political dimensions into consideration and thus provide one of the earliest more comprehensive approaches of ethnic minority entrepreneurship. The consideration of market conditions and the argumentations of the niche market approach as well as the impact of legal conditions (e.g. immigration laws or business regulations) are crucial for an understanding of ethnic minority or immigrant entrepreneurship.

Rath and Kloosterman (2000), however, criticize that the interactive model is more a classification than an explanatory model and that it neglects a number of central issues and questions (p. 667). Immigrants are a priori categorized and portrayed as unchanging ethnic subjects who by default act differently than mainstream entrepreneurs. In addition, the economic context within which their entrepreneurial activities develop is depicted as rather static and the institutional context consists of simply listing laws and regulations. Adopting this model means assuming that there are basic conditions in both the immigrant group and the host society, which cannot be changed or influenced by the migrants themselves but which determine their activities (Pütz 2003, p. 555).

2.3.2 MIXED EMBEDDEDNESS

The concept of mixed embeddedness (Kloosterman, van der Leun and Rath 1999; Kloosterman and Rath 2001) aimed to further the development of the previously introduced “interactive model” and criticized shortcomings in existing studies such as the pure ethnic or social bias and the negligence of the entrepreneurial market: “in conjunction with the ethnic bias, most scientific researchers have paid little systematic attention to the underlying structural changes of the economy in general and specific markets in particular” (Rath and Kloosterman 2000, p. 667). Immigrant entrepreneurship is located at the “intersection of changes in socio-cultural frameworks on the one side and transformation processes in (urban) economies on the other” and is therefore embedded in a larger and dynamic “framework of institutions on neighborhood, city, national or economic sector level” (Kloosterman and Rath 1999, p. 257). Social and ethnocultural dimensions are not viewed as a dominating or independent role, but are integrated into a broader approach. Like the model of Waldinger and associates, this concept was also developed in Western contexts, mainly based on case studies about immigrants in the Netherlands and Western Europe. Yet, many components of these concepts such as market conditions, blocked mobility, selective migration or the role of social relations are generally enough to put them into context of non-Western societies. Moreover, I reviewed literature concerning street vending, informality, and self-employment in non-Western contexts (see chapter 2.1), and thoroughly studied the regional Thai context as well as ethnographic literature about the Akha (see chapter 4). Furthermore, I carried out intensive fieldwork in Thailand and reflected on my own role as researcher (see chapter 3.4.2) in order to try to overcome a Western bias.

The concept of mixed embeddedness is based on two general assumptions/observations (Kloosterman and Rath 2001, pp. 191–192): First, it implies a difference between ethnic minority and immigrant entrepreneurs from less-developed countries and those from the native population in developed countries regarding their endowment in terms of financial, social, and cultural capital. Though such differences may hold true for specific contexts, one has to acknowledge the increasing number of migrant entrepreneurs in the highly skilled and high tech sector

(Sahin, Baycan and Nijkamp 2011). Second, ethnic entrepreneurs are not static figures purely responding to the opportunity structures, but active agents who are able to change existing and create new opportunity structures. This observation is definitely an important point, but Kloosterman and Rath cannot and do not further elaborate the role of agency of migrant entrepreneurs as they explicitly focus on the demand side and on a further exploration of the opportunity structure. Their remarks on the actors' agency is limited to the observation that fortune-making entrepreneurs (be they migrants or not) are the exception and that the number of innovative pioneers is greatly outweighed by the large number of copycats. Thus, the majority of ethnic entrepreneurs have to accept and deal with the existing opportunity structure.

According to Kloosterman and Rath, two dimensions are crucial for the success of ethnic entrepreneurs. On the one hand, markets have to be accessible for newcomers to launch a business (accessibility) and on the other hand, there must be growth potential of the markets where migrants set up a business. If the opportunity structure is adequate, entrepreneurs only need small amounts of economic capital and relatively few educational qualifications. In tourism contexts, especially under conditions of mass or urban tourism, in-migration is high and facilitated by low barriers to entry (Hall and Rath 2007, p. 14). In this context, cutthroat competition evolves and entrepreneurs primarily compete "on flexibility of supply and on price rather than on quality" (Kloosterman, van der Leun and Rath 1999, p. 258).

Emerging adequate opportunities depend on market conditions and the politico-institutional environment of the target destination. In their understanding of the opportunity structure, markets and the way they are embedded in institutions is the central concern. The importance of markets was already mentioned by Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward (1990), but experienced further elaboration in the mixed embeddedness approach.

2.3.2.1 ECONOMIC AND POLITICO-INSTITUTIONAL CONDITIONS

Markets constitute the “concrete economic locus where entrepreneurs, combining different resources in a specific way (adding value), have to sell their products to clients” (Kloosterman and Rath 2001, p. 192) and are – with reference to Esping-Andersen (1990) – strongly influenced by institutional frameworks. Generally, institutions, laws, rules, and regulations can refer to direct, formal laws and instructions (e.g. outlawing prostitution) or to indirect rules and regulations that facilitate or impede the emergence of certain markets (e.g. minimum wage, state welfare system) (Kloosterman and Rath 2001, p. 195). In order to illuminate the opportunity structure from a comparative perspective, they suggest a three-level approach including the national, the regional/urban, and the local/neighborhood level. Such a distinction facilitates the discovery of location-specific traits and their spatial variations. The economic and politico-institutional environment cannot only differ among nation states, but also among or even within cities. Such differences between regional or local configurations have hardly been studied in the field of migrant entrepreneurship (Kloosterman and Rath 2001, p. 198).

The first level refers to the national institutional framework. Despite or in consequence of ongoing globalization processes, nation states and national borders still matter and impact people’s lives. Relevant institutions and policies at this level can include the existence (and amount) of minimum wage, the evolvement of a welfare system (including health and security care as well as educational infrastructure), existing immigration, citizenship and minority policies as well as tourism development strategies. On the national scale, the national framework of the opportunity structure is self-evidently the same for the different research sites, but the urban and local structures consequently differ from place to place.

The second level to be analyzed concerns regional or urban conditions. Regions and cities have become more connected through the improvement of infrastructure and communication, but at the same time they have also become more specialized and promoted their own uniqueness and identity. Therefore, different regions or cities also attract different types of tourists who are the central component of the demand side and thus shape the opportunity structure by influencing accessibility and growth

potential for aspiring migrants and entrepreneurs. Moreover, urban policies such as infrastructure planning, tourism developments or housing policies, which may influence the residential distribution of migrants, can have considerably impacts. The distinction between the national and the urban/regional levels is not always clear, and they might overlap and intersect in the context of certain policies or regulations.

Third, not only regions or cities, but also neighborhoods have their own characteristics and are referred to at the neighborhood or local level. Furthermore, neighborhoods involve proximity and can thereby “constitute the obvious concrete locus for many social networks and hence for the nurturing of the social capital that is so important in many immigrant businesses” (Kloosterman and Rath 2001, p. 197). In addition, migrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurs have to find places for their accommodation and business in order to be able to offer their products to their customers. In many cases, business owners have to position their businesses in particular neighborhoods – for instance, in tourist areas – as customers are normally not willing to travel long distances to buy souvenirs. Finding a shop or accommodation in a certain neighborhood often relies on informal processes of inclusion and exclusion. Newcomers might be supported or blocked in terms of acquiring information regarding business premises or finding accommodation. While Kloosterman and Rath subsume such social processes into the opportunity structure, I believe that the concepts of positive and negative social capital (see chapter 2.2) are more suitable tools to grasp and understand these forms of social practice of economic action in local contexts.

Finally, the mixed embeddedness approach does not solely refer to structural economic and institutional structures, but also to societal conditions in the new host society (Kloosterman, van der Leun and Rath 1999) and thus takes the role of non-migrant actors into account. In my study context, it is important how ethnic minority entrepreneurs are perceived and imagined by members of Thai mainstream society (chapters 7.2 and 8.2).

2.3.2.2 LIMITATIONS AND APPRAISAL

The mixed embeddedness model presents itself as a seminal further development of the interactive model. Indeed, the proposed three-level approach focusing on the demand side and analyzing national, regional, and local contexts helps restructure the complex opportunity structures, but their main ideas about market conditions, accessibility of businessmen and -women as well as intra-ethnic competition have already been formulated by Waldinger and associates. Yet, another advancement – at least in specific contexts – is the model's stronger focus on institutional frameworks and political regimes and an attempt "to come up with approaches that do not just transfer American interpretations without further ado to quite different contexts on the other side of the Atlantic" (Kloosterman and Rath 2001, p. 199). Its applicability to non-European contexts can therefore be questioned, especially when used as the only concept of explanation. Even though Kloosterman and Rath point to the importance of actors' agency, they fail to further elaborate on this central dimension. Both the interactive model and the mixed embeddedness approach are mainly based on structuralist patterns of interpretation, which explain economic actions of entrepreneurs as responses to larger structures beyond their influence. While these models can be strong tools for analyzing the constraints and structural conditions entrepreneurs are confronted with, the actors' economic agency remains invisible. It is necessary to pursue more qualitative and action-oriented studies focusing on entrepreneurs as individual agents and existing research needs to be expanded by agency perspectives (Pütz 2003, p. 557). The weakness of the mixed embeddedness model is that it is still in its experimental phase and that its validation has not yet exceeded descriptive case studies (Volery 2007, p. 35).

Kloosterman and Rath (2001) themselves also call for a more thorough empirical exploration at the local level in order to analyze the interplay between individual actors, social networks, and opportunities (p. 198). Thus, researchers should pay more attention to the relationships of basic structural conditions and the strategies, aspirations, and goals of individual actors. In order to overcome the dichotomy of structure and agency, Bourdieu's concepts of forms of capital and habitus were integrated into the theoretical framework.

2.4 (OTHER) FORMS OF CAPITAL

Even though several scholars (Nee and Sanders 2001; Hall and Rath 2007; Volery 2007) highlight the low entry barriers for migrant entrepreneurship in terms of financial and human-cultural capital, practice still demonstrates that various forms of capital, e.g. economic capital for transportation to name a quite obvious example, are still an inevitable prerequisite. Moreover, ethnic entrepreneurs may provide different goods and services that members of the mainstream society are not as likely to offer as only they may have expert knowledge on specific demands, specific sources of supply or the relevant production techniques. Migrants bring a repository of various forms of capital with them and are able to accumulate further capital during and after migration. The success or failure of an actor within the field of entrepreneurship also depends on his/her endowment of capital while the various forms of capital can be unevenly distributed among various actors within a field. Capital can be perceived as power (Bourdieu 1986, p. 242) and is accumulated, inherited, and transferred individually or collectively. The structure of the distribution of various forms and subforms of capital at any given moment “represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances and success for practices” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 242). In other words, the endowment of various forms of capital structures the constraints and chances of an agent’s practice. Bourdieu (1986) highlights the need to reintroduce capital in all its forms by distinguishing four forms of capital (economic, social⁶, cultural, and symbolic), which enter into human agency and the achievements of economic action.

Economic capital can immediately and directly be converted into money as a ready form of exchange such as income and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights such as house, land or car ownership (Bourdieu 1983, p. 185). It is regarded as the most important form of capital, which serves as the basis for the accumulation of the other types (Fuchs-Heinritz and König 2005, p. 161), but in order to understand and explain the social world, it is necessary to acknowledge capital other than solely the one form recognized by economic theory (Bourdieu 1986, p. 46).

⁶ Also see the concepts of social embeddedness and social capital as mentioned above.

Symbolic capital establishes one's credit within a society or community. It is defined as a resource based on prestige, honor, recognition or misrecognition, which under certain conditions can guarantee economic profits (Bourdieu 1980, p. 262).

Cultural capital occurs in three different types: (1) in the embodied/incorporated state in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body, (2) in the objective state in the form of cultural goods, and (3) in the institutionalized state as educational qualifications and certificates.

- Cultural capital in its objective state appears in the form of books, pictures, instruments, jewelry, machines, and other visible and tangible cultural goods. Objectified cultural capital features “a number of properties which are defined only in the relationship with cultural capital in its embodied form” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 246). A modern art painting, for example, usually only gets valued and ‘consumed’ by persons who have gained knowledge or at least showed interest in arts. Simultaneously, the decorated and ornamented headdress or the traditional clothing of the Akha women might be appreciated by co-ethnics who incorporated the cultural meaning or by tourists who are interested in minority cultures or – on a more superficial level – in the exotic Other. So the validation of cultural capital often depends on embodied cultural capital and on the context of its presentation.
- Institutionalized cultural capital manifests in the form of legally guaranteed titles, degrees, and qualifications. It thereby distinguishes officially recognized cultural competence (e.g. a degree from a fashion school) from “simple cultural capital, which is constantly required to prove itself” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 248).
- The accumulation of incorporated or embodied cultural capital is tied to a high level of personal commitment implying time and labor which presupposes a process of embodiment/incorporation (Bourdieu 1997, p. 55). This type of cultural capital can only be internalized by an individual into an integral part of the person, into a habitus (see chapter 2.5), and therefore cannot be transferred instantaneously like money or material cultural artifacts. In this

context, incorporated knowledge and skills, but also job and migration experiences are embodied cultural capital constituting part of the habitus. The family, the kinship clan, the school or one's social milieu may structure the preconditions for acquiring skills or knowledge, but such experiences cannot be inherited, only acquired, and thus accrue, decline, and die with their carrier. This type of cultural capital can be acquired to a varying extent, depending on the period of time, the society, and the social class, in the absence of any knowing inculcation and therefore quite unconsciously (Bourdieu 1986, p. 245).

Another important manifestation of embodied cultural capital is language. The ability to speak foreign languages (even to a limited extent) can be an advantage for ethnic entrepreneurs, especially in the tourism context where they deal with many international tourists. However, a local accent indicating a migrant or ethnic minority origin when communicating with members of the mainstream society can also be a drawback. Bourdieu (1991) points to the relations between language and power, and how the former is socially evaluated. In his study on language and symbolic power, Bourdieu demonstrated how the Parisian standard language became the official dominating language in France which in turn provided the local bourgeoisie with the "monopoly of politics, and more generally of communications the central government and its representatives" (Bourdieu 1991, p. 47). Similarly in Thailand, central Thai has been enforced as the national language by banning other languages and dialects from the formal education system. Peter Dirksmeier (2012) further expands the notion of embodied cultural capital by what he terms "residential capital". This subform can be "defined as a set of qualities which accumulate because of the particular relevance of a place of birth and domicile"; these qualities such as proficiency in a language and the application of such skills are incorporated within the dispositions of the habitus (Dirksmeier 2012, p. 80).

Bourdieu (1983, 1986) points to conversions and transformations of capital, highlighting that one form of capital is translatable into others. Some forms of capital

can be immediately accessed by virtue of economic capital while the acquisition of other goods and services are only possible through social capital or a combination of both. Buying a present for the boss or a coworker can be aimed at establishing stronger social relations. First, one has to buy the gift and may invest time for decoration or a creative greeting card. So the conversion from economic to social capital needs money, time and effort. Investing in capital however can also become a risky venture. Putting effort into acquiring social capital can be a problem when a member of the network fails to act upon a mutual obligation (Holt 2008, p. 232). “The convertibility of the different types of capital is the basis of the strategies aimed at ensuring the reproduction [...] by means of the conversions least costly in terms of conversion work and of the losses inherent in the conversion itself” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 54).

Nee and Sanders (2001) were among the first scholars employing the forms of capital model in order to show that endowment with social, financial, and human-cultural capital possessed by migrants and their families shapes the modes of societal and economic incorporation. The supply of different forms of capital clearly shapes the capabilities of actors, but so that in conjunction with their habitus, “a set of deeply internalized schemes through which the world is perceived, understood, appreciated, and evaluated” (Sakdapolrak 2007, p. 56).

2.5 HABITUS AND AGENCY

Individuals in most cases neither act solely voluntary nor solely forced. Almost all forms of migration and the subsequent decisions and actions in the migration destination areas involve some type of constraints, but also choices. Migrant entrepreneurs – be they company owners or informal street vendors – can formulate aspirations, goals, and expectations on the basis of which they seemingly make their choices. But they do so according to their endowment of capital within constraining structures and their actions are strongly influenced by experiences and socialization processes.

Along with theorizing the forms of capital, Bourdieu offers “a more nuanced understanding” of agency via the concept of habitus (Holt 2008, p. 232). The notion of

habitus proposes that human beings are actors shaped by history “who carry within their bodies acquired sensibilities and categories that are the sedimented products of their past social experiences” (Wacquant 2011, p. 82). The habitus refers to cognitive structures and is the “universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent’s practices” (Bourdieu 1977, p. 79). Habitus represents the “dialectic of the internalization of the externality and the externalization of internality” (1977, p. 72). It is expressed via embodied dispositions which are durable and acquired through social experience, especially during one’s early years of life (Jenkins 2002, p. 79). It is emphasized that the habitus is influenced as much, if not more, by experience than by explicit teaching: There are three ways how embodied dispositions are utilized in Bourdieu’s conceptualization (ibid., p. 79): (1) as an organizing principle of all thought and action (see also Bourdieu 1977, p. 18), (2) as a ‘way of being’ or ‘habitual state’ (including deportment and way of speaking (Holt 2008, p. 233) and (3) as a ‘tendency’, ‘propensity’ or ‘inclination’. Each individual has a different habitus, which is affected by parameters such as age, wealth, sex, physical appearance, occupation, and so on (Ryan 2004). “As an acquired system of generating schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted, the habitus engenders all the thoughts, all the perceptions, and all the actions consistent with those conditions, and no others” (Bourdieu 1977, p. 95).

It is crucial for the understanding of agency and structure in the context of ethnic minority street vendors that habitus is a set of acquired dispositions, a product of internalization or embodiment, a product of history shaped by experiences, education and training (Bourdieu 1979). Each individual is thus socially predetermined so that these predeterminations influence current and future actions (Schwingel 2009, p. 61). Strauss (1993) also states that “during early childhood and continuing all through life, humans develop selves that enter into virtually all their actions and in a variety of ways” (p. 25). Moreover, these socially constituted dispositions are transmissible. “If you want to pry into habitus, then study the organized practices of inculcation through which it is layered” (Wacquant 2011, p. 86). The power of the habitus stems “from the thoughtlessness of habit and habituation, rather than consciously learned rules and practices” (Jenkins 2002, p. 76). So it is argued that the practice derived from the habitus “operates beneath the level of consciousness and discourse” (Wacquant 2011,

p. 86) and thus argues against the *homo intentionalis*. Also, Giddens (1984) argues that agency does not refer to individuals' intentions of action but to their capability to carry out action (p. 9). Actors or agents are like players of a game who know how to play it without needing to explicitly refer to the rules (Bourdieu 1990a, 1990b). Giddens (1984) uses the term practical consciousness consisting of "all the things which actors know tacitly about how to 'go on' in the contexts of social life without being able to give them direct discursive expression" which especially becomes relevant in the context of "routinization" and "day-to-day social activity" (p. xxiii). However, Bourdieu also recognizes that there must be consciousness involved (Jenkins 2002, p. 77): A speech, for instance, is a complex process involving a full range of intellectual operations, both conscious and unconscious. Habitus structures (but does not determine) an agent's actions and perceptions.

Moreover, the sets of dispositions that constitute the habitus vary by social location and trajectory as individuals with different life experiences have developed different forms of thinking, perceiving, feeling, and acting (Wacquant 2011, p. 86). In other words, agents' different life stories, their unequal capital endowment and power position results in different types of habitus (Etzold 2012, p. 21). Habitus serves as a dimension of distinction (Bourdieu 1987), but yet habitus can also be a collective category when processes of internalization are shared by several or a group of actors. In that way agents – even having developed their own personalities – reproduce societal structures (Weichhart 2004, p. 48). The set of dispositions of the habitus tends to perpetuate and to reproduce itself, but it is not unchangeable. The habitus of individuals or collectives is enduring but not frozen and can be modified under greater transformations of socio-economic conditions.

A concept relevant in both feminist and habitus studies is that of the body. Bourdieu (2001) coined the term 'hexis' "which includes both the strictly physical shape of the body ('physique') and the way it is 'carried', deportment, bearing, is assumed to express the 'deep being', the true 'nature' of the 'person'" (p. 64). The body is part of the habitus and is the "threshold through which the subject's lived experience of the world is incorporated and realized and, as such, is neither pure object nor pure subject" (McNay 1999, p. 98).

Everyday activities as social practice are “shaped by both, the habitus which disposes people to act in particular ways and the availability for various species of capital” (Sakdapolrak 2007, p. 56). In this understanding, agency is not limited to conscious or deliberate social action and decision-making as proposed by rational choice theories. Bourdieu’s theory implies that due to the existence of the habitus, actors are neither (unconstrained) free-willed actors nor are they entirely controlled by some outside force. The habitus concept aims at overcoming the opposition “between an objectivism that reduces practice to the mechanical precipitate of structural necessities and a subjectivism that confuses the personal will and intentions of the agent with the spring of her action” (Wacquant 2011, p. 85).

2.6 GENDER

The vast majority of Akha souvenir sellers are female, thus thoughts and concepts of gender and gender-based divisions of labor are important to this study. Gender can be defined as “a system of culturally constructed identities, expressed in ideologies of masculinity and femininity, interacting with socially structured relationships in division of labor and leisure, sexuality, and power between women and men” (Swain 1995, pp. 258–259). In order to understand the habitus and the agency of female entrepreneurs, it is important to study the traditional role and perception of women in Akha society (see chapter 4.3.1). Furthermore, gender is considered a dynamic and relational construct that is mediated and negotiated by diverse contexts (Castellanos and Boehm 2008). It can be argued that gender is a dimension of habitus (Krais and Gebauer 2002, p. 49), but it is well recognized that “Bourdieu’s social theory had relatively little to say about women and gender” (Adkins 2004, p. 3) and that social capital is “generally conceived in gender-blind terms that give little attention to gendered intrahousehold issues of power and hierarchy” (Silvey and Elmhirst 2003, p. 866).

The extent to which social sciences engage with gender-oriented research varies, but scholars have identified five key issues or moments in the development of gender research (Pritchard et al. 2007, p. 5): First, women often remain invisible (in tourism studies) as they are subsumed into a male norm; second, women are recognized as the “Other”; third, differences between male and female are identified; fourth, female-

oriented and feminist research approaches emerge and finally, gender is one of a number of human status characteristics which affect individuals' experiences.

"Gender distinguishes between male and female domains in activities, tasks, spaces, time, dress and so on" (Pessar and Mahler 2001, p. 2) and gender differences have been used to explain the division of labor. This distinction of male-female dichotomies such as public vs. private-domestic or culture vs. nature has been subject to extensive criticism as it is difficult to generalize women's experiences and their status, and considering the differences that exist between women in terms of ethnicity, place of origin, religion, age, class, education and so on. Furthermore, scholars have pointed to many cases where women in Southeast Asia experienced a relative economy or a degree of economic and social power in the household (King 2008, p. 201).

Theories of gender and work explain the gendered division of labor with the roles of capitalism and patriarchy. Patriarchal relations involve men's control over women's labor. This results in women's employment in low-wage jobs, more unpaid work within the household, and continuing dependence upon their husbands (Walby 1997). According to the patriarchal capitalism approach (Adkins 1995), which sees capitalism and patriarchy as interrelated systems, the demand for work arises in the context of gendered supplies of female and male labor producing and occupational gendered hierarchy. "Employers create jobs in a range of occupations which are associated with gendered characteristics and they demand male or female employees who will provide these characteristics"; this way, capitalism takes advantage of prevalent gender norms (Sinclair 1997, p. 7).

Studies, however, show that changing economic relations can transform cultural constructions of gender. Swain's early study about female producers of ethnic tourist art showed that the female Kuna and Sani handicraft producers gained greater power within the household, but not within the wider society where prevailing gender norms could not be changed (Swain 1993). In addition, Ong (1987) observed that in village and domestic life in Malaysia, female employment in factories led to a decrease of male power and influence over women, and that the women's income-earning capacities gave them leverage over their brothers and fathers.

The role of social capital for women's economic empowerment is still unclear. Recent studies challenge the assumption of networks and social capital as an instrument of women's empowerment (Burt 1998; Mayoux 2001; Molyneux 2002; Silvey and Elmhirst 2003). "Such critique suggests that more work is required in specific contexts to examine how gendered actors contribute to, and may be excluded from, different aspects of social capital and subsequent development outcomes for different social groups" (Radcliffe 2004, p. 521).

Gender constructions do not only play a role in intra-household and work-related issues, but also in the context of the constructions of otherness in host-guest relationships in tourism destination areas. Especially Asian women have been exoticized and eroticized in tourism literature, postcards or other promotional material, leading male tourists to develop certain preconceptions and imaginations about the opportunities their travel experiences will afford them (Scheyvens 2002, p. 42). Western male travelers have been socialized into perceiving women of color as somehow more willing and available (Pritchard and Morgan 2000, p. 125). In this theoretical approach, gender is used as one, but not as the only, parameter of differentiation. Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) reminds us to analyze the multidimensionality of marginalized subjects by integrating various dimensions such as gender, ethnicity, class, age or sexuality. Scholars have especially shown interest in the intersection of ethnicity and gender. John Urry (1990) points out that the combination of gender and ethnic subordination helped to construct Asian women as objects of a tourist and sexual gaze for male visitors from other societies (p. 141).

Studies have portrayed women as "victims, survivors and passive recipients of change or as active agents, turning potential disadvantage into opportunity, resisting oppression and subordination, and able to take control of their circumstances" (King 2008, p. 201).

2.7 MOBILITY AND MULTILOCALITY

It seems as if in the context of our time- and space-compressing age everyone (tourists, migrants, refugees, researchers, ...) and everything (capital, vehicles, information, ideas, ...) were on the move: "The age of mobility has replaced the sedentary age" (Rolshoven 2007, p. 17). Over the past 20 years, one could observe

increasing interest in issues of mobilities across various disciplines such as geography, anthropology, sociology, and of course migration and tourism studies; also in the regional context of Southeast Asia (Trupp and Dolezal 2013; Husa, Trupp and Wohlschlägl 2014). The emergent “mobility turn” (Cresswell and Merriman 2011a) and the “mobilities paradigm” (Sheller and Urry 2006) criticize the prevailing notion of sedentarism, which located bounded places, regions or nations as the fundamental basis of human identity and experience, and thus as the main unit of social research analysis. The mobilities paradigm in contrast “emphasizes that all places are tied into at least thin networks of connections that stretch beyond each such place and mean that nowhere can be an ‘island’” (Sheller and Urry 2006, p. 209). Even though different forms of mobility have shaped humankind all along, academia has rather recently (re)discovered the importance of mobility by focusing on mobile practices such as walking, running, or driving and on spaces such as roads, bridges, cities or immigration stations (Cresswell and Merrimen 2011a). For most of the ethnic minority groups in the highlands of Southeast Asia, sedentarism is a rather new phenomenon brought upon by new central powers after the Second World War in the context of ‘modern’ nation building (see chapter 4.2).

Research conducted by Larsen, Urry and Axhausen (2006) suggests five interdependent types of mobilities, which form travel and migration in the contemporary world: (1) *Physical movement of people* for work, leisure, family or lifestyle. This also implies the perhaps trivial but substantial fact that humans have a body, are part of the physical-material world, and are thus physically only able to be at one place at a time (Weichhart 2009b). (2) *Physical movement of objects* from and to producers, consumers, retailers, and distributors, which transports sometimes-faraway objects and goods to where people live and work. (3) *Imaginative movement* enables persons to travel elsewhere through memories and images seen on texts, computer screens or films, and often substitutes physical travel. (4) *Virtual travel* on the Internet facilitates online-travel without the need to move physically. (5) *Communicative travel* works through person-to-person messages via letters, postcards, telephones, emails or videoconferences. Especially emails “are powerful in travelling the world: they travel long distances as fast as short ones” (Larsen, Urry and Axhausen 2006, p. 48) and transfer (sending, replying, forwarding) information, jokes, gossip, news and so on.

Furthermore, the use of mobile phones has become significant; by 2014 the number of active cell phones will outnumber the total world population (Silicon India Magazines 2013). It is well-known, however, that the access to and use of information and communication technologies is unevenly distributed within countries and globally between developing and developed countries (Chinn and Fairlie 2004).

2.7.1 MOBILITY AS PRACTICE

Moreover, despite the constraints of society or geography, mobility i.e. the act of moving must be considered as practice. Mobile practices in this sense do not only refer to migratory movements which will be discussed later in this chapter, but also to embodied practices such as walking, running, dancing or driving (Cresswell and Merriman 2011a). Even practices which are associated with the physical capacities of lively bodies such as walking or running have entangled a range of more or less complex technologies such as footwear, digital stop watches, bags, rucksacks or maps (Cresswell and Merriman 2011b, p. 5). Lorimer (2011) reviewed the literature on walking studies in which walks have been presented (1) as the product of places (e.g. scenic walks or pilgrimage), (2) as ordinary features of everyday life, (3) as self-centered in order to find a better sort of fit between self and the world (e.g. walking meditation) and (4) as an artistic practice or one of resistance. For many street vendors and people working in the informal sector, walking is an everyday life-feature while one has to distinguish between *walking to or from work* and *walking as work*. In his oft-cited classic *The practice of everyday life*, Michel de Certeau (1984) focuses on the “ordinary practitioners of the city”, the walkers, in order to elucidate the tactical practices of the weak.

2.7.2 MOBILITIES BEYOND THE INTERNATIONAL BIAS: RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION

In order to categorize migrants and migrations, three dimensions, namely time, space, and motivation or purpose are usually applied (Skeldon 1997, Fassmann 2011). In this context, a system of binary divisions such as long-term vs. short-term, short-distance vs. long-distance, permanent vs. temporary or forced vs. voluntary migration is used. Particularly along the time dimension, more classification such as daily, periodic, seasonal, and long-term circulation as well as irregular and permanent mobility can be introduced.

The majority of empirical and theoretical studies dealing with human-spatial mobilities focuses on international (Castles and Miller 2003) or transnational migration (Basch, Glick-Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1997; Vertovec 1999), but the vast majority of people who migrate do so within the borders of their country of birth (Skeldon 2006, p. 17). Therefore, the “dominance of ‘transnational migration’ as an object of study over and above other forms of mobility in the region [in Asia] is somewhat at odds with its numerical importance” (Elmhirst 2012, p. 275). Elmhirst supposes that transnational (and international) migration became so popular on the international research agenda due to the political fears it provokes in the context of global security issues and the development possibilities it presents, e.g. in the context of economic remittances. Furthermore, Olwig and Sorensen (2002) seek to redirect “migration research away from the narrow focus on international population movements” and call “instead for a broader investigation of mobile livelihoods and the fluid fields of social, economic and political relations and cultural values that these livelihoods imply” (p. 2). The empirical evidence presented in this research can refer to mobilities on the subnational level related to various forms of migration and mobilities (see chapter 9.1).

Hugo’s typology of rural-urban mobility suggests the migrant’s level of commitment to her or his home town as useful classification criterion, whereas the degree of commitment to place of origin and destination depends on several factors (Hugo 1993): the location of the migrant’s family members, the location of property owned by the migrant, the regularity and scale of material remittances, political and social roles the migrant holds in the village, the frequency of the migrant’s home visits and the maintenance (or transfer) of the officially registered place of residence. In a later publication, Hugo (2009) also names language (being able to speak the language of the destination), the extent of cultural maintenance (e.g. active memberships in migrant organizations), and ethnicity/ancestry as relevant parameters. It is argued that if both partners come from the same area of origin, the family’s linkages to the home village will be stronger than if one is a native of the destination area.

Based on these criteria, the following types of rural-urban migrants can be distinguished (Hugo 1983): First, *commuters* who hold a working place in the city but return to the village every evening. Their relations to the city are minimal as their

social and political life is centered in the village where they also spend the majority of their earnings. The second group consists of *seasonal migrants* who often seek jobs in order to enhance their agricultural incomes. They carry out low economic or social investments in the city, leave their family back home and retain all political and social roles in the village. Third, *target or lifecycle migrants* move to the city for a limited period of time (though longer than a season) to accomplish a specific purpose (e.g. reach an educational level) or migrate at one or more specific stages of their lifecycle. They may bring their nuclear family members, seek for a more permanent accommodation, e.g. individually rented room, have more interaction with the urban population, but their social relations are predominantly limited to fellow villagers. Moreover, they keep strong links with the family in the village through visits, letters, phone calls, and remittances. Fourth, *working life migrants* intend to spend their entire working lives in urban areas but plan to return and retire to their home village. These migrants are usually accompanied by their family and buy individual housing or rent apartments/houses on a long-term basis. They establish high levels of interaction with urban settlers, but contacts to fellow migrants are maintained. Even though they transfer their registration to the city, they maintain sufficient links to the village to ensure acceptance on eventual return, but also to assist newcomers to the city from their home village. Working life migrants invest in housing and land back home, but are unable to keep most political and social roles. They visit their home only for important events and remittances are transacted periodically. Fifth, *permanent migrants* are totally committed to exchange a rural for an urban way of life by cutting off their relations to the village. The last category is *undecided migrants* who have no clear intentions to stay in the city or to return home to the village.

Hugo's typology, which is based on fieldwork in Indonesia, enhanced our understanding of rural-urban population movements as it moved beyond simple time-distance typologies. However, in order to analyze rural-urban migration in contemporary Thailand, further issues need to be taken into consideration. In the Thai case, migrants usually do not transfer their official places of residence because the process of household registration is a tedious one. Moreover, "village-ness has become a measure or badge of identity that people take with them to urban areas" (Rigg 2003, p. 161). This means that urban residents from rural areas will often say that

they live in the village even though they live and work in the city. Another somewhat unclear criterion of migration typologies is the intention of movers. A migrant's intentions to stay in the city or return home are – for a variety of reasons – not realized as planned. Rigg claims that in Southeast Asia many 'rural' people die in cities "as old men or women, still anticipating, on their death beds, the day they might return to their village roots" (Rigg 2003, p. 161).

Furthermore, people do not necessarily migrate to start a new life elsewhere. They may search for new possibilities to augment and diversify livelihoods back home (Olwig and Sorensen 2002, p. 1). In Southeast Asia, the decline of the agricultural workforce and the interrelated migration into urban areas can be seen in the context of household diversification strategies (Rigg 2003). Previous studies indicate that the involvement in nonfarm work cuts across economic status, and point to three main strategies underlying and driving processes of diversification (Rigg 1998): For the rural rich who are endowed with plenty of economic, social, and educational capital, nonfarm work is a strategy of further capital accumulation, for the poor and often landless households, a strategy of survival and for the middle-income households, a strategy of consolidation.

These thoughts lead to the conclusion that livelihoods in Southeast Asia were perhaps never quite as simple as the rural/urban dichotomy would have one believe (Rigg 1998, p. 500) and to the question of whether conceptions of a single home can be applied to the Southeast Asian context. The concept of multilocality, which will be discussed in the next chapter, aims at grasping the dimension of livelihoods dispersed in different geographical locations.

2.7.3 MULTILOCALITY AND TRANSLOCALITY

In recent decades, migration research in the Global South has pointed to the importance of non-permanent forms of migration and to the "phenomenon of rural-urban exchange within spatially multi-locational household arrangements" (Schmidt-Kallert 2012, p. 174). Instead of giving up the 'old' dwelling place in favor of a new one, multilocal forms of living keep the old one and establish one or more new residential units. In doing so, the household still consists of the same family or kinship members who pool their economic resources and may make future plans together, but these

members live in multiple locations (Thieme 2008). The level of interrelatedness of the different parts of the household varies over time and space. There might be detailed planning in order to accomplish certain short-term goals, exchange of money, goods, ideas and information or investments in housing or agriculture. Furthermore, the multilocal living arrangements can also fulfill social functions if one part, for instance, is responsible for child caring, schooling of kids or support for the sick and elderly (Schmidt-Kallert and Franke 2012). The intensity of linkages between different parts of the household may change due to marriage, the birth of children, the death of grandparents or job-related transformations and thus the amount of material and social remittances as well as the frequency of home visits or calls can change. Multilocal living arrangements are by no means static.

Greiner (2011; 2012) recommends avoiding the term “multilocal household”. He instead calls these interactions created through migration “translocal livelihood strategies”, which can be perused by units of different scale including individuals, households, villages or even regions (Greiner 2012, p. 207; Verne 2012). Translocality is defined as “the emergence of multidirectional and overlapping networks created by migration that facilitate the circulation of resources, practices and ideas and thereby transform the particular localities they connect” (Greiner 2011, p. 610). Yet, it seems fruitful to distinguish between multilocal households and other social networks based on ethnicity or common migration experiences.

One has to remark, however, that our times are characterized not only by large flows of various forms of mobilities, but also by immobilities. Migration can be restricted by immigration policies and everyday mobilities, e.g. walking as work for mobile street vendors, or by urban or selling regulations. The notion of the seemingly borderless world in motion must also be questioned and a complementary perspective of the “age of involuntary immobility” (Carling 2002), which aims at identifying and analyzing barriers and constraints, should be added (see chapter 8.2).

2.8 INTERIM CONCLUSION ON SENSITIZING CONCEPTS

My core interest lies in the different levels of action/interaction/agency and embeddedness of self-employed Akha migrants in Thailand's urban and beachside tourist areas and the question of how these ethnic minority businesses developed over time and space.

Generally, street vending and ethnic minority/migrant entrepreneurship are either discussed with concepts of migration theory, embeddedness or livelihood strategies, but most of these approaches do not make the connection to other social theories. By neglecting this important body of thought and literature, they "do not therefore permit any fundamental analysis of the relationship between the subject and society, the power relations within a society and the changes human mobility effects to power relations" (Thieme 2008, p. 51). I therefore combine concepts of migrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship such as social and mixed approaches of embeddedness that focus on analyzing structural conditions in various selling and destination areas with a more nuanced understanding of agency by employing Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital. The sellers' endowment of various forms of capital and their embodied habitus based on social experiences and their social position in the field can explain economic practice beyond deliberate action.

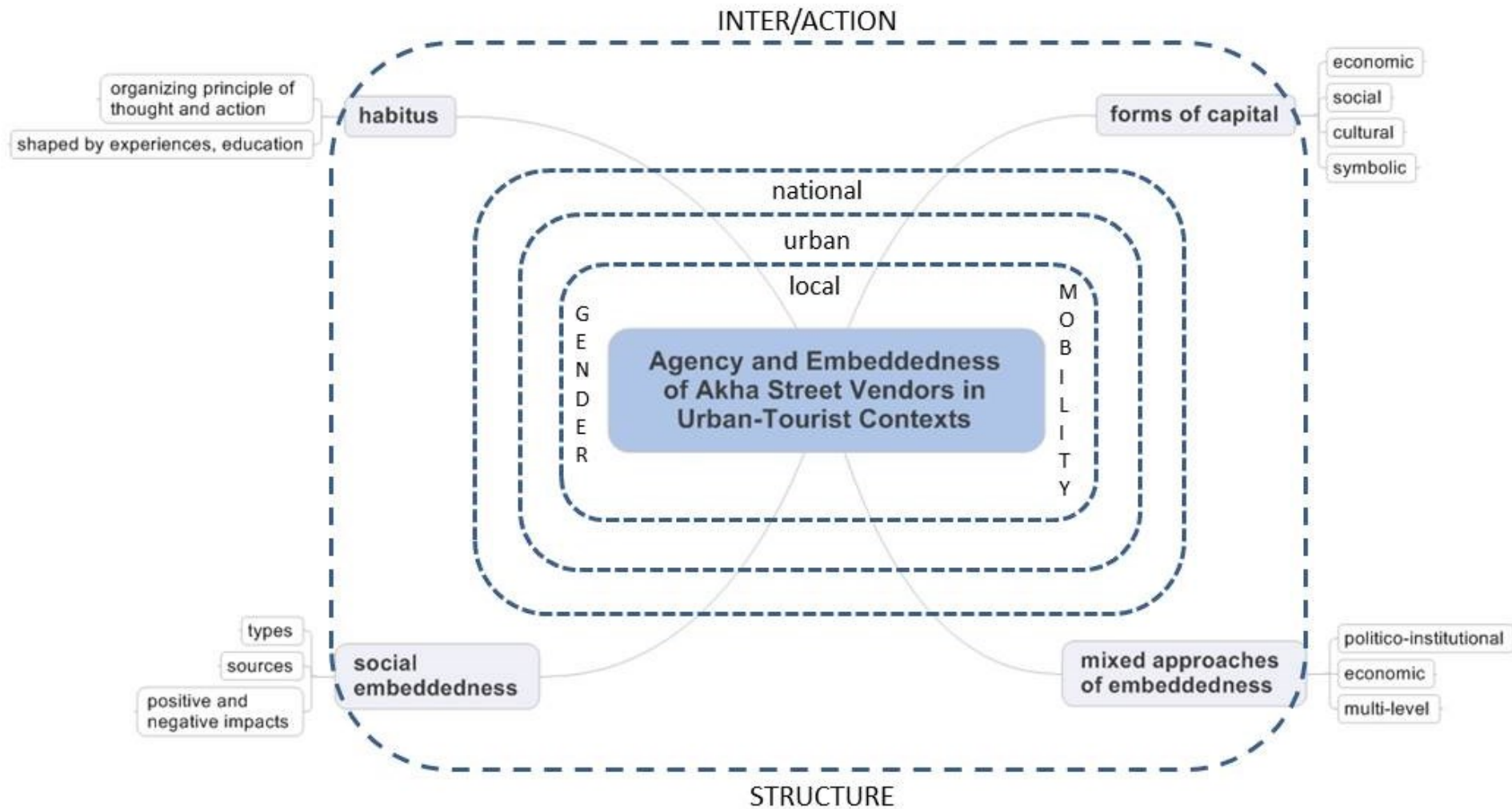
In the German-speaking spheres of social geography, Bourdieu's work was incorporated by Benno Werlen (1997) whose theory of human action, however, largely builds on the structuration theory of British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984). Werlen's important contribution was the inducement of a reorientation from a "spatially-centered" to an "action-oriented" geography, which requires "giving priority to the category of action over that of space and thereby overturning the categorical order of traditional [geographic] research logic" (Werlen 1998, p. 310). His work has been criticized for putting too much emphasis on the freedom of agents and thereby neglecting the structural constraints of human action (Meusbürger 1999), a problem Bourdieu aims to tackle by integrating agency and structure perspectives.

Bourdieu's outline of a theory of practice (1977) is largely based on fieldwork carried out among the Kabyle people in Algeria. For a decade, a growing number of German-

speaking social and development geographers have employed Bourdieu's concepts as general presumptions for their empirical work in countries of the Global South. Rothfuß (2004) studied actions and perceptions of the ethnic minority group of the Himba in Namibia in tourism contexts, Sakdapolrak (2007) used Bourdieu for theorizing social vulnerability in India, and Etzold (2013) explored power relations and livelihood strategies of street vendors in Bangladesh. I have been inspired by these works of geographers, but embed my research more strongly to the ideas and foundations of a grounded theory approach (see chapter 3).

To sum up, in this PhD study, I am interested in the migration of Akha souvenir vendors into Thailand's urban areas and the strategies and actions they deploy as well as the constraints they face. As shown in figure 4, Akha migrants selling souvenirs as self-employed informal street vendors (chapter 2.1) represent the main subjects of analysis. They are predominantly female (chapter 2.6), highly mobile in reference to rural-urban migration and forms of everyday mobilities (chapter 2.7), and are embedded in multiple fields including social (chapter 2.2), political, legal, and economic structures (chapter 2.3). The actors' agency or their capability to act is not only related to the structural conditions at various places, but also to their endowment of forms of capital (see chapter 2.4) and their habitus (chapter 2.5). The structural conditions connected to the specific actions of individuals or collectives take place on (inter)national, urban, and local levels while it is necessary to trace the relations between micro and macro situations and events. The presumptions about embeddedness, capital endowment, and habitus outlined in this chapter go along well with a grounded theory approach developed by Strauss (1987), Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Hildenbrand (2010) as it acknowledges and integrates structure and agency into research design and analysis.

FIGURE 4: SENSITIZING CONCEPTS – INTER/ACTION AND STRUCTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF ETHNIC MINORITY BUSINESS



Source: Own illustration

3 RESEARCH APPROACH: DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 GROUNDED THEORY

The research of this study is guided by grounded theory principles. Grounded theory was initially developed by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (1965; 2006 [1967]) for the purpose of generating theory from data. At the time, in the mid-1960s, qualitative research was – despite the existence of a few ‘qualitative stars’ – losing ground as sophisticated quantitative methods gained dominance over research departments, journal editorial boards, and funding agencies (Charmaz 2006, p. 4). Supported by the emergence of new computer systems able to process huge amounts of quantitative data, positivist conceptions and hypothetico-deductive approaches of scientific methods and knowledge-stressing objectivity, generalizability and falsification of hypotheses and theories were dominant. The publication of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* in 1967 tackled ruling methodological assumptions by providing a methodological frame for directly deriving theoretical concepts from the data. The basic components that defined grounded theory in its early years included (Glaser and Strauss 1967 [2006]; Strauss 1987; Charmaz 2006, pp. 5–6):

- Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis; sampling for concepts, not for persons
- Developing analytical codes and concepts directly from data, not from pre-formulated hypotheses and fixed theoretical frameworks, and advancing theory development during each step of data analysis
- Using the method of constant comparison throughout the process of data analysis
- Memo-writing and diagram-drawing in order to elaborate categories, their properties and dimensions, and to explore relationships between categories

Before I move on to elaborate on how grounded theory has changed since the late 1980s, I briefly outline the conceptual roots of grounded theory. Anselm Strauss’ and his working axioms were strongly influenced by the general ideas of American Pragmatism (especially the work of John Dewey and George H. Mead) and the Chicago school of social interactionism (Robert Park, Herbert Blumer), which were closely

related to each other (Strauss 1987). Pragmatism emphasizes action and the problematic situation (rather than the routine). Mead's contribution in relation to action and interaction include:

"his formulation of stages of the act, his radical conception of the temporal and complex and potential flexibility of any act, his detailing of self as process including self-reaction and the interplay of the I and the Me, his greater emphasis on the body in action, his elaboration with more specificity of 'mind' as a mental activity, and his development of a crucially important perspectival view of temporality and interaction" (Strauss 1993, p. 3).

Moreover, pragmatism rejects dualistic approaches. So, individuals or collectives who discover or create a new understanding of reality do so because they are already socialized to the perspectives they inherited (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 3). The tradition in interactionist sociology at the University of Chicago was connected to philosophic pragmatism and assumes that society, reality, and the self are constructed through interaction. In addition, the Chicago school inspired by utilizing qualitative data collecting methods such as participant observation and intense interviewing (Strauss 1987, p. 6). "In short, Strauss brought notions of human agency, emergent processes, social and subjective meanings, problem-solving practices, and the open-ended study of action to grounded theory" (Charmaz 2006, p. 7). Glaser, however, stems from Columbia University where he underwent rigorous training in quantitative methods and middle-range theories under the supervision of Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton. He filled grounded theory with unbiased empiricism, rigorous coding and codified methods, an emphasis on emergent discoveries, and a specialized language that somehow reflects his early quantitative socialization (Charmaz 2006, p. 7). Glaser and Strauss came together in the 1960s at the University of California, San Francisco, and the 'grounded theory project' aimed at developing a clear basis for systematic qualitative research, though Glaser has always argued that the method could also be applied to quantitative studies (Bryant and Charmaz 2010, p. 33). The receptions of the original book and its follow-up publications were immense and have certainly influenced the landscape of social science and humanities research.

In recent decades, however, the grounded theory approach has been expanded and altered by several scholars. First, there was a split between the two founders Glaser and Strauss in their contrasting notions of theoretical sensitivity and how (if at all) to

make use of existing literature and theoretical frameworks. Since the late 1980s, Strauss – mainly together with Juliet Corbin – has published several revisions of the grounded theory approach that ‘allow’ analysts the use of literature from the beginning and that recommend coding paradigms (Strauss 1987; Strauss and Corbin 1996; Corbin and Strauss 2008) which serve “to explicate the construction of theoretical framework necessary for the development of empirically grounded categories” (Kelle 2005, chapter 21). Glaser (1992) has attacked these viewpoints by arguing that the approach promoted by Strauss and Corbin led to the ‘forcing’ of data and led analysis into preconceived categories (for further discussion on this controversy, see Kelle 2005; Strübing 2008; Kelle 2010).

In the last 10 years or so, further perspectives have entered into grounded theory and definitely enriched its multiperspectivity by adding constructivist (Charmaz 2006) and postmodernist (Clarke 2003) paradigms. The latter aims to shift grounded theory as conducted by Glaser and Strauss and Corbin from a postpositive to a postmodern paradigm. One of the features of postmodern research result presentation is the practice wherein individual voices and the direct representation of the research participants are explicated. By doing so, researchers can tackle the ‘omniscience’ of analysts. In this thesis, I also decided to include direct voices and quotations from research participants in the context of the presentation and analysis of the empirical data. In *Constructing Grounded Theory*, Kathy Charmaz (2006) states that neither concepts nor theories are discovered but rather constructed by researchers through their past and present interactions and involvement with people and research practices. Researchers should be aware that they *construct* concepts and theories and what we may consider knowledge out of field notes, conversations, and observations and that knowledge is constantly evolving in the context of new experiences and circumstances. Yet, I agree with Corbin and Strauss (2008) that our data analysis needs a conceptual language in order to talk about and discuss research findings to some extent (pp. 10–11).

Both constructivist and postmodern positions put greater emphasis on actors themselves, but analysts should equally be interested in agency and structure:

“Minimizing or leaving out structural conditions, whether more immediately contextual or ‘further away’ (or, as some social scientists say, the *macroscopic* or *structural*) short-circuits the explanation. Doing the reverse, overemphasizing structural conditions, does not do justice to the rich interactional data that put life and a sense of immediacy (or as some say, *reality*) into the analysis” (Strauss 1987, p. 78).

In my research I am interested in motivations, actions, and strategies of ethnic minority souvenir sellers and the challenges and barriers they face on various levels as well as in the evolvement of souvenir businesses over time and space. I use grounded theory as suggested by Strauss and Corbin and Strauss in a generic sense to denote theoretical constructs from qualitative data analysis. The provided coding paradigm and the set of sensitizing concepts presented in chapter two do not support the forcing of data, but provide a useful frame to mediate structure and action-oriented data (see also chapter 3.2). Moreover, as will be shown in the next section, it allows abductive reasoning.

3.2 ABDUCTIVE REASONING

In Strauss’ later publications (mainly together with Corbin), the interplay of induction (deriving concepts, their properties, and dimensions from data) and deduction (hypothesizing about the relationships between concepts) is said to be one of the core elements of data analysis and theory development (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 56). This statement stands in contrast to previous viewpoints that rather recommend inductive procedures as represented in this oft-cited quote in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*: “Clearly, a grounded theory that is faithful to the everyday realities of a substantive area is one that has been carefully *induced* [emphasis in original] from diverse data” (Glaser and Strauss 2006 [1967]). Based on such quotes, grounded theory has often been labeled as an inductive method and has thus been exposed to critique (Strübing 2008). In later publications, Strauss mentioned that a stronger inductive rhetoric was perhaps required in 1967 in order to remind social scientists of the time of the necessity for grounding their theories in data (Strauss 1987, p. 6). Eventually, grounded theory developed into two directions, one (Corbin and Strauss 2008) arguing that theoretical pre-knowledge flows into data analysis and the other (Glaser 2002) insisting that categories emerge directly from the data.

Thus, the position of Strauss and Corbin takes into account that the development of categories and theories is theory-guided (Reichertz 2010, p. 215), and also Kelle (2005) acknowledged that “grounded theory has made considerable progress in overcoming the naive empiricism” (chapter 2.4). As shown in chapter 3.6, grounded theorists develop codes that are very close to the empirical data and then develop more abstract hypotheses, concepts, and categories as well as their properties and dimensions. These preliminary categories have to be tested and (re)studied in the field by searching the data for discrepant evidence and negative cases, which can lead to modification or even rejection of concepts and categories. Such logic – even if not explicitly referred to by Strauss and Corbin – is part of an abductive research logic⁷ (Reichertz 2010). Abductive reasoning “begins by examining data and after scrutiny of these data, entertains all possible explanations for the observed data, and then forms hypotheses to confirm or disconfirm until the researcher arrives the most plausible interpretation of the observed data” (Charmaz 2006, p. 186). “It links empirical observation with imaginative interpretation, but does so by seeking theoretical accountability through returning to the empirical world” (Bryant and Charmaz 2010, p. 46). This abductive logic – even if it was not called as much – becomes clear in a text passage by Anselm Strauss (1987) on induction, deduction, and verification: “Induction refers to the actions that lead to discovery of a hypothesis – that is having a hunch or an idea, then converting it into an hypothesis and assessing whether it might provisionally work as at least a partial condition for a type of event, act, relationship, strategy, etc.” (pp. 11–12). Abduction, by comparison, represents the attitude of the researcher towards data and one’s own knowledge by requiring to take data seriously and to challenge the validity of previously developed knowledge (Reichertz 2010, p. 221). More importantly, abduction implies that new categories and hypotheses can appear at any level of analysis, that interpretation of data is not completed at early stages of research and that codes, categories, and theories can be developed and refined (Reichertz 2010, p. 224).

⁷ Abduction as a form of logical inference goes back to American philosopher Charles S. Peirce (1839–1914), who distinguished it from the hitherto known types of conclusion such as deduction and induction.

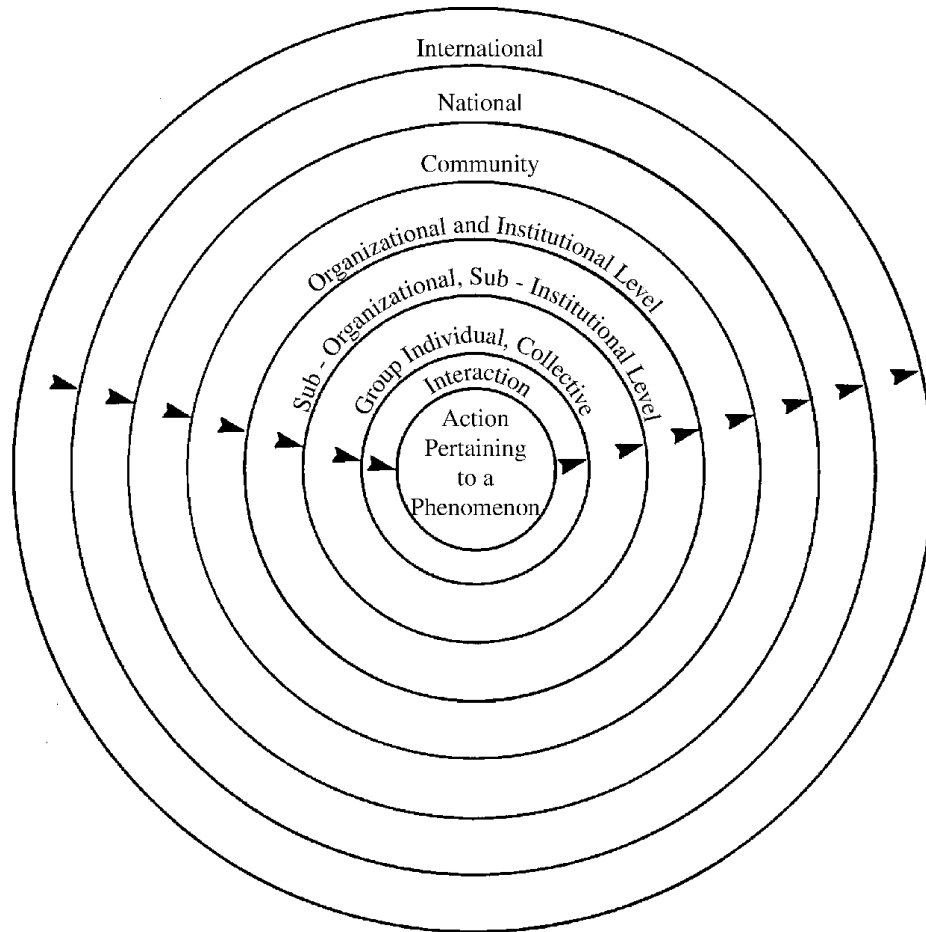
3.3 MEDIATING STRUCTURE AND AGENCY

As outlined in the first section of this chapter on methodology, grounded theory has developed into various directions, whereas my study is mainly based on the foundations of Strauss as well as of Corbin together with Strauss. Their approach acknowledges the importance of both action/interaction (agency) and structure and thus seems fruitful for the purposes of my study. “Often in contemporary qualitative research the emphasis on interactions (and on immediately contextual aspects in relation to interaction) is so strong that it overwhelms or prevents attention to the larger structural conditions” (Strauss 1987, p. 78). Strauss calls for attention to both positions without emphasizing one over the other, and clearly rejects dualistic approaches (Strauss 1993, p. 45). By doing so, he “shows himself to be an advocate of a structure/agency position, without having explicitly addressed the ongoing discussion on the issue”, and comes very close to ideas of Pierre Bourdieu (Hildenbrand 2010, p. 542).

This position becomes evident in their suggested concepts of the *coding paradigm* and the *conditional matrix* (Strauss and Corbin 1996; Corbin and Strauss 2008), which are recommended for middle and later stages of analysis such as axial and selective coding (see chapter 3.6.3). The coding paradigm can help researchers to identify contextual conditions, explore actions/interactions and their consequences, and relate them to each other (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 89). The more complex conditional matrix is an “analytic device for thinking about macro and micro relationships” and helps researchers to “immediate interactions to larger social conditions and consequences” (Charmaz 2006, p. 118). The matrix is depicted as concentric circles that put ‘action’ at the core (see figure 5). The outer rings represent the conditional features of various levels and the arrows – going both towards and away from the center – represent the intersection of both conditions/consequences and the resulting chain of events. In order to enhance generalizability of the matrix as an analytical tool, the specific characteristics relevant to the study should be integrated at each level (Strauss 1993, p. 61). The matrix is intended as a conceptual guide and researchers using the matrix may change the classification scheme to suit their own research. I developed my own classification scheme termed “set of sensitizing concepts” (see figure 4 in chapter 2) to

think more systematically about action- and structure-oriented data along micro, meso, and macro levels.

FIGURE 5: THE CONDITIONAL MATRIX



Source: Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 94

The ideas illustrated in figure 5 above are the following (Corbin and Strauss 2008, pp. 91–93):

- Conditions (structure) and consequences do not exist independently, but are always connected through action/interaction.
- The division between micro and macro perspective is an artificial one as most situations are a combination of both; therefore, researchers should trace the relations between micro and macro to situations, problems, and events.
- The full range of potential interconnectedness between micro and macro conditions is not necessarily clear and visible to individual research

participants; thus, it is important to collect various perspectives in order to understand the whole picture.

- Conditions and consequences usually exist in clusters and correlate in various ways, both to each other and to related action.
- Action and interaction are not confined to individuals, but can be carried out by or on behalf of nations, organizations or various groups.

By combining the coding procedures of grounded theory with the conditional matrix, “it is possible to deliver statements that not only relate to the structures of the individual case, but structures in general” (Hildenbrand 2010, p. 553). After assigning specific characteristics to the different conditional features, the complex relationship between structure (context) and process can be investigated. Process is ongoing action in response to situations or problems, often aimed at reaching a goal or tackling a problem (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 96). Structure and process are related because persons or groups act in response to something (such as occurring life events, goals or problems). In order to connect the specific conditions to the phenomenon in question, one has to trace or reconstruct the *conditional path*:

“Begin with an event, incident, or happening, then attempt to determine why this occurred, what conditions were operating, how conditions manifest themselves, and with what consequences. You determine the answers of this question by systematically following the effects of conditions through the matrix. What levels were passed through? With what effects?” (Strauss 1993, p. 62).

Strauss (1993, p. 63) and Hildenbrand (2010) argue that it is not routine events but problematic ones or ones that imply a disorder in action that should be selected for analysis. Such events “break through the continuity of routine action and may even become the initiating events for the generation of something new” (p. 546). This stands in contrast with Corbin’s argumentation that it is equally important to study routines as this also involves broad implications for knowledge development: “It enables researchers to identify the patterns of inter/action/emotional response that makes it possible to ‘establish’ and ‘maintain’ social and personal stability in the face of contingencies [...], thereby expanding our understanding of everyday life (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 100).

Whatever advice one follows, researchers employing grounded theory should neither think of structure as fully determining action nor should they assume that structural conditions (be they economic, political or sociological) are necessarily relevant to the interactional/processual phenomena under study (Strauss 1987, p. 80). Moreover, structures tend to change over time and differ from place to place, which in turn leads to adjustments in action and interaction. Thus, it also has to be asked what would happen if the conditions (the structure) changed.

To summarize, individuals or groups do not live independently, but rather act within a larger framework of larger structural conditions. Structures do not determine action, but can lead to certain situations or circumstances that persons or groups respond to through some form of action. Thus, structure and agency should be part of an explanation of any phenomenon (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 114). These notions were formulated more deeply and in various approaches by Bourdieu, Giddens and Strauss developing concepts such as habitus, structuration and strategy (see chapter 2). “Glaser on the one hand, and Strauss and Corbin on the other have applied the formal formation of theory to develop a methodology that does justice to such a complex approach towards mediating structure and action” (Hildenbrand 2010, p. 561).

3.4 RESEARCH METHODS

3.4.1 MULTI-SITED FIELDWORK

The empirical part of this study is based on extensive field research in different regions and time periods across Thailand between August 2008 and December 2013 (see table 1 and pictures 1–3 in figure 6). In order to reconstruct the evolvement of Akha souvenir businesses over time and space, to explore migrants’ actions and interactions as well as their multiple forms of embeddedness, I used forms of observation including informal conversations, semistructured interviews, and personal network analysis. In order to grasp the spatio-temporal developments of Akha businesses, the different structural conditions at various sales locations as well as the various actions and strategies employed by the Akha vendors at those locations, I followed an approach which Marcus (1995) terms “multi-sited ethnography”. Multi-sited ethnography aims at investigating transnational or multilocal livelihoods and assumes that „any ethnography of a cultural formation in the world system is also an ethnography of the

system, and therefore cannot be understood only in terms of the conventional single site *mise-en-scène* of ethnographic research" (Marcus 1995, p. 99). In doing so, Marcus suggests among other techniques to "follow the people" (to follow and accompany migrants or workers along their movements) and to "follow the thing" (to trace the circulation through different contexts of the material object of the study, e.g. souvenirs). My fieldwork started in the capital city Bangkok by carrying out observations and interviews at various sales and living locations of the Akha vendors. Moreover, I followed them on their way to and from work as well as during their work as mobile or immobile souvenir sellers. After four months of fieldwork in Bangkok, I moved to Chiang Mai, the main city in the North, which is considered to be the starting point of the development of urban Akha souvenir business. Chiang Mai is the only place where previous studies on highland ethnic minorities in urban contexts specifically or at least partly dealing with Akha have been carried out (cf. Vatikiotis 1984; Toyota 1998; Boonyasaranai and Chermue 2004; Fuengfusakul 2008; Khongthawisak 2011⁸). Thus, in the case of Chiang Mai I can draw on existing research as well as on my own empirical data. During my first weeks of fieldwork, I found that Akha souvenir businesses had spread to almost all important international tourist centers in the country including Phuket, Koh Samui, Pattaya, and Hua Hin (see chapter 5). Even though time and financial restrictions did not allow for in-depth research in all of the mentioned areas, I visited each tourist area at least once to carry out observations and to talk to Akha sellers at those locations. Moreover, I followed two Akha vendors' invitations to visit them and their families in their home villages in Chiang Rai province during their home visit. When I started my first period of field research in August 2008 which lasted until February 2009, I had the great advantage to have some time on my side, which changed in spring 2010 when I accepted a university assistant position at the Department of Geography and Regional Research at University of Vienna which, among other duties, involved regular teaching. Yet, I was able to carry out additional fieldwork in order to further expand, modify, and validate existing concepts derived from qualitative data analysis. Furthermore, I could discuss my studies and preliminary findings with experts on ethnic studies from Chiang Mai University such as Prasit Leepreecha and Panadda Boonyasaranai (both Center for

⁸ The studies of Boonyasaranai and Chermue (2004) and Khongthawisak (2011) are published in Thai.

Ethnic Studies and Development of Chiang Mai University) as well as at international workshops and conferences in Thailand, Europe, and the United States.

TABLE 1: TIME AND PLACE OF DATA COLLECTION IN THAILAND

Fieldwork	Time Period	Main Research Places and Study Sites
1 st visit (28 weeks)	August 2008 to February 2009	Migration destination areas: <i>Bangkok sales areas:</i> Khaosan and Rambuttri area, Patpong area (Silom), Sukhumvit area (Nana, Asok) <i>Bangkok Akha living areas:</i> Wan Chart market area, Hotel Thaiwarie <i>Chiang Mai sales areas:</i> Night bazaar, Sunday market, Saturday market, Friday market <i>Hua Hin sales areas:</i> Beach area, night market <i>Phuket sales area:</i> Patong walking street <i>Akha home villages in Chiang Rai province:</i> Baan Mae Salak and Baan Aguer
2 nd visit (1 week)	July 2010	<i>Bangkok sales areas:</i> Khaosan and Rambuttri area <i>Pattaya sales area:</i> Pattaya beach road and walking street
3 rd visit (4 weeks)	August/September 2011	Migration destination areas: <i>Bangkok sales areas:</i> Khaosan and Rambuttri area, Patpong area (Silom), Sukhumvit area (Nana, Asok) Koh Samui: <i>Bangkok Akha living areas:</i> Wan Chart Market area <i>Koh Samui sales areas:</i> Chaweng, Lamai <i>Koh Samui Akha living area:</i> Chaweng
4 th visit (1 week)	March/April 2012	<i>Bangkok sales areas:</i> Khaosan and Rambuttri area
5 th visit (2 weeks)	December 2013	<i>Bangkok urban government institutions:</i> conversations with city planners and BMA (Bangkok Metropolitan Administration) representatives <i>Bangkok sales areas:</i> Khaosan and Rambuttri area, Sukhumvit area (Nana, Asok)

3.4.2 ENTERING THE FIELD AND FIELDWORK REFLECTIONS

When a white Austrian male researcher attempts to carry out fieldwork among an ethnic minority group mainly consisting of female souvenir sellers working in the informal sector in a country of the Global South, asymmetric relations between the researcher and the ‘researched’ are evident. This situation leads to questions of power and reflexivity and eventually shows that social science cannot be free completely from the researcher’s bias. Or as Rothfuß (2009) puts it in his theoretical reflections on

human geography in the context of intercultural hermeneutics: “*social* research always implies a reflection of power constellations and the strategies and interests of individuals, groups, or institutions” (p. 178). In the following, I briefly describe how I entered the field, which challenges I encountered, and how I dealt with my role as a researcher.

First of all, I have to mention that I already carried out fieldwork in Northern Thailand in the context of my master thesis on ethnic minority tourism in Northern Thailand (Trupp 2006). My four-month research stay abroad took place in the city of Chiang Mai and two highland ethnic minority villages, one Karen and one Akha village. At the time, I could establish rapport with some Akha villagers and urban-based Akha in Chiang Mai involved in social movements, NGO work, and souvenir trade.

Moreover, I met a research assistant I already knew well from previous small projects who agreed to work with me in terms of gaining access to the Akha communities and acting as translator during the interviews. Even though there are big concerns in qualitative studies of human geography and anthropology about the subjectivity and reflexivity of the researcher, there is quite some silence on reflections about or even credit for research assistants and interpreters (Turner 2010). As my research assistant and translator was of invaluable help, but also influenced my research in many ways, I consider it necessary to shed more light on the person contributing a lot of work in the background of this study who over the last seven years has not only been my colleague and part of the research, but also my partner. She agreed to use her real name, Kosita Butratana, and provide the following information about herself: Kosita was born in the South of Thailand, her parents come from the northern province of Phrae, but she partly grew up in the Northeast, went to school in Bangkok, and studied psychology and education at Chiang Mai University. Due to her own migration history, she is able to speak and understand the different regional Thai dialects, but she is a member of the so-called Thai mainstream society, went through the Thai schooling system, and like any other researcher, she brought her own preconceptions and values into the field. During the fieldwork, she tried to learn the Akha language, shared lots of her life experiences with research participants, translated my stories and motivation, and was thus crucial in the process of building rapport. After interviews or observational

situations, we regularly sat together and exchanged our views and perceptions of the fieldwork. It is important to work with research assistants who have the methodological skills and, maybe even more importantly, the social skills to encounter research participants with honest interest, respect, and sensibility. I also believe that it was good to work with a female research assistant. Gender plays an important role in fieldwork processes as it limits access to certain information by how one perceives or is perceived by others (Bernard 2013, p. 330). I am convinced that doing fieldwork as a couple made it easier to gain access to and trust among a female-dominated research setting.

An obstacle in the context of my field research and a deficiency of this study were my insufficient language skills. I started to learn Thai before starting my fieldwork, but my progress was (and still is) slower than expected or hoped. I am able to carry out everyday conversation and informal talks, but in the context of in-depth interviews I heavily relied on my research assistant or translator. Yet, my Thai language skills were sufficient to understand the main contents of the interviews, thus keeping at least a certain amount of control and partial autonomy over the interviews and translations. I also attempted to minimize misunderstandings by frequent questioning and discussion of the translations. Also, seemingly relevant emic expressions by research participants were not only literally translated, but also recontextualized. However, I have to accept that – even working with a well-trained and sensitive research assistant and translator – details and particular meanings of words got lost in translation. Translators bring their own interpretations and subjectivity into the data (Kruse, Bethmann, Nierman and Schmieder 2012), a challenge this study cannot overcome. For most Akha, Thai is their second language, but especially the younger generation is fluent in Thai. However, for part of the younger urban Chiang Mai-based generation, Thai has become the main language and Akha language skills shrink in importance⁹. Moreover, some of the souvenir vendors also have good English language skills, so some of the informal conversations were a mix of Thai and English. Furthermore, I attempted to learn the Akha language, but time was too short and I was just able to learn some basic

⁹ Wandee, a 42-year-old souvenir seller in Bangkok shared her story on fading Akha language skills. When she and her daughter, who grew up and currently lives in urban Chiang Mai, visit their Akha highland home village to meet the daughter's grandparents, Wandee has to translate the conversations as her daughter cannot speak Akha anymore and her parents never learned Thai.

vocabulary and common colloquial formulations, which was nevertheless highly appreciated by my research participants.

In addition to finding a suitable research assistant, I also successfully applied at the National Research Council of Thailand for a research permit. Endowed with social capital in terms of having good relations to Akha representatives, with institutional capital in the form of an official research permit, with incorporated cultural capital embodied in the years of study at my university, the previous fieldwork, and in terms of cooperating with a reliable research assistant, I was confident to start my new fieldwork in an urban setting.

Yet, the first days of fieldwork in Bangkok were a bit frustrating. As neither my research assistant nor I had any personal contact to Akha vendors in the capital city, we started to approach mobile sellers in Khaosan road by introducing ourselves and my research idea. The first replies were demotivating as they said that they did not have much to tell. One vendor answered, “I need to earn money. That’s it.” and walked away. After several attempts, we were able to enter into a longer conversation, also giving us the chance to introduce us in Akha language. Also, my research assistant and I got Akha first names from our Akha friend and NGO leader Miqjur Manqlaeq in Northern Thailand, which also indicated my sincere interest. After about two weeks, we got the first invitation to visit an Akha vendor in her room in Bangkok and to carry out the first interview. She was a vendor with lots of sales experience at different tourist areas throughout Thailand. At this occasion we also met the roommates (also female Akha vendors) of our interview partner and they also became interested in learning about us in general and my motivations for this study. I was frequently asked by Akha vendors why I carried out this study and how I benefited from it. I would say that this was indeed a very good question and I agreed that I should first outline my background and intentions before they shared their experiences. My honest answer was that I was a PhD student who was interested in ethnic minorities, especially in Akha, as I knew that they were popular in tourism contexts and that I would like to know more about their businesses and why it expanded from the hill villages to Chiang Mai and even the capital city Bangkok. Moreover, I mentioned that I could have chosen many different other topics, but that this was the field I really want to study. I

also told them that I had gotten a small scholarship from Austria, which covered the costs of my flight and accommodation, and that I currently (at the time) had no other job. My benefits were to be knowledge acquisition, maybe some publications, and eventually a PhD degree that could help me get a better job at a university or elsewhere later on. I finally also showed my official permit from the National Research Council. In a next step, it was my research assistant's task to introduce herself and to share how she got involved in this project. The research participants told us that some Akha had already had bad experiences with Thai journalists who had spread wrong information about them and therefore had become more careful about sharing their knowledge and experiences.

Another instance of a situation that helped break the ice happened with a widowed female Akha seller who lost her husband in a car accident. The only materialized memory she had brought with her in Bangkok was a scratched passport-sized portrait of him. Kosita had the idea to bring the picture to a photo shop to enlarge and frame the picture. We asked the woman to borrow the photo to make a copy, and then we went to the photo shop asking to enlarge and frame the picture. When picking up the picture it was scaled to A4 format and put in a thick gold-colored frame. Moreover, they photoshopped his clothes by replacing the worn out T-shirt with a formal sports coat. I was a bit shocked by these changes and also did not like the kitschy frame, but was finally persuaded to leave it like it was. When we returned the old picture and the new one in a frame, the woman started to cry and thanked us profusely. Each time she saw us, she gave us one of her self produced wristbands and talked to other Akha about us in the most positive ways.

After establishing contact with the first vendors, it became much easier to get to know further research participants. On the one hand, our first research participant became a kind of gatekeeper by introducing us to her roommates and other sellers on Khaosan Road and on the other hand, the Akha seller community started to talk about this 'Thai-Farang¹⁰-research couple'. For the first two months, I rented a room in a guesthouse in a lane of Khaosan road, thus almost in the middle of the vendors' sales activities while for the following two months, I rented a small apartment adjacent to

¹⁰ Farang is a Thai term referring to Western people (both tourists and expatriates).

the most popular living area of Akha vendors in Bangkok. Getting to know many Akha sellers in Bangkok also facilitated getting in touch with Akha vendors in Chiang Mai and the beachside destinations as many knew each other either from their home villages or from previous mutual sales and migration experiences. Everyone – except the newcomers – knew at least someone from the other sales areas. Some Bangkok-based vendors even offered to call their friends to announce that a Farang and a Thai researcher would like to visit them and talk about Akha souvenir business; an offer we kindly accepted. As the field research continued involving the investigation of various sales areas throughout the country, we could sometimes even provide new information about various sales locations to the Akha entrepreneurs and became an interesting conversation partner in that respect, too.

However, closer field relationships also engendered conflicts. One day, two well-acquainted Akha female sellers (one of them married to an Akha man) asked me to take a photo together. Thoughtlessly, I put my arms around their backs, as I would do with friends in Austria for a photo. The next day, I gave them both a printout of the picture, which the married woman put in a frame and placed in a central location in her room. Her husband disliked this and especially the pose on the picture. It took several days of apologizing to her husband and to explain that I did not mean to be impolite or flirt with his wife. I had the feeling of somehow unintentionally having reinforced the image of Western men chasing after Asian women. However, I was still able to establish a good relation to this man and every time I go to Khaosan Road in Bangkok, we meet and have a research- or non-research-related conversation.

Compared to my previous fieldwork experience in village contexts, I perceived urban-based research to be more difficult and demanding. The village somehow appeared to be a more compact unit, while Akha working activities in urban contexts were often scattered around the city and took place between late evenings and early mornings resulting in the fact that interview or observational times frequently lasted until 03.00 AM.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

The quality and credibility of a study start with the collected data, but some qualitative researchers however argue against thorough data collection and “legitimize small studies with skimpy data” (Charmaz 2006, p. 18). For instance, as time is generally in short supply, some researchers do not invest time to establish rapport with research participants and try to gather their data as fast as possible. Some social research colleagues install video cameras, push the record button in order to record the scenes of interest, leave the setting, and come back later to pick up the camera and the recording. They argue that limited data or the non-existence of any rapport with research participants do not pose problems because the analytical method aims to develop conceptual categories and therefore data collection is directed to indicate relations between categories or potential meanings and dimensions of a category (Reichertz 1988). However, Charmaz (2006) warns that ignoring the establishment of rapport may lead to the risk of losing subsequent interview partners and options for observation. Dey (1999) questions the ethical implications of such proceedings and criticizes such approaches in contrast to long-lasting intensive fieldwork as “smash and grab strategies” (p. 119). Most qualitative researchers rarely get the feeling to have gathered sufficient material, but evaluating one’s own data by asking oneself about breadth, depth, and length of the accumulated fieldwork seems useful (Charmaz 2006, pp. 18–19).

Grounded theory is a general method that embraces various research methods such as observations, interviews, visual methods or document research and uses all data resulting therefrom (Glaser 2002). My collected primary data derive from semistructured interviews, forms of observation including informal conversations, personal network analysis, and photos. In addition to primary data, I used secondary data drawn from tourism and street vending statistics, technical literature, non-technical literature including newspaper articles, tourist magazines, and brochures as well as TV programs reporting on Akha ethnic minorities, official documents, and websites depicting trading regulations.

3.5.1 PERSONAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

Personal network analysis explores social networks as one ego's (= one person's) set of relations with alters (=others) while the whole network analysis in contrast looks at the relationships among all network members in a bounded population (Wellman 2007, p. 111). The latter is useful for studies of networks within an organization and is limited to clearly definable networks. Personal network analysis allows to 'register' persons who are outside the boundary of the original whole network and who might play an important role for the creation of different forms of capital and was thus considered a useful method. By using the technique of name generators (Marin and Hampton 2007), participants are given a list of questions eliciting the names of persons (the alters) that represent the individual's social network. I asked Akha migrants involved in the urban souvenir business to name the people from whom they had received information regarding the souvenir business (sales locations, prices, 'rules'), from whom they bought the things, from whom they got financial (in case of money problems or for business start-ups) and emotional support (in case of discussing a personal problem or in case of sickness) and whom they were working for. The egos were further asked to describe themselves and their informants/supporters (alters) on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, age, gender, education, social status, economic status, relation to each other, degree of intimacy, and frequency of communication. This information allowed me to characterize the person's networks and their set of relations and to analyze the economic hierarchy within these personal networks. In practice, I encountered two main problems with this method. I asked too many questions about the persons in their personal network (the alters), which the research participants could not or did not want to answer. Second, most informants mentioned in the context of the personal network method that they were independent and never used to borrow money or organized the whole souvenir business entirely themselves. Later, however, in the context of informal conversations and participant observations, the same research participants told me that they had received money from their mothers in order to get their business started. This experience demonstrated the necessity of combining different methods. The triangulation of different methods helps check the data against other data collected via different methods and moreover can produce knowledge, which goes beyond the knowledge made possible by one

research technique (Flick 2011, pp. 186–187). As a consequence, I decided to stronger integrate questions concerning personal relations and networks into the methods of semistructured interviews and participant observations, which proved to elicit more valid results. Eventually, I only conducted personal network analysis in this ‘strict’ sense as described above with few research participants who did not seem to mind this interview setting.

3.5.2 INTERVIEWS

Interviews are usually categorized in term of their degree of standardization or structure and of the amount of control researchers try to exercise over participants’ responses. Thus, two poles can be identified: First, informal conversations (see chapter 3.5.3) which are totally unstructured and where the responses are rather controlled by research participants than by researchers; and second, self-administered questionnaires which pre-fix the possible answers of the participants and are highly structured. Corbin and Strauss (2008) recommend unstructured interviews as they are not “dictated by any predetermined set of questions” and have demonstrated to produce the densest data (p. 27).

Semistructured interviews have “much of the freewheeling quality of unstructured interviewing” but are based on an interview guideline, a written list of topics and questions the researcher aims to cover (Bernard 2013, p. 182). The interview guideline included the following broad topics: previous migration and job experiences; comparison of the current job with previous work; organization of the souvenir business in terms of production and distribution; challenges in the context of souvenir-selling including rules, competition; experiences with tourists, other sellers, and officials; economic situation; knowledge about other sales locations, social relations to other Akha and non-Akha; role of male Akha and household issues; future plans. In addition, I asked for some socio-demographic data such as age, marital status, number of children, place of origin, education, type and date of issue of Thai ID card. It is important to note that I did not strictly follow my interview guide, that I followed topical trajectories in more depth and brought up new emerging topics that became relevant during the investigation. Also, I used the strategy of probing in order to stimulate an interview partner to produce more information, without injecting myself

so strongly in the conversation that I would only get a reflection of myself in the data (Kvale 2007; Bernard 2013, p. 186). As the field of urban Akha tourism businesses is mainly occupied by females, I mainly interviewed female vendors. However, I also carried out several informal conversations and two semistructured interviews with male Akha vendors on gender relations. Moreover, I interviewed the same persons at different times and locations (e.g. in 2008 in Bangkok and again in 2011 on Koh Samui), which enabled me to observe and gain information about conditional changes and changing agency perspectives over time and space. Altogether, I carried out 30 semistructured interviews (see table 1 and annex 1) in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Koh Samui and hundreds of informal conversations documented in field notes.

Most of the interviews were audio-recorded, but a few research participants preferred to carry out the interview without recorder. In those cases, my research assistant and I made notes and merged our notes afterwards into an interview protocol. The interviews were carried out in Thai language and conducted by my research assistant/translator and myself. At several occasions, when I was not able anymore to follow the content of the interview, I had to interrupt due to my language insufficiency and asked my interpreter to translate for me. This involved critical issues of breaking the flow through many 'inquiries' of the 'non-understander' and problems of retranslations (Kruse et al 2012). Other interviews were completely conducted in Thai language and translated in the context of the transcription.

As discussed in the previous chapter 3.4.2, it was difficult at the beginning of the fieldwork to gain access to interview partners. Some research participants did not understand why I wanted to interview them (or did not want me to interview them), arguing that they were not special and did not know anything. The time and location of the interviews became other central issues. Akha souvenir vendors are busy and hardworking people as many of them are engaged in producing and sales activities. At most of the locations, they sold until midnight and still engaged in souvenir production after and before work. As I did not want to disturb their daily sales activities, most of the conducted interviews were carried out between midnight and 03.00 AM. Some of the vendors who were especially interested in talking to my research assistant and me reserved one or two extra hours for us in the afternoon. The interviews took place at

several locations, and I always tried to find a place where the interview partners would feel comfortable. Interview locations thus varied and included their private rooms or houses, my rented room, and air-conditioned coffeehouses. Initially, some vendors argued that their rooms might be too small and uncomfortable for us. I answered that I did not care about big or small houses, that my room was not too big either, but that I would like to invite them to my place, which they also accepted. After visiting my place, they also invited us to see their place. Another issue in the context of interviewing was the attendance of others, which “automatically shifts behaviour and discourse toward public behaviour and socially proper responses” (Levy and Hollan 1998, p. 340). Interviews were aimed to be conducted isolated from the respondent’s family, friends, and acquaintances, but it was sometimes not possible to separate female and male respondents (if they were a couple) as the male usually wanted to attend the interviews as well.

3.5.3 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AND INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS

Generally, the forms of observation are distinguished by levels of participation of the researcher ranging from no or minimal participation (e.g. an armchair geographer sitting in a coffeehouse and watching street vendors) to high or complete forms of observations. The latter is termed participant observation, “a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines” (De Walt and De Walt 2011, p. 1). According to Bernard (2013), participant observers can be insiders observing and recording some aspects of life around them or they may be outsiders participating in some aspects of life around them who record what they can (p. 313). Participant observation is time consuming; its collected data requires good memory, discipline, and diligence of the researcher as well as conscious effort at objectivity as the method is inherently subjective. However, it allows insights into contexts, relationships, and interaction previously unknown to researchers. Moreover, becoming a participant observer “reduces the problem of reactivity, of people changing their behavior when they know that they are being studied” (Bernard 2013, p. 317). As mentioned earlier in the context of participant observation, I was able to ask questions about economic support and social relationships in a familiar setting resulting in more valid answers.

By accompanying the Akha souvenir sellers and attempting to participate in every day life and work practices, I observed the gendered division of labor, the interactions of the migrants with each other, and situations of conflict. Furthermore, I observed the interactions between Akha micro entrepreneurs and the demand side (the tourists who bought the products) and the law and regulation enforcers (local officials, police, and inspectors who were watching and controlling the sales areas). The same vending sites, especially in Chiang Mai and Bangkok, were visited at different times of the day and at different times (and thus different tourist seasons) of the year. I did not only observe and join the Akha vendors during their sales activities, but also accompanied them on their way to work and on their way back home. I moreover took part in everyday life activities such as going to the market, having food together, and visiting Akha neighbors or other sellers. Moreover, I visited two Akha home villages of the vendors in Chiang Rai province. I believe that participant observation leads to a better understanding of what happens inside the studied networks and of how power relations are produced and maintained. Participant observation enhances the quality of the data obtained during fieldwork and also the quality of the interpretation of the data (DeWalt and DeWalt 1998, p. 264). However, participant observations have potential drawbacks, especially in a cross-cultural context where the researcher may give meaning to an observed action without checking the meaning with the observed research participants (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 30). Thus, it is useful to combine observations with other methods such as interviews and informal conversations. This also allows for comparisons of what people say and what people do.

Informal conversations often take place in the context of participant observation. “The basic rule in carrying out interviewing or conversing during participant observation is that the researcher is intent on following the lead of the informant, exerting only minimal impact on the topic and the flow of the interaction” (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, p. 137). Yet, researchers direct the communication to some extent and ask specific questions concerning their research interests. During my observations in the Akha sales areas, I also talked to vendors of other ethnic backgrounds including Thai and other ethnic minority groups, to other shop owners and workers, to tourists and expatriates. In the living areas, I talked to neighbors, shop owners, and the owner of the hotel in Bangkok where several Akha used to stay.

The first empirical results of participant observations and informal conversations are field notes and observation protocols. I generally tried to take notes of observed events as soon as possible, if the situation allowed even during the observation. Lüders (2004) points out that observation protocols must be taken for what they are, “texts by authors who meaningfully record their observations and memories after the fact using the language skills available to them, putting their observations into context and pouring them into a text form to create a comprehensible protocol” (p. 396).

3.5.4 USE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

I made extensive use of digital photography during my research stay serving various purposes. Photography helped document scenes of Akha souvenir vending and tourists’ consumption. This also allowed to illustrate the variety of souvenir products over time (four years) and space (as the souvenir products slightly changed depending on location), part of the production process, and the living and sales areas of Akha migrants (see also list of pictures). It is criticized, however, that the notion of a photograph being a “‘window on reality’ is an illusion” (Albers and James 1988, p. 136). Yet, in combination with interviewing and participant observation, photography proved to be a useful tool for documentation.

In addition, I took pictures of many souvenir vendors with their consent, wrote down their names and contact numbers which made it easier to recognize the many different persons and faces. Also, I provided these photographs to research participants who responded positively to this practice. As explicated earlier (see chapter 3.4.2), the use of photography generated both positive and negative relations with Akha vendors.

FIGURE 6: IMPRESSIONS FROM FIELDWORK



PICTURE 1: ESTABLISHING CONTACT AT CHIANG MAI NIGHT BAZAAR

At the beginning of the research, Akha vendors were contacted in their main sales areas.

Photo: Kosita Butratana



PICTURE 2: INTERVIEW IN PRIVATE HOME IN CHIANG MAI

In the back of the picture, my research assistant and translator Kosita Butratana is sitting. Many Akha vendors invited us to their private homes to carry out interviews and talk about their and our life stories.

Photo: Alexander Trupp



PICTURE 3: INTERVIEW IN A COFFEEHOUSE IN BANGKOK

I chose the interview locations according to the interviewee's preference in order to enhance a relaxed conversation atmosphere.

Photo: Alexander Trupp

3.6 QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

One of the crucial ideas of the framework of grounded theory is that concepts directly derive from the data of social research. In contrast to classical hypothetico-deductive approaches, no constructions of pre-defined categories or hypotheses are recommended. By employing an open and flexible research design, researchers avoid getting locked into static and perhaps unsuitable designs, and are more likely to discover new phenomena. The main message of grounded theory is that “theory ‘discovered’ through data could be more relevant and productive since it would at least fit the immediate problems being investigated, as well as potentially opening up more fruitful lines of enquiry” (Dey 2010, p. 172). The process of taking raw data and raise it to a conceptual level is commonly termed ‘coding’ while ‘codes’ are the names given to the ‘concepts’ resulting from coding. It should be highlighted that this process involves more than just paraphrasing or noting terms in the margins of interview transcripts, protocols or field notes. It encompasses interacting with data by using various techniques in order to develop concepts and their possible characteristics in the form of properties and dimensions (Corbin and Strauss 2008). In this chapter, I outline how theoretical categories can be developed in empirical research.

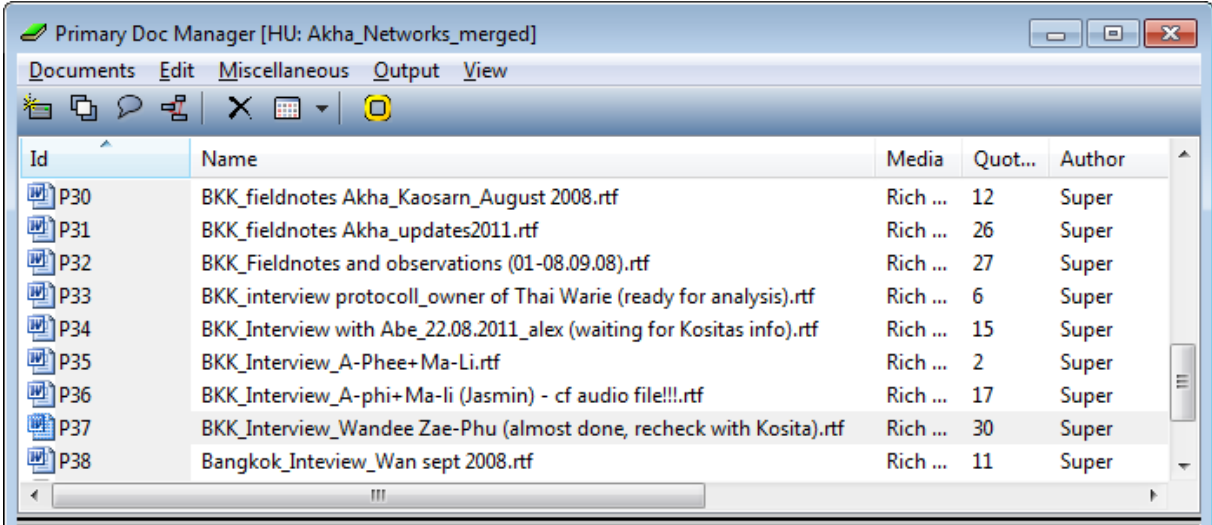
There are different levels of analysis ranging from superficial description to theoretical interpretations. Analysis should move beyond simple description by presenting accounts that embody “well-constructed themes/categories, development of context, and explanations of process or change over time” (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 51). *Concepts* derive from data and represent the researcher’s understanding of what is being described in experiences, actions, spoken words, and other expressions by research participants. Concepts are words that give names to ideas contained in the data. Concepts are interpretations, thus the product of analysis. Such concepts vary in levels of abstraction, and basic-level concepts can be distinguished from high-level concepts. High-level concepts under which analysts group similar low-level concepts are termed *categories*. Categories are thus more abstract concepts. Furthermore, categories can be analyzed in terms of possible *properties* and *dimensions*. Properties are characteristics or components of an incident, object or action that specify and define them. Dimensions indicate the potential variations of a property along a range (see figure 10).

Another important matter is the size of the unit of data to code and analyze. It is possible to analyze a phrase, a sentence, and a paragraph or to focus on a single word. Microanalysis is detailed coding around a concept aimed at breaking data apart and looking for various meanings of a word or a phrase. Corbin and Strauss (2008) admit that microanalysis is very time-consuming and used selectively, but they recommend this strategy, especially at the beginning of a project, as it generates ideas and helps researchers focus on relevant issues and get deep into the data (p. 59). Charmaz (2006) also emphasizes the advantage of line-by-line coding because ideas could occur that could have escaped attention when using approaches of general thematic analysis (p. 50). Microanalysis does not replace a more general analysis but rather supplements it as the former looks into greater detail and the latter makes a step back and examines the data from a broader perspective.

For organizing and structuring the qualitative data, I used the software program ATLAS.ti (Lewins and Silver 2007). It helped manage data sources such as field notes, observation protocols, and transcriptions of interviews, which the software refers to as “primary documents” (see figure 7). At later stages of analysis, the software can organize and structure hundreds of codes, concepts, citations, and memos. But unlike statistical software programs, it does not take over the process of data analysis. However, I carried out part of my analysis “off-screen” by printing relevant transcripts, making handwritten notes, and drawing conceptual connections on paper. Photos as well as secondary data such as statistics were not imported into the ATLAS.ti software.

Before I outline the process of developing categories and theoretical concepts in more detail, I introduce a recommended set of analytical tools researchers can use for the process of coding and category building.

FIGURE 7: ATLAS.TI SOFTWARE INDICATING A LIST OF PRIMARY DOCUMENTS AND THE NUMBER OF QUOTATIONS SELECTED FOR THE CODING PROCESS



The screenshot shows the 'Primary Doc Manager' window in ATLAS.ti software. The window title is 'Primary Doc Manager [HU: Akha_Networks_merged]'. It has a menu bar with 'Documents', 'Edit', 'Miscellaneous', 'Output', and 'View'. Below the menu is a toolbar with icons for file operations. The main area is a table with the following columns: 'Id', 'Name', 'Media', 'Quot...', and 'Author'. The table lists 9 documents (P30 to P38) with their names, media types (all 'Rich ...'), quotation counts, and authors (all 'Super').

Id	Name	Media	Quot...	Author
P30	BKK_fieldnotes Akha_Kaosarn_August 2008.rtf	Rich ...	12	Super
P31	BKK_fieldnotes Akha_updates2011.rtf	Rich ...	26	Super
P32	BKK_Fieldnotes and observations (01-08.09.08).rtf	Rich ...	27	Super
P33	BKK_interview protocoll_owner of Thai Warie (ready for analysis).rtf	Rich ...	6	Super
P34	BKK_Interview with Abe_22.08.2011_alex (waiting for Kositas info).rtf	Rich ...	15	Super
P35	BKK_Interview_A-Phee+Ma-Li.rtf	Rich ...	2	Super
P36	BKK_Interview_A-phi+Ma-li (Jasmin) - cf audio file!!!.rtf	Rich ...	17	Super
P37	BKK_Interview_Wandee Zae-Phu (almost done, recheck with Kosita).rtf	Rich ...	30	Super
P38	Bangkok_Interview_Wan sept 2008.rtf	Rich ...	11	Super

Source: Cutout of own ATLAS.ti project

3.6.1 THEORETICAL SENSITIVITY AND TOOLS FOR INTERPRETING QUALITATIVE DATA

There are two basic rules which still form the main pillars of category-building in grounded theory (Kelle 2010): First, categories must not be *forced* on data but they should rather *emerge* instead in the context of the ongoing process of data analysis, and second, *theoretical sensitivity*, defined as the researcher's ability to reflect upon empirical data with the support of personal experience, general knowledge and literature, is a prerequisite for developing categories (p. 193).

Both 'founders' of grounded theory agree that theoretical sensitivity means the ability of the researchers to develop concepts from data and relating them to theoretical models and theory development (Glaser 1992; Strauss and Corbin 1996, p. 25). However, they disagree on how to achieve and use this ability (Truschkat, Kaiser and Reinartz 2005; Kelle 2010). The most important difference lies in the use of literature. Strauss and associates allow and partly recommend the use of technical literature and theoretical frameworks. Theoretical foundations of a study do not determine the concepts to be studied, but determine the research approach. Moreover, researchers aiming at developing middle-range theories "can use a substantive theory as a theoretical base for exploring the core concepts across different groups, thereby increasing the theory's depth, breadth, and level of abstraction" (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 42). Glaser's approach in contrast – criticized for his "inductivist rhetoric

which produces a highly obscure image of empirical research” (Kelle 2010, p. 205) – prohibits the use of literature in the beginning of the research as it is said to spoil the development of data-grounded concepts. In my own research, I rather follow the approach of Corbin and Strauss (2008) who admit that the use of technical literature enhances the researcher’s sensitivity, gives the research a loose direction and frame, and helps ask questions about the research topics. This approach is also consistent with Blumer’s notion of sensitizing concepts that serve as a starting point for research (Blumer 1969). Or as Charmaz (2006) puts it: “Sensitizing concepts and disciplinary perspectives provide a place to *start*, not to *end*” (p. 17).

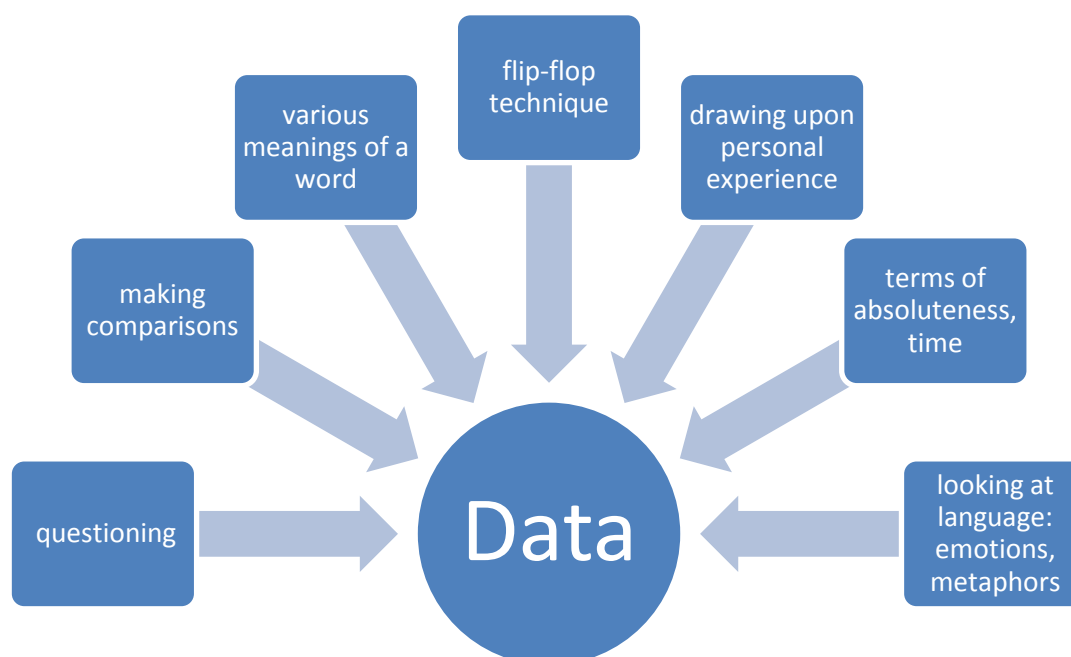
In the following, thinking techniques, strategies, and analytical tools for qualitative data analysis, which mainly build on the ideas of Corbin and Strauss (2008), are introduced. These tools are aimed at probing the data, stimulating conceptual thinking, increasing sensitivity, provoking alternative interpretations of data, and generating free flows of ideas. Moreover, this analytical toolset helps reflect on one’s own biases and to distance oneself from the influence of existing literature. Among the several analytical strategies (see figure 8), two techniques, namely the use of questioning and the making of comparisons, are considered to be most important.

The coding process in grounded theory “requires us to stop and ask analytical questions of the data we gathered” (Charmaz 2008, p. 42). The use of questioning is useful at every stage of the research as it helps analysts get started again when experiencing difficulties with their analysis. Probing questions and thinking about possible answers can help better understand research subjects’ perspectives such as their motivations, decisions, perceptions or actions. Corbin and Strauss (2008) categorized four types of questions (p. 72). First, sensitizing questions tune the researcher in to what the data might indicate; second, theoretical questions, which support analysts to see process and variation and to make connections between concepts; third, practical questions that provide direction for theoretical sampling and help developing the structure of the theory; and finally, guiding questions which guide research methods such as interviews, observations or document gathering and the analyses of these. The use of questioning stimulates probing, developing provisional answers, thinking outside the box and becoming familiar with the data.

Comparative analysis is another core feature of social science research wherein two types of comparison making are introduced: (1) *Constant Comparison* as an analytical process that refers to comparing different parts of data for similarities and differences. In addition to comparing incident with incident in order to classify data, incidents which are found to be conceptually similar are grouped together under a higher-level concept (= category). "This type of comparison is essential to all analysis because it allows the researcher to differentiate one category/theme from another and to identify properties and dimensions specific to that category/theme" (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 73). (2) *Theoretical comparison* can be used in the analysis process when researchers are stuck or confused about the meaning of an incident in the data or when they need to think about an event or action in different ways. Analysts can 'theoretically compare' personal experience of knowledge deriving from literature with a phenomenon they are studying in term of properties and dimension. This tool forces researchers to think at the property and dimensional level and thus helps move beyond the raw data level.

In addition to the strategies of questioning and comparison, further analytical tools are recommended. Thinking about the *various meanings of a word* or a phrase reminds us that there are different levels of meaning inherent in a word or statement. Sometimes, meanings are not obvious from the context or there are concerns that our taken-for-granted interpretation can be assigned to an expression or statement. The *flip-flop technique* changes the meaning of a word or statement to its opposite in order to gain a different perspective of an event or action. By doing so, it can bring out significant properties of the concept. Furthermore, even though we do not necessarily share the same culture or socio-economic background with our research participants we may *draw on personal experiences* that are similar to theirs. This does not mean that researchers should impose their experiences upon data, but rather that they should use it to bring up other possibilities of meaning.

FIGURE 8: ANALYTICAL TOOLS FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF DATA IN GROUNDED THEORY CONTEXTS



Source: based on Corbin and Strauss 2008; Wieser 2013, own illustration

Researchers should be careful and attentive when coming across *absolute terms* such as “always”, “everything” or “never” as such words represent only one point along a broad range. I already pointed out earlier that some research participants mentioned that they “never ever” needed help or support from other but later mentioned that their souvenir businesses were economically supported by their mothers. It is also useful to look out for *terms that indicate time* such as “when”, “after” or “before” which are useful for framing events, indicating conditions, and identifying context and process. Finally, Strauss and Corbin direct us towards *looking at language* and *expressed emotions*. The way research participants describe a situation or explain an action can tell us a lot about the incidents. When talking about migration experiences, for example, it makes quite a difference if the persons say, “so I decided” or “so we decided”. The use of specific personal pronouns prompts further questions about intra-household power or gender relations. Moreover, sometimes research participants use *metaphors* such as “going through hell” which carry a lot of meaning for them and which are worthy of further investigation. In another context, language used by the participants is already conceptually impressive, so that we can use it as a

code. Such codes deriving directly from the persons we talked to were termed “in-vivo codes”.

The following example from an interview with a vendor about competition in the field of Akha souvenir business provides insights into the usage of these analytical tools:

I know so many newcomers for now. But for me it is fine. They need money to survive and support their family that's why they come over. And we don't have high education for applying to other jobs so we have to work as souvenir seller like this (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 24.08.2008)

The first question could be: What is the main topic of this quote? The vendor refers to a high number of newcomers who also carry out the same or a similar job. I can further ask why they decided to move to Bangkok and under which conditions these movements took place. Moreover, I look at the meaning of specific words. “Now” is a time indicator and tells me that she is referring to the current situation, but how was the situation before? What has changed? Moreover, personal pronouns like “we” or “they” can indicate demarcations or group identifications, ideas that need further investigation in the analytical process. This example shows that several of these analytical tools can be combined to think about the data and develop preliminary codes and categories (see chapter 3.6.3).

3.6.2 MEMOS AND DIAGRAMS

Memos have indispensable functions in discovering, developing, and formulating categories and a grounded theory. Memos are written records of data analysis and diagrams are visual devices that illustrate possible relationships between analytical concepts. Memos should be written starting with the first sessions of analysis while diagrams are drawn more periodically. The functions of memos and diagrams move beyond descriptive purposes as they conceptualize the data in narrative or visual form and reflect the dialogue between data and researcher. “Memo writing is the methodological link, the distillation process, through which the researcher transforms data into theory” (Lempert 2010, p. 245). Memos are used in all stages of the analysis and can be categorized in the following types (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 118): Memos for (1) open data exploration, (2) identifying and developing concepts, categories, and their properties and dimensions, (3) elaborating the relations of coding

paradigm in terms of conditions, actions/interactions, and consequences and (4) developing a story line. At the early stages of research, memos might be speculative and rather rudimentary representations of thought, but they grow in terms of complexity, clarity, density, and accuracy throughout the research process. This said, memos and diagrams vary in scope, content, and degree of conceptualization. In contrast to field notes, which are normally written during or shortly after an observation or conversation, memos are more in-depth, complex, and analytical thoughts about an event, usually written after leaving the field (Corbin and Strauss 2008, pp. 123–124). Diagrams support researchers by bringing structure to their data by keeping a record of their concepts/categories and the relationships to each other. Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend graphical designs especially for the illustration of conceptual frameworks: They “are best done graphically, rather than text. Having to get the entire framework on a single page obliges you to specify the bins that hold the discrete phenomena, to map likely relationships, to divide variables that are conceptually or functionally distinct, and to work with all of the information at once” (p. 22).

3.6.3 DIFFERENT LEVELS OF CODING AND ANALYSIS

In the previous section, I introduced (1) a set of analytical tools that supported the interpretation and analysis of empirical data and (2) a framework that helped researchers analyze data for structural conditions, process (interaction), and its consequences. This section goes deeper into “doing analysis” and outlines three major steps on the way to developing theory or the integration of theoretical concepts which I also use in my research. First, the process of developing concepts and their dimensions and properties; second, the development of categories based on grouping similar concepts; and third, redefining and integrating categories. These three steps differ especially by their level of abstraction.

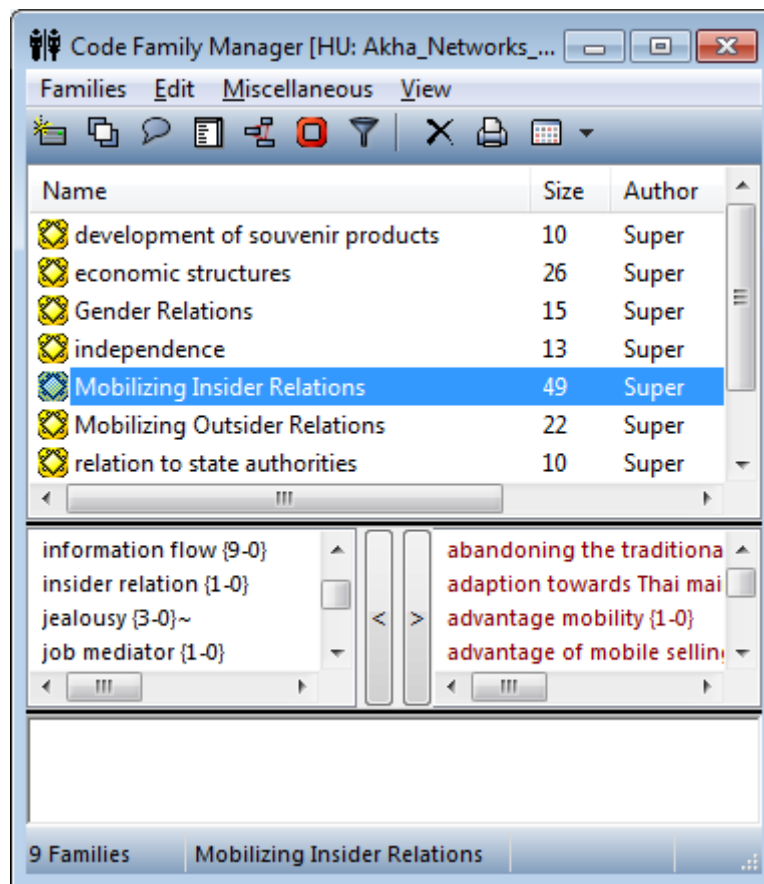
Data analysis should start with reading the entire empirical research material including field notes, interview transcriptions, inspections of visual materials such as photos or videos, and documents. These first readings support analysts to better understand and reconstruct the narrative or the experiences of the research participants. They enhance sensitivity for the subsequent microanalysis and further analytical steps. This

is especially important if the researcher – for any reason – is torn away from the analytical process for a while. In my case, such an unfortunate event happened when I suddenly received an official letter of the Republic of Austria announcing that I have to carry out “alternative service” (in lieu of military service) for the following nine months. Due to several shoulder dislocations, I had been ineligible for years but after another medical check-up, I suddenly and to my big surprise had become serviceable. This was quite a shock and resulted in the fact that my analysis process was interrupted for almost a year. So looking through and reading all of my hitherto collected materials helped me get back on track.

3.6.3.1 DEVELOPING CONCEPTS AND CATEGORIES

It is suggested to start coding/analyzing the raw material soon after the first interview or after the observation is completed because the first insights influence further data collection and analysis. The first act of analyzing is termed “open coding” (Strauss 1987; Strauss and Corbin 1996) or “initial coding” (Charmaz 2006). It aims at attaching initial names to the empirical data. Coding means categorizing parts of the data with a name/word that summarizes and accounts for each piece of the data (Charmaz 2006, p. 43). These names/words that stand for ideas contained in the data are called concepts, which are thus the results of early analysis. Open coding is the process of breaking up the empirical raw data and exploring emerging concepts in terms of similarities and differences. It “requires a brainstorming approach because, in the beginning, analysts want to open up the data to all potentials and possibilities contained within them” (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 160). This process involves some of the analytical tools introduced before, such as asking questions about phenomena and comparing incidents while similar phenomena in the data receive the same code name. For this early process, selected microanalysis in form of word-by-word or line-by-line coding is recommended. The thoughts and ideas generated in the context of “open coding” can be written down in a memo, which then will be labeled with a concept. Concepts alone do not make a theory, but “must be linked and filled in with detail to construct theory out of data” (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 103).

FIGURE 9: OVERVIEW OF CODE FAMILIES IN ATLAS.TI



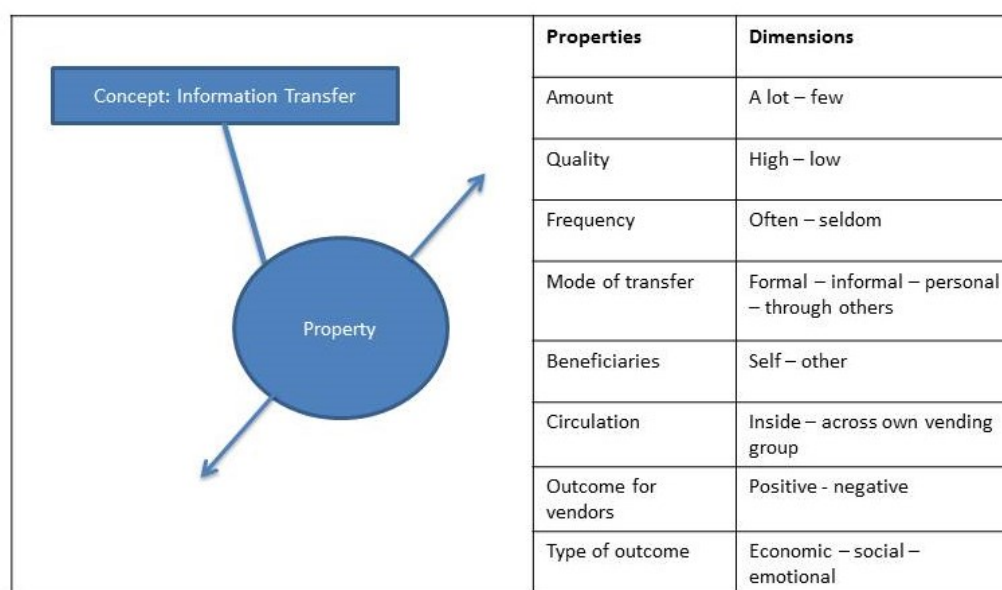
Source: Cutout of own ATLAS.ti project

The result of the open coding process is a list of concepts and memos that expand upon the concepts by including further details, ideas, and reflections contained in the piece of data. In addition to thoroughly describing and reflecting upon concepts, it is necessary to revise, sort, and group them in order to achieve a classification of concepts. Classified or grouped concepts are concepts of higher abstraction and are called categories. I developed a list of 275 codes that were grouped into higher abstract categories. The software ATLAS.ti features a function of “code families” which group codes that belong together (see figure 9). The category ‘mobilizing insider relations’ is further explored and contextualized in chapter 7.1.

Concepts and categories can be further developed in terms of properties and dimensions. As already mentioned earlier, properties are characteristics or components of an incident, object or action that specify and define them, and, dimensions indicate the potential variations of a property along a range. Figure 10

shows how the break-up of the concept ‘information transfer’ in terms of properties and dimension can further conceptual thinking. Properties include issues on the amount and frequency of information transfers, but also questions about who benefits and what the outcomes of such flows are. Dimensions indicate the potential range or peculiarities of the properties.

FIGURE 10: PROPERTIES AND DIMENSIONS OF THE CONCEPT/CATEGORY ‘INFORMATION TRANSFER’



Source: Own analytical process

It is important to note that all the concepts and categories discovered in this stage of analysis are to be considered of provisional nature. As the analysis continues, concepts and categories will be tested against further data and modified, expanded or discarded.

3.6.3.2 FURTHER DEVELOPING AND RELATING CONCEPTS/CATEGORIES

While the first steps of analysis outlined above focused on breaking data apart by developing preliminary concepts and categories as well as their properties and dimensions, the next level of analysis aims at crosscutting or relating concepts/categories to each other. This process is called axial coding (Strauss and Corbin 1996). Axial coding relates categories to subcategories, so its analysis is done around one category, and gives coherence to the emerging analysis. “The category

forms the 'axis' around which further coding and category building is done and may become the core category of the emerging theory" (Kelle 2010, p. 210).

While engaged in axial coding, Strauss and Corbin (1996) suggest the use of a coding paradigm in order to make hypotheses and links between categories. This includes making explicit the comparable relations with larger structural conditions (Strauss 1987, p. 79). The analysis has to make distinctions, as conceptual names placed on a category do not necessarily indicate whether a category represents a condition (circumstances or situations that form the structure of the studied phenomena), an action (responses made by individuals or groups to issues, events or certain situations) or a consequence (outcomes of action and interaction) (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Thereby the central phenomenon, idea or action (category) can be linked to subcategories. The latter represent (Strauss and Corbin 1996): (1) *causal conditions* which lead to the occurrence of these phenomena; (2) *attributes of the context* of the investigated phenomena; (3) *intervening conditions* by which the investigated phenomena are influenced such as time, space, culture, economic status, individual biography etc.; (4) *action and interaction strategies* (be they routine, strategic, random or automatic) actors use to handle the phenomena; and (5) *consequences* of their actions and interactions or the response to events which can also result in strategies or interaction.

Phenomena are complex; e.g. conditions usually change over time and place and actions take place on local, national, and global levels or can be carried out individually or collectively. Thus, Corbin and Strauss (2008) provide further and more complex analytical schemes such as the conditional/consequential matrix that helps analysts "to consider the wide range of possible conditions and consequences that enter into context" (p. 87). "The *rule of thumb* for the researcher is to be alert for what in the collected data bears on the microscopic as well as the more structural" (Strauss 1987, p. 80). Researchers should develop categories for both levels and relate them to each other following the coding paradigm.

FIGURE 11: DIAGRAM INDICATING CONDITIONS, ACTIONS, AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE INVESTIGATED PHENOMENON

Phenomenon: Mobilization of insider relations	
Elements of the coding paradigm	Categories
Causal conditions	Ethnic and social solidarity, values, common interests
Attributes of the context	Collective experiences of discrimination, shared socio-economic status, principle of seniority
Intervening conditions	Competition, type of migration, street vending regulations and enforcement, economic and tourism development
Action and interaction strategies	Personal meetings, informal talks, phone calls
Consequences of their actions and interactions	Information transfer, social cohesion, understanding of increasing competition, self-protection, reduction of costs

Source: Own analytical process

It is also noted that the structuring schemes are only suggestions and that researchers can convert these tools to their own use. Although the analytical step of developing subcategories of a category and showing the links between them is a widely acknowledged practice, several scholars do not use axial coding according to Strauss and Corbin's formal procedures. "At best axial coding helps to clarify and to extend the analytical power of your emerging ideas. At worst, it casts a technological overlay on your data – and perhaps on your final analysis" (Charmaz 2006, p. 63). Still, the conceptual design of the coding paradigm involves a broad understanding of action being compatible with a wide range of social science foundations from phenomenology to rational choice theory and even functionalist role theory (Kelle 2010, p. 203). Moreover, the main argument is that the patterns, meaning the specific points of the coding paradigm and its linkages, emerge directly from data but they have to be recognized by the analysts (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 261). The concepts and analytical strategies of theoretical sensitivity, axial coding and coding paradigms "represent important steps in the development of an adequate understanding of how qualitative data can be used in the process of developing theoretical categories" (Kelle 2005, chapter 24). Figure 11 shows the links of data-grounded categories to the elements of a coding paradigm related to the phenomenon of "mobilization of insider relations".

However, it is important to note that axial coding goes hand in hand with other analyzing procedures. Comparisons can be made at the conceptual level by comparing already coded incidents with each other and with incidents not yet coded. If a piece of data is conceptually similar to data from previous analyses, it can be coded with the same conceptual name. To further the understanding of the concept, researchers should ask what else could be learned about the concept, which in turn can enrich the list of properties and dimensions. Furthermore, analysts continue to look for new concepts they might not have discovered in previous data and ask theoretically-based questions to direct the data collection (see also chapter 3.6.4). Relationships between concepts/categories shall be scrutinized towards incoming data and accepted, changed or discarded with further analysis. “[Qualitative] research is a continuous process of data collection, followed by analysis and memo writing, leading to questions, that lead to more data collection, and so on” (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 197). Memos are crucial elements in this phase of analysis as it is impossible to keep all the evolving ideas in mind. Finally, it is also noted that in this phase of analysis, the emerging analytical scheme has to be revised as new categories and relations between them evolve.

3.6.3.3 THEORETICAL INTEGRATION

“Just remember that doing qualitative analysis is an art as well as a science and that there is nowhere in the analysis where this becomes as apparent as in the final integration” (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 274).

The process of theoretical integration, also termed “selective coding” (Strauss and Corbin 1996), involves the selection of one to a few core categories, the process of linking categories around one or a few core categories, the validation of these links, and eventually the process of refining and trimming the resulting theoretical construction. The idea is to develop a storyline around which all concepts are draped. So, theorizing also means to bring concepts and categories into a logical and systematic explanatory scheme. First, it is important to identify a core category that represents the main theme of the research. Researchers constantly have to look for this “main theme, for what appears to be the main concern of or problem of the people in the setting” (Strauss 1987, p. 35). The core category should relate to as many other categories as possible, account for a large portion of the variation in a pattern of

action/interaction and reoccur frequently in the data (Holton 2010, p. 280). This makes a core category subject to much qualification and modification (Strauss 1987, p. 35).

After choosing a core category, researchers have to check how the other categories can be linked up to it. In order to relate the core categories to all other categories, the coding paradigm already used in the context of axial coding can be employed. In this final process, memos are central to bring the study to its logical conclusions. All the various memos and diagrams that have been written and designed about major and minor concepts/categories “would be sorted and used to fill in the details under each of these various statements of how the concepts related” (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 272). Even though most of the grounded theory literature recommends writing about a single core category, researchers may have to juggle several categories (Charmaz 2006, p. 120). In this case, sorting serves to show how these categories fit (or do not fit) together.

3.6.4 THEORETICAL SAMPLING AND SATURATION

In contrast to other, especially quantitative, sampling techniques, theoretical sampling is the “process of letting the research guide the data collection” implying that no previously established sample size is required, so researchers do not sample persons but concepts (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 144). Concepts can be discovered in field notes, observations protocols, interview transcriptions or documents, newspapers, and websites. Theoretical sampling continues to elaborate and refine emerging categories by developing its properties until no new properties arise (Charmaz 2006, p. 96). In qualitative studies, researchers are not so much concerned with how representative their participants are in respect to a larger population, but are more interested in concepts and their variations. The point in the research when all concepts and categories are well defined and explained is called *saturation*. In fact, researchers could probably go on collecting data forever by pursuing the development of new properties or dimensions into categories, but eventually researchers also have to accept some type of limitation to their studies due to time, money or energy running out. Yet, analysts have to be careful not to conclude a study too soon.

“Though total saturation (complete development) is probably never achieved, if a researcher determines that a category offers considerable depth and breadth of understanding about a phenomenon, and relationships to other categories have made clear, then he or she can say sufficient sampling has occurred, at least for the purposes of this study” (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 149).

That said, researchers of course still start a study with a general target population, which in my case was Akha small-scale entrepreneurs selling souvenirs in Thailand’s urban and tourist areas. Furthermore, analysts have to decide which methods they use and where they can gather the data. Yet, theoretical sampling is concept-driven and cumulative as “each event sampled builds upon previous data collection and analysis, and in turn contributes to the next data collection and analysis” (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 146). While being quite general at the initial phase, theoretical sampling becomes more specific over time as researchers learn more about the studies phenomenon and seek to saturate categories.

Different from classical methods of sampling, the grounded theory researcher does not go out and collect the entire set of data before he or she begins with the analysis. Theoretical sampling is based on the principle that data collection and data analysis are carried out almost simultaneously. Interchanging data collection with analysis would be ideal, but reality has proven that it is not always possible to immediately and thoroughly start analysis after the first interview and observation, especially if the fieldwork sites are located far away from one’s university base. My home university is based in Vienna, Austria, and my fieldwork took place at different locations throughout Thailand. Thus, I aimed to start analyzing selected field notes and interviews after the first two weeks in order to develop preliminary categories and its properties and dimension. Yet, simultaneous processes of data collection and analysis were only partly feasible. I am aware of the danger of a potential inability to follow through on relevant ideas and issues and the result that some concepts may be better developed than others (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 58). But even though data collection and analysis could not always go hand in hand, I carried out one major and four subsequent minor field trips that yielded the opportunity to expand, modify, and validate existing concepts. Sometimes, the only possibility to find answers to relevant questions is to return to the field and collect more data. However, it is also pointed out

that theoretical sampling would be possible (even though it is not recommended) if all data have been collected prior to starting with the analysis because this approach samples for concepts and not for data (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 150).

Validity in grounding theory is achieved by employing a combination of inductive and deductive approaches throughout the process of analysis (see also chapter 3.2). Preliminary data and categories have to be tested and validated as it is a key part of qualitative research to (re)study the field and the collected data for discrepant evidence and negative cases. Another strategy to test the validity of my data is feedback about the data and conclusions from the people I am studying (Maxwell 2005, p. 111; Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 273). Glaser (2002), however, argues that research participants are not capable of testing a researcher's theory as they may not understand or like the constructed concepts. "GT [Grounded Theory] is not their [the research participants'] voice: it is a generated abstraction from their doings and their meanings that are taken as data for the conceptual generation" (p. 25). I believe that researchers should share the scientific insights of their studies with research participants and that they should be able to break down theoretical concepts into a language that is understandable and accessible to persons outside the academic bubble. I thus plan to carry out a workshop with Akha souvenir sellers in order to share my research insight and to elicit feedback from them after the completion of my dissertation.

3.7 REMARKS ON STRUCTURE AND ILLUSTRATION OF EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Being interested in mediating structures and action, it is necessary to explicate changing structural conditions in various sales and migrant destinations as well as agency perspectives of Akha migrants and to aim at synthesizing these two approaches.

In this way, chapter four introducing the regional Thai and ethnic minority context is a prelude to the presentation of the empirical research results, which is necessary in order to understand Akha practices and subsequent structural constraints.

It has to be noted that structures, motivations, and practices can only be insufficiently deduced from direct statements of interview partners because their daily actions,

interactions, and perceptions are not limited to deliberate calculation. Yet, I included several direct quotations of interview partners in the presentation of the analysis in order to give a voice to research participants (Clarke 2003) and enhance intersubjectivity. The analysis and illustration of the categories is based on interviews and observations of strategies and interactions in the field, which in turn were discussed with research participants and analyzed through interplay of inductive and deductive reasoning.

The empirical research results are structured into the following themes and categories, which also correspond with chapters five to eight. I selected this structure and storyline for reasons of clarity and comprehensibility.

- (1) *Factors shaping the development of urban Akha migration and the evolvement of Akha souvenir businesses over time and space*: This chapter identifies and relates conditional changes in Akha vendors' home and target destinations and relates these categories with Akha vendors' motivations and strategies. (chapter 5)
- (2) *Differences within the field of urban Akha souvenir businesses*: This theme analyzes distinctions in terms of types of migration, vending styles, and gender that are related to vendors' endowment of forms of capital and habitus. (chapter 6)
- (3) *Social dimensions of economic action*: This category focuses on Akha vendors' strategies to mobilize insider and outsider relations and on the practice of disembedding or detaching oneself from social relations. (chapter 7)
- (4) *Economic and politico-legal conditions*: This section further explores conditional structures, changes, and their consequences in various Akha vending locations. (chapter 8)

I am aware that analytical concepts such as differences within the field and mobilization of insider relations partly overlap. I also understand that the embodiment of social structures and gender roles as dispositions of the habitus are interwoven and that micro and macro structures can only exist through the actions of individuals. Yet, I believe that the distinction presented in this thesis can provide a comprehensive representation of relevant conditional and agency-specific configurations directed

towards the phenomenon of ethnic minority business and street vending in urban tourism contexts. The final chapter nine aims at synthesizing these categories and conflates Akha strategies in urban tourism contexts into two core categories: 'Being mobile' and 'mobilizing capital'.

4 THE THAI CONTEXT: INTERNAL MIGRATION AND ETHNIC MINORITIES

After outlining the theoretical and methodological approaches, this chapter introduces the Thai regional context. First, as the migration of Akha souvenir vendors represents forms of internal migration, I provide a short overview of this type of mobilities in Thailand. In the second part, I describe the changing socio-economic and political situation of highland ethnic minorities ('hilltribes') in Thailand and eventually focus on the ethnic minority group of Akha who represent the research participants of this study. An understanding of internal migration and the ethnic minority context in Thailand is crucial in order to uncover structures and practices in the field of Akha urban souvenir business.

4.1 INTERNAL MIGRATION

Internal rural-urban migration, mainly from the north-eastern and northern region to Bangkok, the central region, and the mass tourist destinations in the south has supported the economic development of the country by providing labor for manufacture, construction or services (IOM 2011). The movements to urban or tourist areas can be both permanent and temporary, including several forms of seasonal migration (see chapter 6.1). These forms of mobility have been facilitated by rapid urbanization, industrialization, and improved transport and communication structures. It is difficult, however, to quantify these migration streams as most migrants are registered in their home regions and not in Bangkok or other urban areas and are thus registered as rural people. Thus, I can only draw on the available census and survey data of the National Statistical Office (NSO): A comparison of the population censuses from 1960 and 2000 shows that the percentage of lifetime migrants increased from 10.8 percent in 1960 to 16.8 percent in 2000 and the percentage of five-year-migrants (having moved in the past five years) from 3.6 to 6.3 percent over the same period (IOM 2011, p. 14). Data of the annually conducted migration survey reveals a percentage of 2.7 of population who live in a different location than they did one year earlier (ibid.). These numbers do not include individuals who migrated for a period shorter than 12 months and therefore miss many temporary migrants who move during agricultural or tourist high season. Moreover, they can only provide a very

general perspective, which does not consider the specifics of migration of ethnic minorities.

Initial research on internal migration in the Thai context focused on describing spatial mobility patterns and identifying socio-economic determinants and constraints based on the results of the national migration surveys (Goldstein and Goldstein 1986; Husa 1988). In addition to elaborating large data sets, anthropological village case studies were conducted. Early research viewed internal migration as a rational choice of poor rural residents to escape poverty and poor rural infrastructure and originated in a climate where national and international scholars and agencies feared population explosions in seemingly ever-growing urban areas. Bangkok rapidly grew into a dominant primate city (Husa and Wohlschlägl 1997). However, at least since the 1990s, it has become evident that migration to urban areas cannot be stopped and organizations such as the United Nations Development Fund argued that it is equally important to improve the life of migrants, as it is to stem migration (Chamratrithirong 2007, p. 3). This understanding led to a shift from focusing on the determinants of migration to its consequences. The next phase of research discovered the concepts 'migration and development' and 'migration management' which took into account both the benefits and disadvantages of population movements (Chamratrithirong 2007, p. 4). It was also increasingly recognized that rural and urban areas must be rather seen as interconnected rather than separated. Migration in this context is seen as a livelihood strategy in order to increase and diversify the household income (Rigg 1998). Literature on agrarian transformation in Thailand shows that internal forms of migration shape the character and the direction of change in the countryside (Rigg and Salamanca 2011). The creation of multi-sited households and living arrangements can further enhance material and nonmaterial exchange between rural and urban areas.

For a long time, migration research has ignored female migration by either excluding it completely from research agendas or dealing with it as "associational migration" (Guest 2003, p. 17). In several Southeast Asian countries, especially in Thailand, female labor migration has played a crucial role since the 1970s and eventually found its place on Thai research agendas (Piampiti 1984). According to the Thai population census, women have outstripped men in urban-directed migration since 1980 (Osaki 1999, p.

449). Thai women from rural areas have long played important roles in household economies as wives and daughters, have worked along with men on family farms and in agricultural labor exchanges, and have moreover been predominantly involved in market trade (Singhanetra-Renard and Prabhudhanitisarn 1992, p. 154). Thai society also places greater expectations on women in terms of care and economic support for their parents or siblings, which in turn leads them to view job-related migration out of the village as their duty. Parents thus may encourage the urban migration of their daughters and expect economic remittances (Guest 2003, p. 18). Especially young single women from the northern and northeastern part of the country meet the demand for flexible, cheap, and legally unprotected labor force and thus dominate rural-urban migration flows (Clausen 2003, p. 46).

The issue of highland ethnic minorities, however, has not been a big issue on the research agenda on internal migration in Thailand. Anthropologists and geographers seem to be predominantly engaged in village-based research, cross-border mobilities or studying political and economic issues in the context of national and regional integration (Toyota 1999).

4.2 ETHNIC MINORITIES AND ‘HILLTRIBES’

Looking at official population data, Thailand as a modern nation state seems to be characterized by ethnic and cultural homogeneity. This unity can be explained with the notion of ‘Thainess’, a well-constructed collective identity based on three pillars: First, *Chat* (the Nation, including speaking Thai as a manifestation of membership in the Thai Nation); second, *satsana* (the religion, being Thai is being Buddhist), and third, *phra mahakasat* (the monarchy, being Thai means devoting oneself to the Thai monarchy) (Keyes 1997; Laungaramsri 2003; Vaddhanaphuti 2005). “The essence of Thainess has been well preserved up to the present time despite the fact that Siam has been transformed greatly toward modernization in the past hundred years” (Winichakul 1994, p. 3). The construction of Thainess has served to integrate or assimilate certain populations (e.g. the Tai-Lao speaking peoples of Northeastern Thailand) and to exclude others (e.g. the highland ethnic minority groups). Outlining these larger structural conditions is necessary to better understand actions of and barriers faced by the Akha minority souvenir sellers in Thailand’s urban areas.

In Thai official discourses, all non-dominant groups of people, regardless of their distinctive histories, languages, and socio-cultural features are termed ethnic minorities (*chon klum noi*); the concepts of indigenous and native peoples (*khong dueng doem*) however are absent from the state's classification of non-Thai minorities (Laungaramsri 2003, p. 162). The term hilltribe people (*chao khao*) was constructed in the late 1950s and assigned to nine ethnic minority groups, namely the Karen, Hmong, Lisa, Akha, Lahu, Yao, Khmu, Htin and Lua. It is important to note here that all these peoples are non-dominant groups, meaning that they do not have a 'mother country' in the sense of a nation state and thus often miss the lobby or support of more powerful institutions. Also, historically, these groups have long been vulnerable generally non-stratified groups "being dependent at any time on ethnically different, more powerful, larger, highly and pyramidically class-stratified valley societies" (Geusau 1983, p. 244). In his book *The Art of Not Being Governed – An anarchist history of upland Southeast Asia*, James Scott (2009) however argues that the various ethnic minority groups in the highlands of Southeast Asia until recently successfully avoided stratified state societies and the systems of force and control in the form of taxes, military service, compulsory labor, and slavery. It seems, however, that the highland minority groups in Thailand have become increasingly involved in national and international affairs and that Scott's described forms of resistance and avoidance have crumbled over the last 60 years.

The term hilltribes is not self-designated, but was introduced by the Thai government in 1959 and can be considered problematic. First, the term does not refer to a tribe in the ethnological sense, as it is neither an ethnic group with a defined settlement area nor an overall tribal organization (Korff 2003, p. 122). Second and more important, the term has developed a negative connotation and 'hilltribe' is often associated with the wild, primitive, and uncivilized (Winichakul 2000). Thus, the term hilltribe rather involves politico-economic dimensions reflecting unequal power relations between a dominant and a minority group than reflecting a topographical dimension of low- and highlanders. As mentioned before, *chao khao* is translated as people of the hills or hilltribes, but the Thai term *khao* in addition to standing for hills or mountain can also be a third-person pronoun, connotating 'the other' and thus stands at odds with *chao rao* (*rao* meaning 'us') (Laungaramsri 2003, p. 163; Vaddhanaphuti 2005, p. 157); an

opposition of 'us' and 'them' is created. Despite a thorough awareness of the complications surrounding this name, the term hilltribes or highland minorities will be used for the purposes of this research due to a lack of viable alternatives. In the following, I provide an overview of ethnic minority (hilltribe) issues in Thailand over the last 60 years by outlining the development and the reasons and consequences of a Thai hilltribe policy as well as other transformation processes ethnic minority groups have experienced.

The total hilltribe population in Thailand is estimated to be more than 920,000, or 1.4% of the overall population of 65 million (Trupp 2014a). In comparison, the hilltribe population in Thailand was estimated at 222,000 in 1960 (Kunstadter 1967), at about 331,000 in 1974/77 (Husa and Wohlschlägl 1985), and at about 793,000 in 1996 (Kampe 1997). This enormous increase can be attributed on the one hand to natural population growth and on the other hand to immigration and refugee movements, mainly from Burma/Myanmar and Laos. The settlement areas of these groups cover broad sections of the mountainous regions of Northern Thailand and are accompanied by frequent migratory processes. It is believed that some of the mountain peoples, such as the H'tin or the Lua, migrated to what is now Thailand at the beginning of the second millennium, well before the arrival of a Thai-speaking population. The presence of Karen settlements for at least the last 300 years has been verified. The Hmong and Yao have been living in this region since the mid-19th century, and the Tibeto-Burmese ethnicities including the Lisu, Lahu, and Akha immigrated to what is now Northern Thailand in the early 20th century (Kunstadter 1983, p. 28). In fact, many of those classified under the category hilltribe precede the dominating Thai population in inhabiting parts of the present-day nation state and should thus rather be regarded as indigenous or native peoples (Vaddhanaphuti 2005, p. 156).

4.2.1 THE MAKING OF A "HILLTRIBE PROBLEM"

Before the foundation of the Thai nation state, these different ethnic groups had various types of interaction with the neighboring majority of the population. Contact ranged from almost total autonomy to trading and neighborly exchanges of tribute and allegiance affiliations (Keyes 1995). It is therefore inaccurate to speak of the total isolation of the hilltribes, since there have always been shared influences and contact

with the Thai, Burmese, or Chinese ethnicities predominant in Thailand, Burma, or Yunnan (Keyes 1995; Platz 1995). Initially, the government showed no great interest in hilltribe affairs and Thai authorities only exercised a nominal sovereignty over the then remote northern mountain area, but this changed drastically in the 1950s. Several factors underlie this change and the resulting 'hilltribe policies':

- Politically, the hilltribes garnered attention because of their supposed susceptibility to communist and other ideological influences. Thailand feared developments similar to those in neighboring countries. While in Burma there was strong resistance to communism by the Karen and the Shan, the increasing communist influences in China, Laos, and Vietnam were a source of worry for Western-oriented Thailand.
- Strategically, the hilltribes also gained importance because they are settled in the vast and difficult-to-defend mountainous border regions. Their nomadic life often brings them across borders, and officials have considered them a security risk.
- Economically, the hilltribes came under scrutiny (especially in the 1980s) because of their slash-and-burn farming practices (shifting cultivation), which erode the natural resources of the land. This centuries-old and sustainable farming method has come under increasing criticism in recent decades because it requires large areas if used extensively.
- Last but not least is the drug problem. Following the Second World War, the 'Golden Triangle' border region between Burma, Thailand, and China (Yunnan) became an important opium cultivation area. Due to climate conditions and the isolated and uncontrolled location, the hilltribes' settlement region proved to be ideal for opium cultivation. Initially producing only opium, the region gradually began to produce opium-based heroin and finally synthetic methamphetamines, called *Yaba* in Thailand.

Due to these developments, the hilltribes were labeled troublemakers and forest-destroying drug dealers by the Thai government and in public opinion (Laungaramsri 2003). Therefore, Thai government measures to 'develop' the mountain peoples and the creation of a series of institutions dealing with this issue and (fabricated) problem

of hilltribes on various levels must be seen in light of this (Husa and Wohlschlägl 1985, p. 19).

First, the Border Patrol Police (BPP) was founded at the initiative of the US Special Forces (Kunstadter 1967, p. 381). Established in 1959, the Central Hilltribe Committee became the first organization responsible for a coordinated hilltribe policy on a national level. Meanwhile, the Thai Council of Ministers went through with the so-called *nikhoms* or planned (forced) relocation projects. The goal of the *nikhoms* was to create permanent settlements for the mobile hilltribe groups in order to stop shifting and opium cultivation. Moreover, sedentarism should facilitate their integration into the Thai administration, thereby making them more easily controllable.

In 1961 and 1962, the first official “Socio-Economic Survey of the Hill Tribes” was undertaken with the help of Austrian ethnologist Hans Manndorff (Manndorff 1967; Trupp and Butratana 2009). The survey aimed to obtain reliable information as a basis for further development plans and projects. The establishment of the Tribal Research Centers (TRC)¹¹ in Chiang Mai in 1964 was recommended in a Socio-Economic Survey report (Geddes 1967). The TRC’s purpose was to collect information and scientific material about ethnic minority issues in Thailand until it was dissolved by the Thai government Bureaucratic Act in 2002¹² (Buadaeng 2006). Especially in the early years of the research center, some anthropologists alleged that their scientific work may rather serve the military or intelligence institutions than the minority people of Northern Thailand; a debate that became known as the ‘Thailand controversy’ (Hinton 2002). It is documented that during the 1960s, the Thai military took action – sometimes based on incorrect information – against hilltribe communities (Vaddhanaphuti 2005, p. 157).

Moreover, formal education was used as a tool to teach Thainess, the dominating values of Thai mainstream society. The border patrol police was assigned to establish schools in the highlands and to teach the standard curriculum of the lowland while

¹¹ In 1984, the TRC was upgraded to the Tribal Research Institute (TRI).

¹² It is argued that in the 2000s, the ‘hilltribe problems’ of communist involvement or opium cultivation have diminished and that hilltribes have been integrated into Thai society and thus, the government no longer needs to maintain the Tribal Research Center (Buadaeng 2006). 50 years later, new ethnic studies institutes and organizations inside and outside academia have emerged and more importantly, organizations and movements managed and led by ethnic minority people themselves.

minority languages were forbidden in schools. These implementations were to demonstrate the state's 'superior' body of knowledge to local populations.

Such government policies on hilltribe affairs demonstrate how the life and existence of upland minorities was constructed as a national and international problem: "The 'hill tribes' increasingly appeared as a social problem requiring ever-adjusted methods of intervention, extensive knowledge of the target population, and appropriate modes of planning" (Gillooly 2004, p. 119).

During the 1970s and 1980s, development policies mainly focused on replacing opium cultivation with cash crops, linking highland farmers to lowland markets, and developing new forms of political-administrative structures in the hilltribe villages (Bhrukasri 1989; Tooker 2004). While the introduction of cash crops can be seen as an attempt to integrate the hilltribes into the market economy, hill farmers – even though now able to earn cash income – became heavily dependent on chemical fertilizers and market developments (Vaddhanaphuti 2005). Another emerging development since the 1970s has been the uphill-migration of lowlanders, especially poor farmers. This resulted in the situation that by the late 1980s, the hilltribes formed a 10% minority in the mountain area (Geusau 2000, p. 126; see also chapter 4.3.2).

Almost simultaneously with the start of government initiatives, the Royal Highland Development Projects were launched under the patronage of the king (and later of other royal family members). In addition to national and international development organizations, another player has had great impacts in terms of socio-cultural change, the Christian church. A TRC survey from 1977 indicates that at the time, around 50% of highland minority people followed animistic beliefs, 45% Buddhism, and less than five percent Christianity (Kunstadter 1983, p. 25). Today, the majority of the hilltribe population has converted to various forms of Christianity and it is not uncommon to see three different types of churches in one minority village. Buadaeng and Boonyasaranai (2008) argue that the centralization and modernization policies towards hilltribe regions have destroyed political and social structures in the upland villages and thus paved the way for large-scale conversions to Buddhism and Christianity (p. 85).

One issue that has become seminal since the late 1980s is the question of access, use, and ownership of natural resources. While state concerns until the end of the Cold War were primarily about insurgency and opium, they subsequently became questions about forest and water resources. The label for hilltribe people “as shifting cultivators and thus forest destroyers represents the most prominent and long-standing characteristic associated with the ‘hill tribes’ in official as well as public discourses” and shapes the “social and political attitudes toward hill people” (Laungaramsri 2003, p. 166). In the making of the modern Thai nation state, the Royal Forest Department (RFD) took control over forest and land and redefined its ownership. However, it took until the 1960s for these new power relations to directly affect the hilltribe population in the form of new laws such as the Wildlife Conservation Act, the National Park Act or the Forest Reserve Act (Vaddhanaphuti 20005, p. 159). The law that probably most affected the hilltribes is the logging ban of 1989. This law enacted a general ban on felling timber for the commercial timber industry as well as for the ‘simple’ farmers of the hilltribes. Theoretically turning their primary agricultural method of shifting cultivation into a punishable crime, the law wrenched away an integral part of the hilltribes’ livelihoods (McKinnon 1997, p. 131). The lack of land use rights and the ban on shifting cultivation are the two most important factors contributing to the increased migration of hilltribe peoples to urban areas (see chapters 4.3.2 and 5).

I don't have any land. All property belongs to the Thai government. We don't have any documents. So if they want to get it back, me and my family will not have anything (Interview with Akha souvenir seller, Bangkok, 26.08.2008)

Another critical issue that quite obviously defines exclusion and inclusion is citizenship. According to Toyota (2006), 40–60 percent of hilltribe people in Thailand have a legitimate claim to Thai citizenship but remain without it (p. 1). Without citizenship, they are forbidden to leave their district, vote, work, or buy land; they are excluded from the social security and health care systems and have no access to higher education. While registrations for guns, opium cultivation, and opium smoking were already issued in the 1940s, two more decades had to pass in order register the first ethnic minority highland family and to issue the first Thai ID card for them in 1963. However, until 1985, hardly any registration of the hilltribes had taken place (Vadhanaputhi 2005, p. 161). Further estimations assume that by 1986, 150,000 or

34% of the hilltribes received Thai citizenship, and in 1999/2000, the absolute number of Thai citizen holders increased to 240,000 but the relative share went down to 30% (Buergin 2004, p. 151). Reliable data on this issue is rare to non-existent and scholars agree that the Thai system for obtaining citizenship is fuzzy in both theory and practice. Generally, the Thai citizenship law is a mixture of *ius soli* and *ius sanguinis*, forcing applicants to prove both their own status and that of their parents. It has to be demonstrated that the person in questions was born in Thailand and that the person's parents (or at least one of them) have Thai citizenship or live with a registered place of residence in Thailand. Other obstacles to obtaining Thai citizenship are corrupt local officials who encounter hilltribe applicants with negative preconceptions as well as incorrect information on the documents due to some of the hilltribe people's limited literacy (Vaddhanaphuti 2005, p. 162). In the last decades, Thai authorities have issued various minority ID cards in different colors such as the blue card, the pink card, the orange card or the navy blue card (Toyota 2006, p. 19). These cards "provided 'incomplete Thai identity' as the card holders were not recognized as Thai citizens" (Vaddhanaphuti 2005, p. 162).

These policies and their consequences over the past decades have led to a rather negative image of highland ethnic minority groups. Such perceptions, however, stand in contrast with another picture that has been constructed in tourism contexts. The "hill tribes have become comfortably exotic, known well enough but different enough to be exciting" (Gilligly 2004, p. 119). Especially in the area of ethnic tourism, tourists search for seemingly exotic or strange images ranging from constructed exotic (and erotic) beauties to noble savages (Trupp and Trupp 2009). The attractiveness of Thailand's hilltribes to tourists was discovered in the late 1960s by backpackers and somewhat later by the tourism industry that has presented the ethnic groups as exotically as possible in order to fulfill tourists' quests for authenticity (MacCannell 1973; Cohen 1989b). Thailand's official tourism organization and numerous private agencies keep advertising 'their' highland ethnic minorities in order to increase tourism revenues, but at the same time the government ignores their partly illegal status in the context of registration and citizenship (Leepreecha 2008; Trupp 2011).

The dissolution of the Tribal Research Institute in 2003 may suggest the assumption that the 'hilltribe problems' such as communist insurgency and opium cultivation have diminished and that hilltribes were well integrated into Thai society which prompted Buadaeng (2005) to ask: "Have 'Hill Tribe Others' Become 'Us Thai'?" In the same year, Vaddhanaphuti (2005) however concludes that hilltribe people "remain aliens in the Thai nation-state" (p. 164). Also, my research shows that negative preconceptions of Thai mainstream society towards ethnic minorities remain strong (see chapter 8.2), yet one has to recognize the rise of ethnic minority movements in Thailand. Over the last 20 years, academic research institutes on ethnic studies¹³ emerged and have fought for citizenship and land rights as well as promoted ethnic and cultural diversity in Thailand with the involvement of ethnic minority people, NGOs founded and staffed entirely by representatives of ethnic minority groups,¹⁴ social movements consisting of academics, political activists and farmers. Moreover, groups such as the Hmong or the Akha organize their own transnational conferences and are redefining and negotiating their identities in transnational fields (Morton 2013). So I agree with Gillogly (2004) and others that there has been some success for ethnic minority rights and positive integration in Thailand, but one still has to ask whether such aspirations and projects are carried out by an elite, the entire group or a specific group of people.

4.3 THE AKHA

The Akha are a Tibeto-Burmese speaking ethnic minority group who are today scattered across Yunnan province in Southwestern China, Eastern Burma, and the northern parts of Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. Their total number in these five Mekong nation states together accounts for approximately 650,000 persons, or if one – like Geusau (2000) – also adds the closely related group of Hani-Akha from China, their number amounts to 2.5 million people.

It is stated that the Akha as well as other Tibeto-Burmese highland groups such as the Lisu and Lahu once were part of the so-called Lolo kingdoms between Tibet, Szechuan, and the Southern Yunannese border (Geusau 1983, p. 245). Since then, they faced

¹³ See for example the Center for Ethnic Studies and Development (CESD) of Chlang Mai University: <http://www.cesd.soc.cmu.ac.th/>

¹⁴ See for example the organization Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand (IMPECT): <http://www.impect.org/>

confrontation with increasingly stronger and bigger groups, which led to southward migration and to movements into peripheral forested hill and mountain areas. Many minority groups in mainland Southeast Asia, including the Akha, have historically been prepared to accept 'indirect rule positions' under alien states (Turton 2000, p. 20). "Ever since, the Akha have been at the mercy of stronger groups and their migration was in most cases caused by political or military unrest in their former homelands" (Schliesinger 2000, p. 177). Themes of landlessness, poverty, oppression, and marginalization are not only found in external historical reports about the Akha but are also recurring issues in Akha internal history, as expressed in numerous archaic oral traditions and stories or folk tales told by elders (Geusau 2000).

Thailand is the most southern dwelling country of the Akha. Some Akha argue that they already settle in Thailand for more than 150 years while the Dutch anthropologist Leo Geusau notes that the first Akha settlement in Thailand was established in 1903, but until the 1950s their number remained in the few thousands (Geusau 1983, pp. 246–247). Due to political developments in Burma since the 1960s and the subsequent forms of violence including robbery, murder, and destruction of property against the Akha in the Shan state, many Akha have fled to Thailand. Fewer Akha migrated from Laos. Today, the Akha are mainly concentrated in the northern border province of Chiang Rai as well as in the provinces of Chiang Mai, Phrae, Phayao, and Lampang (Geusau 2000, p. 126). The Akha population in Thailand in 2003 accounted for approximately 70,000 persons and 271 villages (Technical Service Club 2004), but considering the number of unregistered persons and the increasing number of urban-based Akha, their total number is probably significantly higher. The Thai term for the Akha is *I-kor*, which the Akha consider to be derogatory (Kammerer 1986, p. 72; see also chapter 7.2.2).

It is important to note that the Akha peoples are divided by themselves and by outsiders into several subgroups that have their own languages/dialects, traditions, customary laws, migration trajectories, and trading experiences. In Thailand, the most prevalent group is that of the Akha Ulo. The immigration of refugees from Burma over the last 50 years led to an increase of Akha Lomi and population movements from China to a considerable number of Akha Phami (Geusau 2000, p. 128). Schliesinger

(2000) refers to a fourth subgroup, the Akha Puli, and members of other subdivisions such as the Makha, Meu-im Adzho, Musa, and Pateh from Burma, Laos, and China who occasionally stay and live in Chiang Rai province when visiting relatives or marrying into Akha families already living in Thailand (p. 177)¹⁵. The various subgroups can be distinguished according to three major criteria (Geusau 2000, pp. 127–128): The first criterion is the geographical region of village concentrations, which can refer to present-day locations or memorized past locations (e.g. Akha Lomi in the mountain areas of the Burmese Shan state or Akha Ulo in Northern Thailand). The second distinction is based on the dress, especially women's silver headdress (e.g. the cone-shaped headgear of the Akha Ulo, the trapezoidal style of the Lomi, and the headdress of the Phami that looks somewhat like a helmet decorated with silver buttons, coins and beads). The third criterion is clan membership tracing back to the family's genealogy. This form of distinction was especially used by the Akha themselves, but has lost lots in importance due to religious conversions and assimilation into Thai mainstream society. However, this research suggests that different Akha subgroups living in Thailand achieved varying socio-economic success in general and in the field of urban souvenir and tribal art business in particular (see chapter 7.1.1).

4.3.1 AKHAZANG AND GENDER ROLES

The collective experience of exploitation and marginalization mentioned above is also embedded in *Akhazang*, “which has been translated as ‘religion, way of life, customs, etiquette, and ceremonies’, and ‘traditions as handed over by the fathers’” (Geusau 1983, p. 249). Akhazang however does not refer to traumatic experiences, but rather provides a set of guidelines in dealing with life covering various aspects such as cultivation practices, hunting methods, husbandry, village foundation and construction, nourishment, parenting, transfer of knowledge, ceremonies and offerings, household tasks or gender roles. Akhazang is extremely pragmatic and dynamic (Geusau 1983, 2000). Historically, Akha have continuously adapted to changing circumstances, threats, and challenges and this survival experience has been accumulated and transmitted from generation to generation. It is emphasized that Akhazang and Akha cosmology do not share the characteristics of hierarchically

¹⁵ In addition to the three major groups (Ulo, Lomi, Phami), Toyota (1998) refers to five further subgroups, the Pya, Naka, Upi, Akeu, and Ajaw (p. 202).

organized class societies where experiences or success are directly related to an almighty god or formed around a central principle like karma (Geusau 1983, p. 252). In a non- or relatively little stratified society, every family has to participate in cultivation, hunting, construction and so on, thus the only division of labor is between men and women and between the older and younger generations (Geusau 1983, p. 244).

One aspect of Akhazang that seems especially relevant in the context of this study is the organization of Akha gender roles. The traditional “Akha kinship system features named patriline with exogamous unnamed sub-linages, paternal authority in the household, and a meticulous sexual division of labor” (Hanks 1988, p. 15). Until recently, a spatial gender division was highly visible in form of separated areas for sleeping and for ceremonial meals in most Akha houses. Kammerer (1988) observed on a daily basis that women prepared meals, served men and only ate whatever the men had left behind (p. 34). Such observations led Geusau to conclude that Akha women are not equal to Akha men: “just as the roof is above the floor, so is the man higher than the woman” (Geusau 1983, p. 271). While there is a broad consensus concerning clearly divided male and female spheres, the view of an unambiguously male-dominated Akha world is challenged by other authors (Hanks 1988; Kammerer 1988; Kammerer 1998). In order to understand the Akha gender system, it is necessary to outline the gender-based division of labor as well as the distribution of social and political roles.

Generally, Akha men see the village and the world outside while women remain in the household (Hanks 1988, p. 17), but lots of their divided activities in the house, the year and labor have to be seen as complementary (Kammerer 1986, p. 357). Men are responsible for hunting and slaughtering animals, which is also symbolized through an arrow or a crossbow that is placed beside the sacrificial pig at a man’s funeral (Hanks 1988, p. 17). Moreover, they carry out the ancestral offerings, are responsible for healing family members, cooking meat dishes, and weaving bamboo strips to produce baskets (Yassokrai 2005). The cultivation of rice and the work on the fields is carried out by both genders, although women’s contributions are normally higher; rice pounding and preparation are clearly women’s work (Kammerer 1988, p. 39). Akha women are associated with the importance of birth and with fertility more generally

(including the growth and harvest of rice¹⁶): “Women are endowed with the power to conceive, to give life to the flesh of a baby and to the rice seed, and to nourish the baby with milk” (Hanks 1988, p. 18). As girls, they have to take care of their younger siblings and begin to learn to spin cotton, to sew, and to weave (Choopah and Naess 1997, p. 191). While the crossbow traditionally stands as symbol for the man, the spindle stands for the woman: “Akha women spin cotton thread, weave cloth, and sew clothes for themselves and their menfolk, just as the texts of oral tradition recount” (Kammerer 1988, p. 39). Women almost entirely carry out the domestic duties such as rice steaming, cooking, stocking water, rice and firewood as well as feeding livestock, planting vegetables in the garden and looking after their children (Yassokrai 2005).

Gender asymmetry also becomes evident in the distribution of important leadership and socio-political roles (Kammerer 1986, p. 356). Oral traditions and thus studying to become a reciter as well as important village functions such as village-founder, leader, and blacksmith are restricted to men. Moreover, court cases and village meetings are dominated by men, which clearly signifies that women are disadvantaged in village decision-making. Finally, it is also the male household head who decides if a household moves into or out of a particular village (Tooker 1996, p. 337). There is, however, one category of women who possess high levels of ceremonial and personal authority based on their knowledge of Akhazhang, ceremonies, and herbal traditions (Geusau 2003, p. 269). This position – referred to as the “white-skirted women” in literature – links annual ancestral offerings and rice rituals and has strong ritualistic responsibilities (Kammerer 1986). Generally, male elders have the authority over customary knowledge, which women and young men are expected to respect (Kammerer 1986, p. 249).

A conclusion of traditional Akha gender roles may state that female Akha are subordinate to men although certain persons such as the “white-skirted women” have a high standing in the community (Yassokrai 2005). Kammerer (1988) however argues differently: “Women are accorded greater power than men, since it is the fertility of the Akha women and their rice that sustains the ancestors. Yet this power at a general

¹⁶ Once a year, usually in August or September at the height of the rainy season, a four-day ancestral offering associated with rice planting – called “swinging ceremony” in English – takes place that has also been referred to as “women’s new year” (Kammerer 1986, p. 264).

level is denied at an individual level” (p. 49). Finally, seniority plays an important role even though it is less important than gender.

Since the 1980s, many of the transformation, integration, and assimilation processes outlined in the previous section have directly impacted on the Akha. It is assumed that these changes have also impacted on gender relations by favoring or further enhancing the position of men (Kammerer 1986). A deteriorating economic situation due to the loss of land and forest as well as a disruption of social, political, and cultural structures in the villages due to the implementation of the Thai administrative-bureaucratic system and Christian missionary activities have been observed and documented (Kammerer 1990; Tooker 2004). More recently, however, certain Akha elites have launched and promoted a more formal notion of pan-Akhaness by reshaping their culture in multiple and transnational ways (Morton 2013). Another response to the larger structural changes that affects not only Akha elites but all levels of society is the ongoing migration into urban areas.

4.3.2 AKHA URBAN MIGRATION

Though no official statistical data on Akha migration is available, we can compare different studies that examined the number of hilltribe people in the northern city of Chiang Mai. In the early 1980s, Vatikiotis (1984) argued that Chiang Mai was not likely to be visited by many highlanders as the city was too distant from the major hilltribe settlements (p. 119); a statement that soon was to be falsified as the increasing number of urban Akha in Chiang Mai has shown in the decades to come: In the 1970s, their number was estimated to be lower than 50 (Toyota 1998, p. 210), a survey from 1982 counted 76 people (Vatikiotis 1984, p. 200), but more recent studies assume 1,700 (Boonyasaranai and Chermue 2004) to 2,000 (Toyota 1998, p. 197) Akha living in the city of Chiang Mai. The reasons for this significant increase of urban migrations of ethnic minority people are manifold. In addition to the mentioned lack of land (rights) and transformations processes discussed earlier, Buadaeng, Boonyasaranai and Leepreecha (2002) mention the following migration factors: First, the non-confirmation to village regulations regarding drug addiction or socio-cultural rules; second, the quest for higher education and the search for non-agricultural jobs which are rarely available in rural areas; third, the temptation of an urban and more modern

lifestyle; and fourth, the opening of trade routes between Thailand and its neighboring countries. For Boonyasaranai (2001), the increasing urban migration is a reflection of a cultural crisis in the hilltribe communities that has been caused by rapid socio-economic transformations. Meanwhile in Chiang Mai, an urban-based generation has emerged that has grown up in the city and only occasionally goes to the hilltribe villages in order to visit relatives; they thus have no experiences of working in the rice fields and are not familiar with Akha village structures (Toyota 1998).

These migratory movements have been facilitated by massive improvement in transport infrastructure as well as communication structures and perpetuated by existing social ethnic networks. Studies on urban-based highland minorities carried out in Chiang Mai (Toyota 1998; Buadaeng, Boonyasaranai and Leepreecha 2002; Ishii 2012) highlight wage laborers as the most prominent migrant group. They mainly work at construction sites, gas stations or in the tourism industry in the hotel or gastronomy business earning around 3,000 Baht¹⁷ or less per month. Due to their acceptance of lower than average income, ethnic minority people are preferred employees (Toyota 1998, p. 208). Another relevant group is student migrants who are often supported by Christian, Buddhist or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Buadaeng, Boonyasaranai and Leepreecha (2002) further mention sex workers in hidden and open service places, traders mainly dealing with agricultural products and handicrafts as well as a mixed group of government officials, NGO workers or tourist entrepreneurs as frequent professions in urban Chiang Mai. This dissertation, however, focuses on one specific group that is highly visible in contrast to other urban-based highland minority groups. Eye-catching female Akha handicraft and souvenir sellers, often wearing colorful and richly decorated hats, have become part of an informal sector that is linked to the global tourism economy. The following chapter discusses the evolvement of ethnic minority souvenir businesses over time and space.

¹⁷ During time of writing 1.000 Thai Baht approximately account for 22 Euro.

5 THE EVOLVEMENT OF URBAN AKHA SOUVENIR BUSINESSES OVER TIME AND SPACE

Practice is located in time and space. This chapter gives an overview of the migration of Akha micro-entrepreneurs and the expansion of their souvenir businesses over time and space (see figure 13). In relation to suggested coding paradigms by grounded theorists such as Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Hildenbrand (2010), I discovered and analyzed structural conditions, actions, and motivational factors that led to the development of Akha urban businesses.

5.1 FROM HILLSIDE TO ROADSIDE

Ethnic tourism in Thailand started in the 1960s when individual and later on mass tourists visited the highland villages in search for authenticity and adventure (Cohen 1989b; 2001). At this time, the northern Thai cities Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai and the same-named provinces were the only highland areas in the entire mainland Southeast Asian mountain region that could be relatively easily and—above all—safely reached. With the increase of tourists in the 1970s, a low-cost tourism establishment emerged in the city of Chiang Mai and soon after, Chiang Mai and the touristic “hilltribe excursions” became part of the programs of larger and international tour operators cooperating with local travel agencies. Already in 1968, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) opened its first regional office (outside of Bangkok) in order to promote Chiang Mai’s tourism potential including historical sites, Lanna culture, lively handicraft productions, and the hilltribes. Moreover, the Northern Thai aristocracy and the local Thai-Chinese elites started to rival the Bangkok involvement in tourism and financed the first large-scale hotels such as the Suriwongse or the Rincome Hotel (Meyer 1988, p. 377). In short, Chiang Mai became the touristically most important city in the highlands of Southeast Asia and the hilltribes (even though involuntarily involved in political affairs, see chapter 4.2.1) became an important tourist attraction. In the context of ethnic minority tourism, the idea was born that hilltribes could commercialize their handicraft products for an outside audience. The commercialization of hilltribe crafts was sponsored by Thai authorities as part of their efforts to integrate the highland minorities (especially the Hmong) into the national economy and the state (Cohen 1989a). In addition to the Thai state, also other external

organizations like humanitarian and religious NGOs supported the commercialization process in order to find new sources of income for resettled minority people (Cohen 1983). Moreover, private business people spied business opportunities and started selling authentic tribal art as well as reproductions in Chiang Mai. In the specific case of the Akha, it is reported that the awareness of an external interest in traditional Akha handicrafts was mediated by the wife of a Christian missionary who worked among the Akha for many years (Choopah and Naess 1997, p. 198). We can summarize that the commercialization of cultural goods in the region is generally not a spontaneous endogenous process initiated by villagers, but rather an exogenous process introduced by state agencies, NGOs, and private actors (Cohen 1983, p. 76). When profit-oriented motives and the economic pressure to earn money outweigh aesthetic standards and it is more important to satisfy the customer (tourist) than the artist, these artifacts can be called souvenir, tourist, or airport art (Graburn 1976, p. 6; see also chapter 2.1.4). Even though the hilltribe souvenir business was started in the villages and initiated by external agents, it soon expanded to urban areas and taken over (at least partly) by the hilltribes themselves.

The evolvement of Akha (and other minority) souvenir businesses in Chiang Mai is strongly influenced by various developments on the intersecting local, national, and international levels. The development and the future potentials of international and domestic tourism led to the establishment of two institutions that have come crucial in shaping the opportunity structures for the Akha in the field of ethnic minority enterprise, the Old Chiang Mai Cultural Centre and the night bazaar.

The Old Chiang Mai Cultural Centre (OCMCC) was established in 1972 and has featured *Khantok* dinners including dance performances of northern Thai and hilltribe groups. The first residents were brought by the Border Patrol Police on behalf of Thai entrepreneurs who employed them as local tourist attractions (Vatikiotis 1984, p. 210). The idea to display ethnic minority groups for an entrance fee to an outside audience may indicate parallels to colonial forms of such exhibitions, also termed “human zoos” (Trupp 2011). Yet, this institution probably became the first urban base for highland

ethnic minorities, which also offered employment opportunities¹⁸. In addition to the low monthly salary of 150 Baht per month for dancing and singing, ethnic minority members aimed at increasing their income by producing and selling handicrafts and souvenirs to tourists (Choopah and Naess 1997, p. 195). This opportunity was also used by some of the very first Akha migrants. They bought or borrowed old bags, jackets or leggings from the village and distributed them to handicraft and souvenir shops in town or sold them themselves at the night bazaar.

The night bazaar was established in the early 1970s and is to date located in the Chang Khlang area between the historical city center and the Ping river. Ever since, it has been one of the biggest tourist attractions in Chiang Mai. The market operates from 06.00 PM until midnight and consists of small vending stalls and shops and expanded over the last decades to some of the neighboring lanes and squares. It is famous for its handicrafts, souvenirs, toys, clothing as well as (original and fake) CDs and DVDs. From its beginning, the night bazaar has also served highland minority groups as “a dual and indistinguishable function of market and social meeting place” (Vatikiotis 1983, p. 213) where economic activities as well as social exchange with co-ethnics and relatives take place. The first highland minority group engaged in the souvenir enterprise was the Hmong. Their pioneering role in the 1970s is linked to the proximity of Hmong settlements in Mae Rim and Doi Pui to the city center of Chiang Mai and to their early involvement in government-sponsored “handicraft commercialization projects” (see above). The Akha were the second group that entered the urban highland souvenir business in Chiang Mai (Meyer 1988, p. 429). According to Toyota (1998) the first Akha woman opened a handicraft stall at Chiang Mai’s famous night bazaar in 1975 (p. 205). My research participants also confirmed this development. One of the first Akha involved in the urban souvenir business got the information from another Akha friend who observed that an old Hmong man very successfully sold bracelets at Chiang Mai night bazaar. So they decided to follow this business model together. At the beginning, there were only three mobile Akha and some Hmong vendors. Initially, the Akha sellers were too shy to approach and sell to the tourists. Contrary to the present-day situation, in the very early years of urban souvenir business, the Akha constituted a

¹⁸ The Diamond Hotel was reported to be the second place where hilltribe shows were presented to tourists (Meyer 1988, p. 426; Choopah and Naess 1997, p. 195).

rare attraction and tourists approached them, asked questions about the products, and were eager to buy the handicrafts. In the late 1980s, Akha vendors could sell their products such as self-made bracelets for 200–300 Baht per day, which was many times the income of any other wage laborer. In the context of an interview, one of the Akha sellers recalls the early days of Akha souvenir business at Chiang Mai night bazaar:

At that time no one sold there. There were many Farang at that time but Ator [my Akha friend] and I were too shy and so we could not address them. But the Farang saw us with the stuff in the basket and asked 'What are these things?' And they bought my stuff for 200-300 baht. So Ator said that we should organize more products. Both of us could run good business. (Interview with Akha vendor, Chiang Mai, 26.01.2009)

Based on this success, they decided to buy more raw materials, produce more souvenirs, and bring their friends and relatives. In the first half of the 1980s, Vatikiotis (1984) reported that the Akha population in Chiang Mai accounted for 76 persons while an estimated number of 15–20 of them were involved as traders in the night bazaar (p. 212). We can thus date the beginning of the urban Akha souvenir business to the early 1970s, when some Akha started selling handicrafts on a small scale at the Old Chiang Mai Cultural Centre and the Chiang Mai night bazaar.

While these developments outlined above clearly shaped the opportunity structures in the migration and sales areas, increasing socio-economic and cultural transformation took place in the village areas. The highland development policies discussed in 4.2.1 led to an exclusion of the hilltribes from the forests, to their loss of control of natural resources, and to an undermining of political, social, and power structures in the village.

If we have enough money or something to do to survive we will not come to Bangkok. But in our village there is nothing to do. We are not allowed to make plantations in our village. No forest for us anymore. (Interview with Akha seller in Bangkok, 26.08.2008)

Moreover, the integration of peripheral areas into the state and the increase of international tourism also facilitated better roads and transportation, which form the infrastructural base for more frequent migratory movements to the city. Maybe even more importantly, the ethnic minorities became more entrepreneurial by controlling both the production and the distribution of the souvenirs. Through the direct sale to tourists, minority vendors avoided dependence on intermediate dealers and were thus

able to significantly increase their income. The social relations to their Akha home villages were important in order to obtain hilltribe clothing that was resold in the city or further processed for souvenir production. Moreover, successful Akha sellers shared the knowledge about new business opportunities with co-villagers, Akha friends, and relatives. These forms of social capital (see also chapter 7) and the subsequent commercial opportunities were not equally available to the urban lowlanders. This resulted in an economic niche that may be described as unique to highland minority migrants (Vatikiotis 1984, p. 122). In the 1980s, the market in Chiang Mai changed from mainly selling traditional clothing and jewelry to selling products primarily adapted towards Western tourism demands (Choopah and Ness 1997, p. 197). The rise of the urban Akha souvenir business in the 1970s and 1980s can be attributed to transformations in the Akha home villages, new evolving commercial opportunities in the city, and minority agency (see Table 2). Akha souvenir and handicraft entrepreneurs may run their own shops, rent stalls at one of the markets, occupy some space on the sidewalk, on the staircase of a building, or walk up and down with a basket along the streets as mobile vendors (see chapter 6.1 for further elaborations on the different types of sellers).

Another city in Northern Thailand that features a comparatively high number of highland ethnic minorities is Chiang Rai, the provincial capital city of the same-named province. Chiang Rai province is also the area where the most Akha live and most urban Akha migrants come from. Clearly after Chiang Mai, the city is the second most important tourist center of the North and has become an increasingly important economic gateway for the neighboring countries Laos and Myanmar in the context of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). Even though the city of Chiang Rai is much closer to most of the Akha villages than Chiang Mai, souvenir selling and trading on a larger scale only started in the 1990s when the Chiang Rai night market opened and the province launched its tourist promotion (Buadaeng, Boonyasaranai and Leepreecha 2002, p. 21). However, most tourists use Chiang Rai as a connecting point to other tourist areas or as a starting point for trekking tours to hilltribe villages and spend a relatively short time in the city. There are about 70 ethnic minority vendors – mainly with Akha, Mien, and Hmong ethnic background – selling souvenirs at the night market (Buadaeng, Boonyasaranai and Leepreecha 2002, p. 21).

Over the years, Chiang Mai became the ever more important economic and touristic center of the North and the extended domain of hilltribe villages (Toyota 1998). Simultaneously, several processes including new laws such as the logging ban of 1989 prohibiting the use of shifting cultivation, the spread of information about new job possibilities through Akha networks, the influence of the media and mass communication as well as urban temptations especially affecting the younger Akha generation led to further city-directed migration and to an increase of the number of Akha souvenir sellers. In the mid 1990s, Mika Toyota (1998) estimated the number of urban-based Akha in Chiang Mai to be around 2,000 (p. 197) and Fuengfusakul (2008) counted approximately 100 mobile sellers at the night bazaar in Chiang Mai in 2000 (p. 113). The vending style of mobile selling appeared in higher numbers in the context of increasing migration and competition. The number of mobile sellers, however, has not been stable as some only come to sell at the markets during tourist high season and return to their home villages for harvest season; thus, different types of migrants can be identified (see chapter 6.1).

TABLE 2: CONDITIONS FOR THE RISE OF AKHA URBAN SOUVENIR BUSINESSES

Changes in Source Region	Opportunities in Target Region	Minority Agency
Loss of land and forest	Increase of international tourism	Taking over the processes of souvenir production and distribution
Destruction of social and political village structures	Establishment of commercial institutions	Mobilization of social networks to co-villagers, relatives, and friends
Improved transportation facilities		Adaption towards tourist demand

Source: Own illustration

While present-day zones of Akha sales activities in Chiang Mai's souvenir business can be relatively clearly identified (see figure 12), it is more difficult to map out ethnic minority neighborhoods. In the early 1980s, Vatikiotis (1984) identified a residential dispersal of ethnic minority groups in Chiang Mai though noting that there was an above-average share of hilltribes in the subdistricts of Haiya and Chang Klan. Today especially parts of the Chang Klan subdistrict, an area called Kampaeng Ngam, has

become the main residential area for Akha as well as Lisu migrants from poorer economic backgrounds. Especially the part of Kampaeng Ngam along the waterway Khlong Mae Kha has rather poor living conditions and is occupied by highland groups and some lowlanders (see picture 4). Highland minorities started to move to this area in increasing numbers since the early 1990s (Rabibhadana and Jatuworapruk 2007, p. 65). Most of the households would fall under the UN definition of a slum¹⁹ and most of the dwellers are considered to be squatters. It was not possible however to identify other spatial concentrations of Akha residences in Chiang Mai²⁰.

PICTURE 4: HOUSING AREA KAMPAENG NGAM IN CHIANG MAI



PICTURE 5: HOUSING AREA IN CHAWENG, KOH SAMUI



Photos: Alexander Trupp

This high increase in Akha migrants in general and Akha souvenir sellers in particular outlined above led to increasing competition that strongly affected the spatial expansion of urban and, later on, beachside Akha souvenir businesses.

¹⁹ According to the United Nations (2003), a household can be defined as a slum household if the members living under the same roof lack one or more of the following conditions: access to improved water and improved sanitation facilities; sufficient (not overcrowded) living area; quality/durability of dwellings and security of tenure (p. 18).

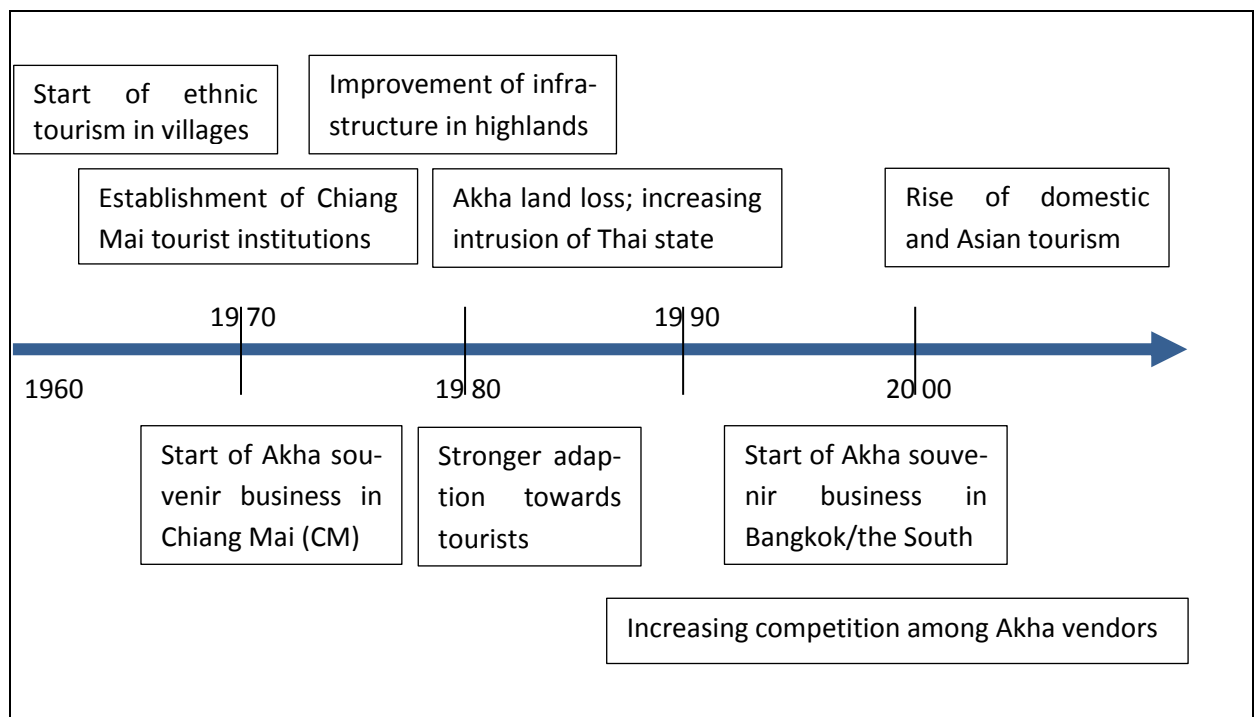
²⁰ Currently, parts of the Akha communities are planning an Akha village in Chiang Mai that shall also feature typical Akha village characteristics and thus facilitate the 'Akha way of life' in urban settings.

This map of Bangkok illustrates the spatial distribution of informal markets. Daily vending areas, marked in pink, are concentrated along major thoroughfares such as Arak Road, Sripoom Road, and Thapae Road. Weekly markets, marked in green, are primarily located in the central and southern parts of the city, including areas around Rachadamnoen Road and the Chao Phraya River. The map also shows the Chao Phraya River, major highways like Highway 106, and various landmarks such as the Chiangmai Municipal Sport Stadium and the Chiangmai Gymkhana Club. A scale bar at the bottom indicates distances up to 1,200 meters.

Over the last 15 years, three different ‘day markets’ have been established in Chiang Mai, which also became important sales areas for Akha entrepreneurs. The most popular among these is the so-called ‘Sunday market’, also called walking street. For the first two years, starting in 2002, the market was located on Thapae road between Thapae gate and the Chang Klang intersection. In August 2004, the market was moved to the 1.5 km long Ratchadamnoen Road that runs from Thapae Gate square to Wat Phra Sing temple. Some intersecting roads have also become part of the market. The market runs every Sunday from five until ten PM and features Northern Thai handicrafts, food stalls, jewelry, accessories, local artwork, and hilltribe products. Furthermore, a weekly Saturday night market opened in Wualai road south of Chiang Mai and in December 2008, a Friday market was launched in Kampaeng Ngam, which mainly consists of hilltribe vending stalls. These markets have provided more commercial opportunities for Akha vendors, but also have attracted further business

competition. Above all mobile, Akha sellers expanded their sales activities to the tourist areas along the eastern part of the historical city, to Loi Kroh road and the adherent small red-light zone, and vendors selling from the sidewalk or small stalls can be seen at the intersection of Loi Kroh road and Kampaeng Din road. It also has to be noted that these economic spaces are important sites of social activity and exchange. There is a high fluctuation of Akha migrants, newcomers frequently arrive from the villages and meet relatives or friends they have not seen for a long time. So, personal stories or news from the villages are shared along with information about business activities elsewhere. These social functions are even more important for migrant destinations further away from the villages such as Bangkok or the beach areas (see chapter 7).

FIGURE 13: TIMELINE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF URBAN AKHA SOUVENIR BUSINESSES



Source: Own illustration

5.2 MOVING ON TO BANGKOK

Increasing competition, bad sales conditions in Chiang Mai, continued limited job opportunities in their home regions as well as the motivation of some adventurous Akha sellers to discover new destinations and business opportunities have led to a spatial expansion of the Akha souvenir business to other urban and touristic areas such as Bangkok, Pattaya, Hua Hin, Koh Samui or Phuket. According to external resources, the first highland minority people selling souvenirs on the streets in Bangkok were Hmong (Giradet 1990). They came to Bangkok during the dry season as seasonal migrants in order to diversify their household incomes by temporarily becoming street vendors. I assume that their longer experience with urban souvenir businesses in Chiang Mai, with ethnic tourists in their home villages, and their comparably strong (economic) relations with Thai lowlanders made them move first. They predominantly sold ready-made souvenirs in Bangkok's famous tourist area Silom (Patpong). Based on my own interviews with long-time Akha sellers and Thai business owners in Bangkok, I date the beginning of Akha urban businesses in the capital to the mid-1990s when the first Akha temporarily moved to Bangkok. Similar to Chiang Mai in the early days, they and their products easily aroused attention. The Akha pioneers in Bangkok were very successful as they could sell their products at a good price in a short time. So they informed friends and relatives from the home village who came to accompany them. These Akha sellers who migrated to Bangkok in the first years did not have much information on where to go and how to run a business in the capital city. However, they had received the information from other Akha friends who had already moved there on a short-term basis that it was economically better to run a business in Bangkok. These pioneers or early migrants had already gathered sales experience in Chiang Mai or their home villages and migrated in small groups. In contrast to Chiang Mai, however, they often experienced troubles with municipal police checking their residence permits (see chapter 8.2).

The first Akha sellers in Bangkok stayed overnight at the Sriwawat hotel around Thanon Samsen, and in 2002 moved to the Thai-Chinese owned hotel Thaiwarie (see picture 7) next to Thanon Dinso, which is still the main place of residence of some Akha. This accommodation is good for seasonal migrants or short-term visitors/vendors as they offer relative cheap room prices and do not care how many guests stay in a room.

Usually, three to six Akha vendors share a room costing between 150 and 200 per night. As the hotel manager does not offer discounts for longer stays and charges 10 Baht extra for recharging mobile phones, many Akha vendors have moved to a living area close to Wan Chart market (see picture 6) where they mingle with long- and short-term migrants, predominantly coming from Isaan, Northeastern Thailand. During my fieldwork, the Wan Chart area became the preferred living area for most mobile Akha sellers because the rooms and houses, which can be rented on a monthly basis, are cheaper and more spacious. However, the area is also considered to be dangerous at night and Akha sellers sometimes anxiously told stories about residents getting robbed in the small lanes. All three living areas have in common that they are located within walking distance from one of the main sales areas for Akha vendors, the famous Khaosan road and the adjacent area.

PICTURE 6: SMALL LANES IN THE HOUSING AREA OF WAN CHART



PICTURE 7: UNTIL RECENTLY, THIS HOTEL WAS THE MAIN ACCOMODATION FOR AKHA VENDORS IN BANGKOK



Photos: Alexander Trupp

The three main sales areas in Bangkok are the Khaosan and Rambuttri area, the Silom road (Patpong), and the lower area of Sukhumvit road. The Khaosan area is lined with street vendors selling food, clothing, souvenirs, accessories, and fake ID cards and is well-known as Bangkok's ultimate backpacker bubble that is spatially expanding, going

up-market, and has become a popular night life area for young Thais on the weekend (Howard 2005; see picture 9). The Sukhumvit area sees many expatriates, attracts an increasing number of tourists from the Middle and Near East around Soi 3, and features red-light districts at Nana Plaza and Soi Cowboy. Along Thanon Silom lies Bangkok's financial district, but international tourists mainly visit the Patpong night market that offers fake watches, purses, and clothing as well as its famous red-light zone. Only 200 meter further lies Soi Thaniya, which is popular with Japanese tourists. These areas feature a distinctive atmosphere and specific characteristics and thereby attract different types of tourists, which in turn shape the opportunity structures. Akha vendors are aware of these specific structures and have specific reasons to sell at one location or another (see chapter 8). In addition to these three main sales areas, Akha vendors are scattered near various tourist attractions (e.g. next to the Grand Palace) and occasionally go to sell at special markets or events (e.g. Chinese New Year in Chinatown). Other popular tourist and market areas such as the famous Chatuchak (weekend) market or Suan Lum night market²¹ strictly prohibit any mobile street vendors.

Before, I went to Suan Lum night bazaar with my friends (4-5 persons) by tuk-tuk cause of we heard that there is a big night market in Bangkok which is close to Silom Road. But when we arrived there, they didn't allow us to sell in that market and they let us go out accompanied by security. We had to run away (laughing). (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok 26.08.2008)

However, a few Akha traders have their own shops at Chatuchak. Due to a strong fluctuation in Akha sellers it is difficult to assess the number of Akha vendors in Bangkok based on my own count; the information of Akha interview partners on their number accounts for 70–100 sellers.

5.3 MOVING BEACHSIDE

Since the late 1990s, Akha vendors have also ventured further south towards several beachside destinations (see pictures 5 and 8). During my fieldwork, the tourist areas of Hua Hin, Pattaya, Phuket, and Koh Samui were popular sales and migration destinations for both mobile and immobile (=stall) vendors. They have thus migrated and worked in most of the major international tourist destinations of the country.

²¹ Suan Lum night market operated from 2001 to 2011.

Many Akha vendors know other famous tourist destinations, such as Krabi, as well, but authorities strictly prohibit them from carrying out mobile sales activities. In Hua Hin, there are about 20 Akha entrepreneurs, most of them mobile vendors, but one couple runs a stand at the night market and a few Akha vendors present and sell their products from the sidewalk. Sales zones include the beach area between the Chinese temple and the Sofitel Hotel, the small red-light zone and the night market where mobile sellers are allowed to sell after 10.00 PM. Long-term and experienced vendors told me that more than ten years ago they started to explore different and relatively new sales areas in Thailand. These further migration movements and the spatial expansion of Akha souvenir businesses were mainly motivated by two factors. On the one hand, the competition has been increasing in both Chiang Mai and Bangkok, and on the other, Akha pioneers felt ready for new adventures and trying out something new. In terms of economic sales success, Pattaya, Phuket, and Koh Samui have been regarded as the best options, but in terms of larger politico-economic, social, and institutional structures, Bangkok and especially Chiang Mai are the preferred locations. For instance, in the early years of Akha souvenir business in Pattaya – when pioneers or newcomers could not yet draw on Akha social networks providing reliable information – the main problem was not to successfully sell products, but to find a place to sleep. Several guesthouse owners in Pattaya (in 2001) would not rent out rooms to Akha sellers even though they offered the same money as tourists or Thai visitors. It seems that economic success did not go hand in hand with social integration or enhancing symbolic capital. Eventually the newly arrived Akha group found a tuk-tuk driver who helped them find a place. Another critical issue that may have impeded greater numbers of Akha migrants moving to the islands of Koh Samui and Phuket is the transport issue on the islands. Not all Akha living areas are within walking distance to the sales areas, and transportation between the beach areas (the sales places) is quite expensive. In order to navigate between living and sales areas on Phuket or Koh Samui, a motorbike or a car is of great advantage. For example, Chaweng, Koh Samui's most popular beach area is seven kilometers long.

If I have to walk along Chaweng it is very far. If I want to go to Lamai [the second most popular beach area on Koh Samui] I call my husband to pick me by motorbike. [...] If you don't have a motorbike here it is quite tough. And you can't run your business. (Interview with Akha seller, Koh Samui, 07.09.2011)

Interestingly, in addition to seasonal individual vendors, Koh Samui hosts many migrating Akha couples who work together in the souvenir business. Research participants working on the island stated that many couples move to Koh Samui to start a new life and to leave former negative experiences, e.g. in the context of personal relationships, behind.

The reason why I decided to go to Koh Samui is that I did not want to live in the same area as in the past which reminds me of my past story. I want to forget everything. (Interview with Akha seller, Koh Samui, 08.09.2011).

Even though most Akha migrate into the souvenir business without family members, joint work and migration can enable a life with one's loved ones that may not be possible otherwise. Such statements and developments also challenge the view of Akha souvenir migration as purely economic. Indeed, the motivation to escape individual or community histories and the opportunity of self-realization, which are usually related to lifestyle migration (Benson and Reily 2009), can play a role, too. The motivations for different sales and living locations cannot be reduced to economic interests alone. Moreover, several Akha vendors have had great economic success in destinations such as Pattaya or Phuket, but returned to Chiang Mai or Bangkok because of more pleasurable working and living conditions and a more pleasant social environment.

Another reason that has influenced the spread of Akha souvenir businesses is the advantage of self-employment. Being one's own boss and thus able to independently decide when to leave work and return to or visit the village is highly valued.

I can decide to come home whenever I want. Christmas, my children's vacation or when there is a serious case in the village. That is why I love this job, it is a tough job but it makes me feel I am independent. (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 04.09.2008)

Moreover, previous employment experiences lead to a preference for and an increase of self-employment. Most Akha (except younger seasonal sellers in school or university) already have job and migration experiences prior to working in Bangkok or the beachside destinations. These occupations included waitresses, workers at construction sites, in laundry shops, and massage places or wage labor in the agricultural sector. Most of these jobs are characterized by low wages and some, e.g. those in construction, can be quite dangerous and resulted in injuries. Some vendors

showed me the injuries they had sustained from working in rice fields, factories or construction sites. Toyota also (1998) observed that ethnic minorities are preferred employees because they accept lower than average wages for unskilled work (p. 208). A young Akha woman also reported that she was deceptively offered a job working in a restaurant or hotel, which actually turned out to be a brothel where she and other women were locked up. In addition, many Akha sellers reported that they had been treated badly and looked down upon by Thai employers. Overall, previous job experiences were described rather negatively. In light of such experiences, becoming one's own boss is promising. Research participants clearly stated that they preferred to run their own businesses as they could decide when and how to work as well as when to visit their villages, and that their jobs as own-account workers made them feel independent.

PICTURE 8: AKHA VENDORS AT THE BEACHSIDE TOURIST DESTINATION IN HUA HIN



PICTURE 9: AKHA VENDORS AT KHAOSANROAD IN BANGKOK



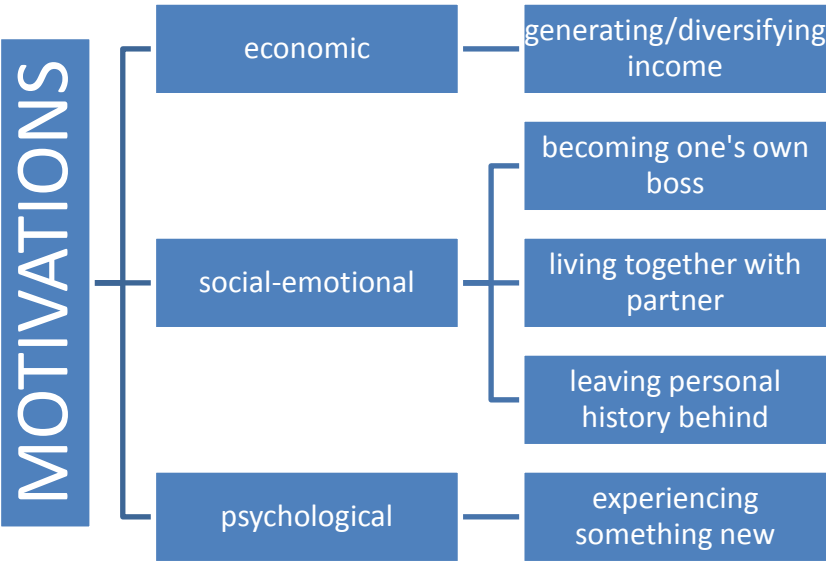
Photos: Kosita Butratana

Many Akha own-account workers are well aware of the advantages and disadvantages of the various sales locations, and there are long-term Akha vendors who have gained experience in Chiang Mai, Bangkok, and two or three beachside destinations. At present, experienced sellers are also contacted via mobile phone by Akha vendors seeking advice on starting their own urban souvenir businesses or changing their current living and sales conditions. Social relations still play an important role among Akha migrant sellers, especially in terms of sharing information about transport, living possibilities, and changing business opportunities at various locations (see chapter 7).

At the present time, there is a strong fluctuation both (1) between different various sales areas and (2) between home villages and sales areas (see figure 15). Their high level of mobility and flexibility enables Akha vendors to oscillate between several locations – a core factor in the pursuit of the urban souvenir business (see chapter 9.1).

For most sellers, Chiang Mai has been the starting point for newcomers to move on to further destinations in their urban Akha souvenir businesses. As mentioned earlier, due to transportation improvements and motorization processes in the highlands, the distance between Chiang Mai and the northern Akha villages is not really relevant anymore. Already in 1998, Mika Toyota stated: “Chiang Mai is no longer perceived a migrants’ destination but rather has become part of their [the Akha’s] extended domain of social networks” (p. 209). Today, Akha vendors’ social networks have further expanded and facilitated an extension of Akha souvenir businesses to Bangkok and beachside destinations. Almost all of the Akha vendors I talked to had a mobile phone and many of them were well connected to family members, relatives, and friends who stayed at the village or worked in other places. One of the Akha vendors even mentioned that ever since the massive spread of mobile phones in Thailand’s hill areas, Akha migration has increased considerably. Consequently, long-term and experienced sellers have become an even more important source of information. However, popular sales areas such as Chiang Mai night bazaar or Khaosan road in Bangkok have remained places where migrants meet personally and exchange experiences about former and current sales conditions throughout the country. Bangkok is not necessarily an intermediate stop before heading further south, as many sellers instead decide to head on to Pattaya, Phuket or Koh Samui directly. Table 3 illustrates the migration trajectory of a mobile souvenir seller in order to illustrate reasons and contexts of such movements.

FIGURE 14: MOTIVATIONS FOR MIGRATION INTO TOURIST BUSINESS



Source: Own illustration

TABLE 3: THE MIGRATION TRAJECTORY OF MIBAE

Mibae is a 29-year-old female mobile seller working in Koh Samui along the main tourist streets of Lamai and Chaweng beach area at the time of the research. She was born and grew up in a village in Chiang Rai province, finished elementary school, and experienced six years of formal Thai education system. Despite being born, raised, and educated in Thailand she received formal Thai citizenship only in 2008. Thus, when she first moved to Bangkok to work as an informal souvenir seller in 2005, she constantly was in danger of being arrested by state officials because of her unclear citizenship status.

At the age of fifteen, she had her first work-related migration experience as a dishwasher in a noodle shop. Later on, she worked at a petrol station in Samut Phrakarn near Bangkok and accepted several other jobs earning between 2,000 and 9,000 Baht per month. At some of the jobs, she was incorrectly informed on income and work duties, which led to her disappointment. After four years of working experience in different places, she returned home to her village for three years and helped her mother sell souvenirs in a popular hilltribe area.

In 2004, she decided to work as a self-employed souvenir seller in the northern city of Chiang Mai and the following year, she joined two other vendors from her home village to move to Bangkok. In Bangkok, she earned around 10,000 Baht per month and worked at different sales locations within the city. On her best day, she earned a few thousand Baht when on other days she could not sell a single souvenir. Due to social and economic reasons, Mibae decided to leave Bangkok and to migrate to one of the beachside tourist destinations. She called one of her relatives, an experienced souvenir vendor, and asked about the current situation in places like Hua Hin, Pattaya or Koh Samui. After learning that the number of mobile sellers in Koh Samui is rather low, she eventually selected this destination where she went on to earn three to four times more than in Bangkok.

Mibae is married and lives and works together with her husband in Koh Samui. She has a child from a previous relationship who lives in Chiang Rai province with his grandparents and visits a school there. She once tried to bring him to Koh Samui, but it was difficult to find an appropriate school as well as someone to take care of him while she worked.

Even though living costs are higher on the island, she can save a considerable amount of money each month that she invests in the education of her son, a car, and a bigger house in the village where she plans to return and retire in the future.

FIGURE 15: THE MOBILITY PATTERN AND SPATIAL EXPANSION OF AKHA SOUVENIR BUSINESSES



Source: Own illustration

5.4 THE DEVELOPMENT OF AKHA SOUVENIR PRODUCTS

As outlined above in chapter 5.1, the initial commercialization of crafts and souvenirs was initiated by external agents and addressed to a (primarily) Western tourist audience who did not share the cultural background of the producers. Especially since the mid-1980s, the handicraft market has changed from selling old traditional clothing and silver to products especially tailored for Western tourist demand (Choopah and Ness 1997, p. 197). At the time, a process was initiated that combined traditional Akha embroidery or garments with new designs. Old hilltribe textiles and garment to be discarded were easy and cheap to find. Cohen (1988) refers to a “process of boutiqueization” resulting in hybridized products “fusing tribal items into modern Western garments fashionable among the younger generation of foreigners and Thais” (p. 58).

Today these products can still be found among Akha souvenir sellers, but have become rather rare, especially among mobile and semimobile sellers. First of all – due to the sellout of traditional art and textiles – it is now very difficult to get old hilltribe clothing or embroidery in the hill villages in Thailand, so most of these raw materials are bought from ethnic minority traders bringing these garments from Burma/Myanmar. Second, once one of the cheapest resources, old textiles and even scraps of cloth have now become expensive. They are now mainly used to produce belts, bags or skirts. There is, however, a number of tribal art and boutique shops in Chiang Mai and Bangkok – most of them owned and managed by non-Akha – that sell hybridized forms of ethnic minority clothing.

In order to produce or decorate key chains, small bags, necklaces or bracelets, other (newer) raw materials such as fabric and string in various colors as well as small cowry shells are bought in the Thai-Burmese border town Mae Sai, in Chiang Mai around Warorot market or in Bangkok at the major markets of Chatuchak or Pahurat. The only materials that come directly from the hill villages are the seeds of a tropical plant, Job’s tears, which are collected by souvenir sellers in their home regions .

FIGURE 16: PHOTO SERIES ON SOUVENIR PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES

PICTURE 10: SEWING



**PICTURE 11: PRODUCING
SYNTHETIC LEATHER BRACELETS**



**PICTURE 12: USING JOB'S TEARS
SEEDS FOR DECORATION**



Photos: Alexander Trupp

During my four years of research at varying sales destinations across the country, I could also identify changes over time and space. It seems that in recent years, more and more products are offered for sale that have no connection to the Akha home regions or cultural traits at all. Since 2011, vendors have started to sell self-made bracelets displaying names of international football clubs or naughty phrases such as “Lick my Ass” or “Cunt Man” that obviously cater to specific areas and clients such as party tourists in the Khaosan area or visitors of red-light districts. Sellers recount that these products are easily marketable to drunken tourists. One of the sellers told me that she would prefer to sell wristbands with “nice and lovely” slogans, but tourists preferred the naughty ones. Other sellers, however, did not understand the self-made inscriptions on their bracelets and asked me for a translation. It takes fifteen to twenty minutes to produce these kinds of bracelets, and many vendors now offer bracelets with any phrase made to order.

FIGURE 17: VARIETY OF SOUVENIR PRODUCTS

PICTURE 13: THE SIMPLIFIED SOUVENIR VERSIONS OF THE AKHA HEADDRESS AND THE WOODEN FROG



PICTURE 14: THE 'LISU HAT' AND NAUGHTY WRISTBANDS



PICTURE 15: PLASTIC SOUVENIRS ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY POPULAR



Photos: Kosita Butratana and Alexander Trupp

However, also other new self-made products, such as bracelets made from synthetic leather mixed with various types of decoration, have become popular. Producers and sellers say that the problem of the introduction and development of new souvenir designs is that as soon as one new product proves successful, other Akha quickly aim to copy the style. As a consequence, the market price of the souvenir drops and sellers make less profit. These new products serve as a means of income generation, may even hold a certain degree of innovation, do not burden local resources of the hill areas, but cannot support the hypothesis of the ethnic souvenir business contributing to the revitalization of handicraft or embroidery traditions, either.

One of the last and definitely most obvious objects representing Akhaness also in urban souvenir contexts is women's Akha headgear. Many vendors, mobile and permanent alike, wear and sell a strongly simplified version of the Akha headdress. In its original form, the impressive looking headgear consists of various materials such as beaten silver, silver coins, beads, and feathered tassels and has become a symbol of ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand. In tribal art shops in Thailand, the original silver headdresses are sold for 1,000 Euro upward. The souvenir version replaces the silver with aluminum the beads with plastic and omits many other details of the original

piece. It is thus much lighter and cheaper (around 1,000 Baht), but still the most expensive product mobile sellers have to offer. Some of the mobile sellers have already sold their original silver headgear and only wear the souvenir form for sales. Others however do not even wear the souvenir version; first, they are more comfortable without it and second, it raises the risk of getting noticed and arrested by the police (see chapters 8.2 and 8.3).

Another trend I observed is the increase of mass-produced items. Over the last years, the share and range of mass products such as magic wallets, plastic bracelets, cigarette holders, fake tattoos or blinking toys has increased. Even though some areas have informal rules determining which vendors are allowed to sell which products (see chapter 7.2.2), several of these items are sold by own-account workers from Northern and Northeastern Thailand alike. Maybe the most popular mass-manufactured products that Akha sellers offer are wooden frogs in various sizes. This souvenir consists of a wooden frog with a ribbed back and a wooden stick. If one runs the stick down the ribbed back, it creates a sound similar to the croaking of frogs. As mobile sellers usually play with this frog while roaming the streets in order to attract tourists, the frog has become a symbol of mobile Akha sellers. Thai media has started to advertise the Akha as a tourist attraction in Khaosan road titling “Singing Frog In Khao San Road” (Khaosaner 2009) and tourists often refer to them as frog people. However, even though ethnographic literature refers to the use of silver frogs as exchange goods with Chinese traders in previous times (Geusau 1983, p. 265), there seems to be no deeper cultural relation between Akha sellers and their most popular product. Such wooden frogs are produced in a factory close to Chiang Mai and other places across Southeast Asia and souvenir vendors either buy them in Chiang Mai or from wholesalers in Bangkok. Moreover, plastic souvenirs have become good sales products in certain tourist areas (see chapter 8.3).

In addition to self-made products and mass-manufactured items, a third category of souvenirs can be identified. These souvenirs (mainly colorful fabrics including hats and bags) are made by Lisu²² producers, but sold by Akha vendors. While Lisu producers

²² The Lisu people represent another highland ethnic minority group of mainland Southeast Asia.

also sell their products in Pai²³ and Chiang Mai, they do not venture as far south – to Bangkok and the beachside – as the Akha do. Akha entrepreneurs working in those areas contact Lisu producers by mobile phone to order and resell their products. In this case, a division of the economic process between production and distribution can be observed along the lines of minority ethnicity.

To sum up, Akha souvenir products have drastically changed over the last years and decades, wherein a trend towards mass-manufactured items and self-made products strongly oriented towards perceived tourist demand has been identified (see also pictures 10–12 in figure 16 and pictures 13–15 in figure 17). Most vendors offer a mix of the souvenir categories outlined above. It has thus become more and more difficult to identify ethnic groups by the products they sell. In a study on vendors and small entrepreneurs at Chiang Mai night bazaar, Fuengfusakul (2008) observed that each ethnic group only sells products that display their ethnic style (p. 112). My data collected between 2008 and 2013 strongly contradicts this observation. Different sales groups may sell different products, but with few exceptions they do not necessarily reflect their ethnic or cultural traits.

5.5 INTERIM CONCLUSION

The development of ethnic minority souvenir businesses was once initiated by external actors and mostly limited to the northern region, but over the last decades an increasing number of Akha has gone into business for themselves and migrated southwards to Thailand's urban and beachside tourist areas. Several problems and conditional changes in the highland regions such as loss of land, destruction of traditional village structures, improvement of transport infrastructure, and the creation of economic opportunity structures in the destination areas in light of international tourism development set the stage for the evolvement of Akha souvenir businesses. These developments have been identified as casual and intervening conditions in the context of axial coding which have fostered migration into urban areas and the spatial expansion of sales activities. On the other side and equally important, Akha have become more entrepreneurial by taking over production and distribution, adapting their products toward tourist demand, and thereby increased

²³ Pai is a popular tourism place in the highlands of Northern Thailand in Mae Hong Son province.

their income. They have activated their social relations with co-ethnics using social capital for processes of souvenir and raw material acquisition and for the transfer of information relevant for business start-ups. Based on empirical data analysis, I developed three motivational categories referring to economic, social-emotional and psychological dimensions (see figure 14). Even though economic pressure seems predominant at first sight, non-economic factors have been shown to be important as well. These include rather negative previous employment experiences leading to the quest for occupational independence, the possibility to live a life together with a partner, the chance to escape individual or communal histories, and eventually the desire of experiencing something new. Migration decisions and economic actions are not purely economically rational and self-interested (see also chapter 7). The case of Akha migration into urban and beachside tourist destinations involved more than a purely economic survival strategy aiming at simply surviving on the market, as Fuengfusakul (2008) observed and neoclassical migration theory has argued.

6 DIFFERENCES WITHIN: STRUCTURE AND DISTINCTION OF THE SOUVENIR BUSINESSES

While chapter 5 provides an overview of conditional structures, motivational factors, and actions leading to a rise and spatial expansion of Akha souvenir businesses, this and the subsequent chapter look at existing distinctions within the field of urban souvenir businesses, thus analyzing differences and power relations within the Akha group as well as between Akha vendors and other agents.

There is a strong tendency to view groups or communities as a homogenous unit leading to the negligence of unequal power relations within the group, especially in terms of gender, class, and generation (Anthias 2007). The field of Akha ethnic minority vendors and entrepreneurs is not homogenous, either. Despite sharing a set of commonalities important for the mobilization of internal social capital (chapter 7.1), a range of differences ‘within’ (Moore 1993) in terms of type and pattern of migration, migration trajectory, and migrants’ endowment with social, cultural, economic or political capital and their social experiences embedded in the habitus can be identified. These distinctions are important because they also shape the everyday socio-economic practices of Akha vendors. In this chapter, I first describe the various types of Akha migrants found in the urban field of souvenir businesses (6.1) and subsequently outline co-existing vending styles including mobile and permanent modes of selling (6.2). Finally, I analyze the central role of gender for both production and distribution processes (6.3).

6.1 TYPES OF MIGRANTS AND MIGRATION

In the previous chapters, I outlined different concepts of internal migration and mobilities (2.7) as well as general migration processes in the Thai and Akha context (chapters 4 and 5). This section aims to describe and classify the specific patterns and types of Akha souvenir migration and thereby show to what extent existing categories fit complex contemporary mobilities.

It is impossible to press the Akha migrants engaged in urban souvenir businesses into one single migrant category or typology. However, one criterion that almost all these Akha migrants have in common is that they are individual migrants. These persons

thus move individually, as couples or in small groups and their movements are self-financed even though in some cases family members provide initial economic support. The act of migration is often carried out jointly with other Akha friends or relatives, but there is no organizational or governmental structure or sponsorship behind this migration. Also, there are no signs of mafia-style structures in the sense of criminal activities or a 'big informal leader' controlling the business, as assumed by some tourists and expatriates I talked to during my fieldwork. It also seems quite obvious that all Akha migrants are internal migrants, thus moving permanently or temporarily from one area of the country to another. It has to be noted, however, that some of the Akha vendors fled or migrated from Myanmar to Thailand and live in Thailand without a clear legal status. They are either regarded as illegal migrants by government authorities or have been issued IDs with limited rights and are thus restricted in their mobility (see chapter 8.2). Moreover, it has also been observed that the forms of internal migration described below can lead to international migration (Skeldon 2006). Some of the female Akha sellers had established relationships with foreign visitors, which eventually led to marriage-related migration (see chapter 7.2.1).

Referring to the time dimension, I could apply the UN and IOM definitions and distinguish between long-term migrants (persons who move to a new place for a period of at least 12 months) and short-term migrants (persons who move to a new place for a period of at least three months but fewer than 12 months) (IOM 2004). However, short-term or temporary migrants are better described as seasonal migrants who move from one place or region to another in accordance with yearly seasonal events or periods. In the case of Akha entrepreneurs, a three-level seasonality can be identified. Time periods and events in both the sending and receiving areas can foster this type of temporary migration. First, the international tourist high season runs from mid-November until late March with secondary peaks in July and August when most Western countries have summer vacation. The second period is related to the Akha agricultural calendar when household members search for work during the agricultural low season in order to supplement agricultural incomes. A final period is related to Thai school and university holidays, which usually take place in October, from March to April, and in July. This third 'lecture-free' season refers to the younger generation of Akha sellers who see the work of souvenir selling as a 'holiday job' to earn some extra

money. They usually visit their mothers in the migration destination areas, accompany them to work and gradually start selling on their own, or they come together in small groups of three to five friends. According to my observations, the 'holiday job' sellers are exclusively female. Generally, I estimate that more than 90 percent of Akha micro-entrepreneurs are women, mostly leaving their husbands behind in the villages (see chapter 6.3). Moreover, there are short-term migrants who aimed for longer-term migration but gave up the sale of souvenirs after a few weeks when they were not successful. The lack of job opportunities in the village areas prompts many Akha to search work outside of agriculture and outside the village. At the early stages of migration, future intentions in terms of long-term or short-term stays are not yet fixed and often change over time and space.

However, there are a significant number of long-term migrants who reside and work at a specific location for more than a year. Most of my interview partners arrived in Bangkok or in one of the beachside destinations for the first time during the first decade of this millennium. Some arrived in the early 2000s and thus already had plenty of work experience while others had just reached their new sales destination briefly before or even during my fieldwork. Many of them aim to work in the cities as souvenir sellers until they accumulate enough savings in order to return and eventually retire back home in the village and could thus be termed 'working life migrants'. For most Akha sellers, the wish to return home to the village sooner or later is strong. In many interviews and conversations, Akha vendors stated their dislike of living in the capital.

"When I win the lottery, I go back home to the mountains immediately. Staying in the hill village is the best" (informal conversation with Akha seller, Bangkok, 22.08.2011)

Long-term migrants usually visit their home village three times per year. The most important events to visit home include migrants' children's holidays, Christmas, and other ceremonial events. Visiting home is also a question of money, as a one-way trip by public transport from Bangkok to a particular village in Chiang Rai province costs 1,000 Baht, which amounts to the income of two to four working days. Only very few Akha vendors working in Pattaya, Phuket or Koh Samui possess their own car they can use and share for the transport. In addition to personal home visits, relations to the family back home are maintained through regular phone contacts, investments in the

home village, and economic remittances. Daily phone calls to the husbands and children 'left-behind' are common, as almost all Akha vendors and at least one household member back home possess a mobile phone. Different from the past, today most Akha villages in Thailand at least partly receive a signal. The commitment to the village and the future plan of returning home after having accumulated sufficient savings is also represented in bigger investments such as the construction of a new house, which better earning sellers pursue.

Permanent migrants who have established or intend to establish a long-lasting urban residence were only noted in Chiang Mai. Indeed, spatial concentrations of hilltribe communities have existed in the northern city at least since the 1990s (see chapter 5.1). Through this relatively long presence of Akha in Chiang Mai, an urban-born second generation has emerged. I could not observe this strong urban commitment in Bangkok or the beachside destinations. However, a minority of the young Akha generation can imagine and aims for a future in urban settings (outside of Chiang Mai) stating to have no reasons to return to the village except for family visits or ceremonies like Christmas or *gin kao mai*.

All types of Akha migrants (except for the urban-born second generation) have kept their homes in their villages of origin as official main residences, since the change of domicile registration in Thailand is rather complicated and village ties have been maintained. It has been shown that Akha migrants do not give up their village residence in favor of a new one but rather establish a second – even a temporary – one in the migration destination area. Another interesting aspect of the Akha vendors' migration pattern is that they not only migrate between their home village and the sales/migrant destination area, but also between the various tourist areas (see chapters 5 and 9.1).

In most of the cases observed, it was the Akha woman who migrated and left husband and children behind in the village. Married Akha women discussed the migration decision with their husbands, but stated that it was eventually their choice. Unmarried Akha migrants mainly discussed their migration decision with their mothers who in many cases had urban sales experiences themselves. Akha men are reported to take care of the children and the house back home. The new – even temporary und

unregistered – households in the migration areas are shared with relatives, Akha friends or other Akha vendors who had gotten to know each other during their sales activities. In addition to these multilocal households that consist of family members living in multiple locations, Akha vendors also run a household with co-vendors who are not necessarily family members. Most Akha vendors keep a household combination of a rural and an urban base in the context of spatially multi-locational living arrangements (Schmidt-Kallert 2012). As stated above, rural and urban household members are in steady contact via mobile phone and economic remittances in both directions take place. On a small scale, newcomers in the Akha souvenir business may receive start-up support from a village- or urban-based mother, while urban-based Akha migrants transfer remittances for the schooling of their children or invest in house constructions in their home regions. Such rural-urban livelihoods do not only function economically in the sense of a household diversification strategy (Rigg 1998), but also socially in the context of child rearing, education of the kids or care for the elderly (Schmidt-Kallert 2012).

While the role of men will be discussed later in the context of gender and work, it is necessary here to further elaborate on the role of children in the migration and sales process. Most of the children of preschool age stay in the village together with the left-behind husband or other relatives. Only in Chiang Mai, where permanent Akha migrants have been identified, one can frequently observe Akha women bringing young children along during their mobile souvenir sales activities. Infants are carried on the back and young children walk together with their mothers. While sometimes alleged to be using their small kids for commercial purposes in order to make a better sell (Ishii 2010, p. 118), Akha female sellers explain that bringing their children along allows them to combine work and childcare. In many cases there is no relative in Chiang Mai who could take care of them during the evening. In the newer migrant destinations such as Bangkok and the beachside areas, children of souvenir sellers are rarely seen. In those areas, it is even more difficult to find someone to take care of the children when the sellers are busy. Moreover, most of the sellers prefer schools in Chiang Mai or Chiang Rai which may support the education of ‘hilltribe’ children and are closer to their home villages and to a network of friends and relatives. However, during school holidays, daughters may visit their mothers or parents in order to join

their sales activities and eventually become temporary souvenir vendors during their lecture-free time themselves.

My mother is working in Khaosan Road. When I was a student my mom used to ask me to sell souvenirs in Bangkok during my vacation but I was too shy so I didn't do that in the past. But I know for now it could be good business because I could run my own business which is better than working as waitress, housekeeper and etc. for others person. (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 26.08.2008)

This short description of the different types of Akha souvenir migration demonstrates the growing complexity of mobility patterns. Various forms of rural-urban temporary migrations have developed, while ties to the family members left behind in the villages as well as to Akha entrepreneurs working in other destinations were maintained. Based on such ties, Akha vendors can be highly mobile and spontaneously able to change their sales and living location. They can be characterized by a mobile livelihood as they move between different sales destinations and their home village.

From a historical perspective, high levels of Akha mobility are not really new. "When traced over a period of about one hundred years, the mobility of an average Akha family is very high indeed" (Geusau 1983, p. 271). Long before the establishment of 'modern' nation states in Asia, the Akha faced conflicts with increasingly stronger and bigger groups, which eventually lead to southward migration. Moreover, in order to be able to move at the time, close ties to clan and lineage members were a prerequisite for safe travel or migration. It was thus necessary to establish "a network in the Akha universe which makes great mobility possible" (Geusau 1983, p. 271). As shown in these chapters, high mobility continues to play a significant role. Also, social relations have endured, but nowadays appear in various forms of social capital involving both insiders and outsiders (see chapter 7).

6.2 TYPES OF SELLERS/ENTREPRENEURS

In the following, I provide a basic overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of Akha entrepreneurs and subsequently outline the different styles of selling Akha entrepreneurs pursue.

6.2.1 BASIC SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

This is not a quantitative study, yet it seems useful to provide a quantitative sketch of the research group based on 30 semistructured interviews with Akha entrepreneurs, observations and informal conversations (see chapter 3.5). The ages of vendors I talked to during the context of the semistructured interviews ranged from 20 to 61 years, though children of school age and even infants were sometimes brought along during the sales activities. This data slightly contradicts Ishii's (2010) previous study carried out in Chiang Mai who estimated vendors' ages from the late teens to the 40s (p. 115). Generally, there is a huge gap between the older (illiterate) and the younger (literate) Akha generations. The unequal distribution of literacy and the recognition of a wider range of lifestyles among the young generation have accompanied the devaluation of the cultural knowledge of Akha elders who have lost their position in society (Toyota 1998, p. 208). The majority of my interview partners older than 35 had no formal school education, while the younger generation had an educational level between grades 4 and 12. However, none of them had institutional capital in form of a higher education degree. The vast majority of Akha migrants involved in the souvenir business are female (see chapter 6.3) while various types of marital status such as single, (re)married (both migrated as couple or migrated alone), and divorced exist. The majority of Akha vendors in urban contexts have converted to Christianity and a few follow Buddhist belief. However, syncretic forms of 'traditional' beliefs remain. All the interviewed persons migrated from one of the two northern Thai provinces, Chiang Mai or Chiang Rai, but not all of them received Thai citizenship (see chapter 8.2). The criteria of legal citizenship status and the perceived lower status in Thai society marks the main difference between 'hilltribe' and 'Thai mainstream' vendors (see chapter 7.2.2). In a survey of 236 mobile street vendors in Bangkok's Khlongtoey and Dindaeng districts, Nirathron (2006) found that 88% come from provinces outside of Greater Bangkok, that the age of the vendors lies between 20 and 78, and that 85% had received no more than six years of education (pp. 33–34).

6.2.2 VENDING STYLES

Previous research on street vending and informal entrepreneurial activities in Thailand distinguished at least two types of vending units (Nirathron 2006, p. 26): First, mobile

vending where the sellers do not have fixed locations, but move from one place to another and second, static (sometimes also termed fixed, permanent or immobile) vending whereas the sales stall or shop is permanently fixed. Studies undertaken by Smith and Henderson (2008) and Gantner (2011) investigating the informal tourism sector in Phuket apply a threefold classification. They distinguish (1) mobile vendors constantly on the move carrying their goods with them, (2) semimobile vendors using facilities such as carts or display racks which are transportable to selected locations, and (3) immobile (fixed, static) vendors referring to their stalls' various design and substantiality. These categorizations are based on studies dealing with a plethora of informal commerce embracing the sale of souvenirs, food and beverages, bars, beauty services, tailoring products or transportation services. In the following, I partly build on existing categorizations and introduce a classification that seems useful for the distinction of vending styles of Akha souvenir sellers across Thailand's urban and beachside destinations. These distinctions draw on the type of (im)mobility they employ in order to approach customers and on the type of physical space they occupy in the context of economic activities. Such space may include a small shop, a stall, some space on the pavement in front of a shop or next to the street, the stairways of a building or simply the streets, squares, and footpaths. Moreover, it will be shown that these styles of souvenir vending are not merely ways of operating a business, but also reflect distinct social practices and unequally distributed forms of capital.

Even though I have to carry this basket I can walk around wherever I want without any expenses. They [the semimobile and permanent vendors] have to pay 500 baht per month. And that area is sometimes difficult to run business, especially in rainy season they cannot sell so I prefer to walk around even I know that this can be very risky for me. I mean to have trouble with the municipal policeman who is looking for us to pay the fine but I know how I can deal with this situation (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 10.09.2008)

Mobile Vending

Mobile Akha souvenir sellers do not have fixed premises, but carry their products (mainly in baskets) by walking through touristy streets and zones. In terms of absolute numbers, this is the biggest group accounting for a few hundred Akha mobile souvenir sellers across Thailand. With the exception of a few male mobile vendors in Bangkok

and the beachside destinations, this group is (almost) entirely constituted by female sellers. Carrying the heavy baskets, they roam the streets and footpaths along markets and tourist zones walking several kilometers each day. For this group, walking as an everyday mobile practice involves *walking to and from work* as well as *walking as work* (see chapter 9.1). There are no official licenses or permits for this group of souvenir vendors, which exposes them to conflict with state or city authorities (see chapter 8). This risk is further enhanced by their outfit (especially the souvenir version of the Akha headdress), which enables authorities to easily identify these vendors as the ‘hilltribe other’. However, their enhanced mobility also reveals advantages such as being able to directly approach customers and greater flexibility as they can access different places at particular times. Compared to the other vending types, this style features the lowest business entry barriers. Many mobile vendors state that they would prefer to have their own shop or permanent stall, but cannot afford it.

I would love to have my own shop if it possible but this business needs too much money. It's my dream. But for now I prefer to run my own business like this [as mobile seller]. (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 26.08.2008).

Semimobile vending

Semimobile Akha vendors using easily transportable mats or small tables to display their products occasionally move their sales places because they want to reach consumers at different places or because they get displaced from the current sales location. These micro entrepreneurs pursue their businesses on footpaths, streets, squares or stairs in front of buildings. The gender ratio of this type of sellers is rather equal, while it was observed that migrating couples often split into a female mobile vendor and a male semimobile seller (see chapter 6.3). Their legal status in terms of business permits is rather unclear. In Bangkok's backpacker quarter, for example, they do not have official licenses, but rather an informal agreement with the municipal police to pay a monthly fee equivalent to the costs of a fine for mobile selling. In Chiang Mai, however, places for semimobile vendors around Chiang Mai night bazaar are more clearly regulated. Akha entrepreneurs can rent three steps in front of the popular night bazaar building for 1,500 Baht per month, less favorable space near

Kalae parking lot for 800 Baht, and they can occupy the least favorable spaces without paying (Fuengfusakul 2008, pp. 111–112). Most of these vendors remain at their sales sites throughout the day/evening or even throughout days and months, but if necessary they are still able to move quickly.

PICTURE 16: PREPARING A SOUVENIR STALL FOR CHIANG MAI'S FRIDAY MARKET



Photos: Alexander Trupp

Fixed vending

The category of fixed vending styles comprises souvenir stalls or shops that are set up permanently or regularly (see picture 16) at one specific site. These businesses can be found in tourist zones, including night markets and several day markets, which are especially popular in Chiang Mai (see chapter 5.1). These spaces for stalls or small shops have to be officially rented or owned, thus forms of economic and social capital are necessary in order to run this type of business. Depending on the location, monthly tenure can cost up to 20,000 Baht. Moreover, stalls at popular markets are limited, usually fully booked and thus not accessible to newcomers unless they can take over the stall contract of someone they know. Similarly, in smaller and less popular markets such as Chiang Mai's rather new Friday market, which does not charge any rental fees, economic capital to purchase a trolley, an umbrella, and a rack to display the products amounting to approximately 3,000 Baht is required. In contrast to the mobile selling styles, permanent vending units are only open to Akha with 'complete' Thai citizenship (see chapter 8). It has to be noted that people occupying fixed stalls or shops can be owners, lessees or sublessees while rental terms might be negotiated on a yearly, monthly or daily basis and the costs greatly vary depending on the business' features and location (Fuengfusakul 2008, p. 111).

Eventually, there are a small number of permanent Akha-operated shops specializing in 'tribal art', high quality souvenirs or silver jewelry. In addition to souvenirs, they sell

traditional and commercial fine art²⁴. Most of their products (except for the contemporary silver jewelry which mainly comes from Northern Thailand) are produced and imported from Burma/Myanmar or China and significantly differ from the goods offered by the vending types outlined above.

Online vending

Finally, a very small number of Akha vendors additionally started to sell their products online. The CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of the “Akha Hill Tribe products” and website “Akha hill” (<http://akhahill.awardspace.com/index.html>) also works as a mobile seller. The online shop features a wide range of products such as rather cheap bags, belts or hats costing around 20 Euro up to traditional Akha silver headdresses and complete Akha customs costing around 1,000 Euro, but it also provides information on trekking tours and recent flood disasters. The online project was also set up in order to support poor Akha communities.

This categorization is useful to distinguish between different types of businesses open to actors endowed with different levels of capital. However, it was observed that households and individuals mix these vending styles in order to maximize profits or organize family life. As mentioned above, couples may combine mobile and semimobile or fixed vending styles. Moreover, individual vendors can have a fixed stall at one of Chiang Mai’s one-day markets, work the other six evenings as mobile sellers at the night market, and may additionally be involved in an online company. Other vendors might have a job e.g. as waitress in a noodle shop and occasionally work as mobile sellers in the late evenings. This reflects the aggravating sales conditions due to increasing competition in the souvenir market. The practice of individuals or couples to pursue various vending styles can be seen as a diversification strategy in order to spread risks, but it also expresses gendered dispositions of the habitus.

²⁴ Graburn (1976) defines commercial fine arts as products that are made with eventual sale in mind but follow culturally embedded and formal aesthetics and standards (p. 6).

6.3 GENDERED PRACTICES

“The divisions constitutive of the social order, or more precisely, the social relations of domination and exploitation that are instituted between the sexes thus progressively embed themselves in two different classes of habitus, in the form of opposed and complementary bodily hexis and the principles of vision and division which lead to the classifying of all the things of the world and all practices according to distinctions that are reducible to the male/female opposition” (Bourdieu 2001, p. 30).

Gender as a social construct is part of the habitus and patterns the practice and division of labor (see chapters 2.5 and 2.6). It is a mode of structuration that implies power relations. Women in Southeast Asia have long been associated with high status and relative equality in contrast to male dominance prevailing in East and South Asia (King 2008, p. 203; van Esterik 2000). It is, however, impossible to generalize about the region of Southeast or the territory of Thailand. “Within the geographical space today known as Thailand there is also considerable variation in gender ideology and practices according to region, class, urban/rural residence, and so on” (Yasmeen 2006, p. 20). Ethnographic literature about the Akha in Thailand suggests “that both Akha men and women expressed opinions suggesting that concepts of sexual stratification are important to them” (Kammerer 1988, p. 34) and that the Akha have a meticulous gender-based division of labor wherein household tasks and the production of clothing are seen as women’s tasks only (Hanks 1988; Kammerer 1988; Yassokrai 2005; see also chapter 4.3.1). Most of the literature on Akha gender roles also agrees that Akha women can exercise a certain degree of power, but are subordinate to men. “Not only do men have the power to influence the lives of women; so also women have the power to influence the lives of men. But I would argue in this, men and women are not equal” (Kammerer 1988, p. 49).

Early research carried out by Vatikiotis (1984) notes that women dominated the Akha population in Chiang Mai by 2 to 1 (p. 122). During the 1970s and 1980s, Akha marriage customs fostered the urban migration of Akha women to avoid unwanted marriages (Toyota 1998, pp. 203–204). A women-dominated migration pattern corresponds to the data of the Thai population census, which shows that women have outstripped men in urban-directed migration since 1980 (Osaki 1999, p. 449). This trend has also continued for the urban Akha migrants (Toyota 1998, p. 204), and especially holds true in the sector of handicraft and souvenir business where more

than 90 percent of souvenir sellers and producers are women. However, one has to be careful because the (almost) non-visibility of Akha men does not necessarily indicate that they have no or merely a weak function within the Akha souvenir business. These observations lead to two main questions: First, how can we explain the extremely high percentage of Akha women in the souvenir business and second, what is the role of Akha men? I answer these questions by looking into the dynamics of two central dimensions of economy, distribution (sales) and production.

Gendered division of souvenir selling

It has been observed that men generally do not migrate alone into the tourist business, but as companions of their wives. With very few exceptions across the country, the group of mobile sellers is entirely female. Ishii's (2010) observation that there are only female vendors (p. 115) holds true for Chiang Mai, but not for the more southern destinations such as Bangkok or Hua Hin. Mobile vending is more exhausting, as it generally entails longer sales hours, walking long distances as part of the job, and carrying heavy baskets full of souvenirs. Men involved in the souvenir business mainly do not work as mobile sellers like their female counterparts, but work as semimobile or permanent vendors from stalls or from footpaths (see picture 17). Furthermore, it has been observed that an Akha man accumulated a stock of souvenirs in his rented home in Bangkok and became a local distributor to women who had run out of their own goods. Female Akha sellers themselves explain this gender-based division of labor in the context of urban souvenir selling the following way: "Men just cannot sell as we do", "men are too shy", and one Akha woman mentioned that Akha men are too lazy. Female mobile sellers state that semimobile or permanent vending seems more comfortable and probably economically more beneficial, but sympathize with Akha men who are just not able to carry out this type of work. Following their own logic, it is the alleged shyness that hinders Akha men from approaching Western tourists and becoming successful mobile sellers. However, also the first female Akha sellers in Chiang Mai were too shy to approach tourists, and so are the female students who come to join their mothers during the holidays as well as many newcomers who do not have any sales experience. Yet, many of them have entered the mobile souvenir business. It seems to be taken for granted that Akha men are unable to sell like

women, and neither male nor female sellers openly doubt this. The division of gender-related work in this context “appears to be ‘in the order of things’, as people sometimes refer to what is normal, natural, to the point of being inevitable” (Bourdieu 2001, p. 8). Gendered work and power relations are present in the habitus of actors functioning as the organizing principle of perception, thought, and action.

My husband is working in the same area and we are taking care of each other. Some other couples stay together in Bangkok and help each other run business but mainly the husbands of the female sellers live in their village. They have to take care of their family or farms or pets or rice field. They prefer to stay there much more than in Bangkok and they think this job does not suit to them as it does to females. (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 10.09.2008)

I think they [male Akha semimobile sellers] can earn much more than me because they can display their stuff on mats. So they can show more products than I do. [...] And I know that they are too shy to carry a basket like females. (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 07.09.2008)

Another explanation of the gendered division of sales practices is linked to the existing images of the exoticized and feminized ‘Other’ and to the pre-formed tourist gaze (Urry 1990). Both stereotypes, that of the pure, real, exotic or primitive lifestyle of the hilltribes as well as that of available Asian women in the context of sex tourism, persist (see also chapter 7.2.1). Ishii (2012) argues that it is difficult for male Akha to find a job in ethnic tourism, as this field of occupation mainly requires women and children for the sake of exoticism and eroticism (p. 306). Tourist promotional materials about the hilltribes in general and the Akha in particular mainly depict women and girls (Ishii 2010, p. 117). This is also due to the fact that the Akha women’s traditional dress and silver headgear is more attractive to tourists than the men’s costume. The “Akha women’s dress, especially the headdress became the symbol of tourism promotion to northern Thailand” (Boonyasaranai 2001, p. 8). Thus, notions of otherness and certain preconceptions and imaginations can influence tourists’ purchasing preference. However, most of the mobile sellers only wear a simplified souvenir version of the headdress or discard it for this purpose (see pictures 8–10).

As mentioned above, men are only marginally involved in mobile selling. In Chiang Mai, I could not see a single male mobile seller, which is consistent with Ishii’s (2010) observations at Chiang Mai night bazaar (p. 115). However, there is a very small

number of Akha mobile sellers in Bangkok and the beachside destinations. Two Akha men told me that they tried to sell the same products as the female mobile sellers, but they were not able to sell anything. So they changed their products (to accessories made in China and fake tattoos) and became more successful. During my last short fieldwork period in 2013, however, I noted a slight increase in male Akha mobile sellers. The newly migrated men provided the following explanation for this recent phenomenon: First, the children they had to take care of in the village had grown up and could now take care of themselves, second, the desire to live together with one's wife, and third, the wish for better income as farming or wage labor provide only little revenue.

The majority of the female sellers' husbands or boyfriends, however, had not migrated but stayed in the villages. According to their female partners, they stay at home (in the village) in order to take care of their house, their rice fields, and their children. The descriptions the female migrants provided about their husbands' duties back home reached from "Men stay at home and work there a little bit" to accounts highlighting the important work of their husbands and complaining about statements from Thai tourists judging their husbands and boyfriends idleness.

Gendered division of souvenir production

As outlined in chapter 5.4, the souvenirs offered range from mass-manufactured items to self-made products such as wristbands, bags or Akha headgears, which require at least some basic skills in sewing, stitching or embroidery. In Akha society, "knowledge of embroidery and handicraft is highly honoured" (Geusau 2000, p. 145). In traditional Akha village contexts, girls learn to spin cotton at the age of five, one year later they start sewing, and in their early teens they learn to weave (Choopah and Naess 1997, p. 191). The production of clothing is clearly associated with the female sphere, which is also reflected in the spindle that symbolizes women in Akha society (Kammerer 1988, p. 39) and can be seen as gendered embodied cultural capital. Usually, men do not get involved in the task of weaving or sewing, which is also demonstrated in an ethnographic account by Hanks (1988) describing the husband's engagement in the women's job of weaving as punishment or a rite of restoration (p. 19–20).

Following this embodied gendered cultural practice, it is not surprising that the vast majority of self-made souvenir items are produced by Akha women. Yet, the sewing and production techniques for designing wristbands for tourists differ from ‘traditional’ Akha embroidery, and so many Akha women picked up new production skills in the migrant destination areas. However, some of the younger Akha men involved in souvenir selling have started ‘typical women work’ by learning from their wives how to sew and embroider and have begun to contest hitherto long-lasting gender roles (see picture 18). One male Akha souvenir seller (and producer) recounted the reactions of male villagers when he was observed producing souvenirs back home in the village: “Some asked questions like: are you a ladyboy now?” (informal conversation with Akha seller, Bangkok 22.08.2011). He explained that he did not mind the opinion of others. It was important for him that working as a souvenir seller and producer provided him with a good economic basis as well as the opportunity to stay and live together with his wife. It seems that socio-economic success achieved by means of “female-connoted” work does not necessarily enhance the social status of Akha men in the home villages. This statement has to be seen as a preliminary hypothesis, which certainly requires further verification and research.

PICTURE 17: GENDERED PRACTICE OF MOBILE AND SEMIMOBILE VENDING



PICTURE 18: CONTESTATION OF GENDER ROLES?



Photos: Alexander Trupp

The descriptions outlined above demonstrate that the gender dichotomy of private or domestic and public spheres does not hold true for highly mobile Akha households. The reproduction of traditional cultural and economic practices that place the primary

responsibility on men to earn a living and the primary responsibility on women to take care of the home and children has often been used to explain the greater mobility of men (Nee and Sanders 2001, p. 405). In the case of the urban Akha, domestic functions such as taking care of the house and the children are partly taken over by the left-behind husband (and the grandparents), while female Akha vendors migrating alone on a long-term basis refer to themselves as breadwinners of the household.

Yet, many decisions and practices are not made independently, but subject to a male-dominated gender order forming structures of masculinities and femininities. Migration decision-making of couples is discussed together, but also “smaller” decisions in urban contexts often need the male partner’s agreement. For example, once, a Thai movie team was looking for background artists for a half-day film shooting (chapter 7.2.2), and an Akha seller called her husband in the village to ask for his permission to participate. Her husband forbade her to join, but she eventually decided to take part anyway. Also in the context of my semistructured interviews, a few women were not allowed to be interviewed without the attendance of their husbands. Finally, it is still unclear to what extent the souvenir sector provides Akha women an opportunity to be independent from their husbands. This question needs further research focusing on the household as the main unit of analysis and incorporating additional research among the left-behind in the villages.

7 SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF ECONOMIC ACTION

This chapter deals with the question of how economic action is embedded or disembedded in social relations and experiences. I analyze the social relations of Akha micro-entrepreneurs to members of their own ethnic group and to members outside their group and the ways these social ties can be mobilized and transformed into social and other forms of capital, thus benefiting individuals or groups within social networks (Portes 2000; Anthias 2007; see also chapter 2.2). Putnam (2000) used the concepts of “bonding social capital” referring to networks within a community that tend to reinforce rather homogenous groups and “bridging social capital” referring to networks that connect or “bridge” different groups or communities. By distinguishing between these two types of social capital, I draw on Tooker’s (2012) semantic use of an “inside-outside distinction” of the ‘Akha world’” (p. 103). Tooker’s ethnographic study is based on extensive fieldwork among the Akha prior to their full nation state integration and describes a continuum of inside-outside distinctions within Akha society as well as between the Akha and the ‘outside-world’. Today, Akha entrepreneurs are embedded in multiple national, legal, and political structures (see chapters 4 and 8) and have ventured into various tourist destinations across the country (chapter 5). By pursuing their businesses in urban and tourist contexts, they make use of social relations to other Akha (whom I term insiders) and a range of actors outside their own ethnic group including members of other ethnic minority groups, various agents of Thai mainstream society, expatriates, and international tourists (whom I term outsiders).

7.1 SOCIAL NETWORKS I: MOBILIZING INSIDER RELATIONS

Before the intrusion by the Thai nation state and the impacts of globalization, the village-bound household consisting of two or three generations was the “basic kinship, ritual and economic unit in Akha society. It was the minimal segment of a patrilineage, below the level of a sublineage (pà) which may consist of several households” and mainly based on cultural and ancestral practices (Tooker 2012, p. 118). The village was the highest political unit and also of social importance, as it hosted interrelated households. Yet, few Akha spent their lives in a single settlement, as many women left their birth villages to join husbands elsewhere and both men and women moved when

villages divided or integrated (Kammerer 1986, p. 86). Those who had to travel for various reasons received hospitality from clan and lineage people including “one’s wife’s, mother’s, and grandmother’s clans; thus lineage-based social network in the Akha universe made great mobility possible” (Geusau 1983, p. 271). Social capital was rather mobilized and transferred within the family, the lineage (two to three generations), and the clan (10–30 generations) than within the village (Geusau 1983, p. 271). I argue that in urban and tourist contexts, social relations within Akha migrants are maintained, but that they are mainly built on additional and different sources and foundations. This chapter outlines forms, foundations, and consequences of Akha social capital outside of the classical village context.

7.1.1 ETHNIC HOMOGENEITY AND INTRA-AKHA RELATIONS

In his early study on ethnic minorities in Chiang Mai, Vatikotis (1984) – to his own surprise – identified a high level of in-group affiliation of Akha migrants which hardly varied in regard to status, length of residence or point of origin (p. 224). He linked this in-group solidarity mainly to kinship ties (including ties to extended family and clan members) and village ties, and moreover to business networks that were necessary for e.g. maintaining close links to rural suppliers. Today, one can still find a high in-group orientation of Akha souvenir sellers, which also explains the rather strong ethnic homogeneity. Most Akha vendors migrated into tourist business through persuasion or information from Akha friends or relatives who had previous sales experience. In some vending areas such as the Chiang Mai night bazaar or the Khaosan Road in Bangkok, Akha vendors constituted (with a few exceptions) the only mobile (walking) sellers. I was often asked by tourists or colleagues if there were any ‘fake Akha vendors’ (e.g. migrants from Isaan disguised as Akha); this question can definitely be denied. Akha vendors are well aware of other vendors occupying the economic activities of street vending and souvenir selling. When asked about other members of ethnic minority groups engaged in mobile sales activities, Akha vendors in Khaosan road quickly pointed to a female Lahu²⁵ seller who carried out the same sales activity they did: “I only know Naka who is Lahu but this is ok because she is married with a male Akha” (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 07.09.2008). Naka, the Lahu woman, married an Akha man and was thus accepted as an Akha family/clan member according to the

²⁵ Lahu is the name of a Tibeto-Burmese ethnic minority group.

patrilinear system. Traditionally, adopting a group or a person into the Akha alliance system is possible and usually achieved through intermarriage; moreover, the person in question must speak the Akha language and follow Akha customary law (Geusau 2000, p. 134). Yet, she was immediately identified as non-Akha by other vendors. Vendors are well aware of other sellers of different ethnic origin in the market place²⁶. In the following, I discuss the foundations of Akha social relations with outsiders and insiders and its positive as well as negative impacts in the context of urban ethnic minority businesses.

Relations between Akha subgroups

As outlined in chapter 4.3, the Akha population is categorized by themselves and by outsiders into several subgroups that have their own language/dialect, traditions, and customary law. However, one should be wary of perceiving these subgroups as clearly defined socio-cultural units because they often overlap with each other and individual members might disagree on those distinctions (Toyota 1998, p. 202). Ishii (2010), in her study on Akha souvenir vendors in Northern Thailand, notes that the notion between the main different subgroups Ulo, Lomi, and Phami has faded and that the younger generation (below the age of 20) did not know which subgroup they belonged to (p. 115). When I asked Akha interview and conversational partners about their ethnicity, they mainly answered Akha (a few of them mentioned Thai first and then Akha), upon request they (the vast majority of them were older than 20 years) were all able to name their subgroup. Among the group of mobile sellers, the majority consists of Akha Ulo who also constitute the most populous group in Thailand. I met a small group of Akha Lomi in Bangkok whose members shared rooms. However, they received information regarding the souvenir business from members of the Ulo subgroup, suggesting that the transfer of social capital can crosscut ethnic subgroup boundaries. However, I did not meet any Phami Akha working as mobile souvenir sellers during my entire fieldwork. One of the Phami Akha entrepreneurs owning a big shop around Chiang Mai night bazaar warned me to be wary of the differences between Akha subgroups, highlighting that the Phami Akha significantly differ from

²⁶ Yet, there are other mobile (e.g. in Sukhumvit area in Bangkok, Phuket or Pattaya) and immobile vendors from other parts of Thailand as well as international migrants from Myanmar or Laos who sell food, accessories or souvenirs. (see Nirathron 2006; Yasmeen 2006; Gantner 2011).

other Akha groups. Indeed, existing literature as well as my own observations clearly indicate that the Phami Akha – the smallest group in numbers – constitute the socio-economically strongest group. Before the late 1940s, the Phami Akha lived on the upland-lowland margins of Yunnan province in China, enjoying a prosperous existence as farmers and traders but subsequently – in the context of the communist takeover – fled to Laos and Burma, and eventually – as a consequence of harassment by the Kuomintang – moved to the Mai Sai area in Northern Thailand in the 1960s (Vatikiotis 1984, p. 235). In Thailand, they acquired wealth due to their strategic position close to the border, their relations with other Akha across the border, and to the Burmese in Kengtung, as well as due to their networks resulting from their involvement in cross border trading (Meyer 1988, p. 429). They invested their capital in land purchases in the lowlands, being able to successfully grow fruit and vegetable crops and as the wealthiest group of Akha in Thailand eventually got involved in larger business activities in urban Chiang Mai (Vatikiotis 1984, pp. 235–236).

Toyota (1998) states that the Ulo Akha (who now dominate the mobile souvenir business in absolute numbers) were excluded from the political Akha system in China and are thus sometimes seen as a deviant group by other subgroups (p. 202). Based on these former political exclusions and the distinctive development of the Phami Akha outlined above, Toyota further found that the “P[h]ami Akha still look down on the Ulo Akha by saying, “‘They are lazy, dirty and disorganized and that they have been in Thailand too long’” (pp. 203–204). Although I did not encounter such strong statements, one successful Phami Akha shop owner exporting expensive high-quality minority products stated that she felt ashamed of the mobile vendors who sold cheap and simple souvenirs that had nothing to do with Akha culture. It seems that internal divisions and prejudices continue to play a role for the Akha souvenir business. While I identified strong relations and solidarity on a horizontal level among Akha of low socio-economic status (see chapter 7.1.2), vertical social relations and support between ‘elite Akha’ possessing a high portion of economic, cultural, and social capital and ‘ordinary street vendors’ are rather weak. Economic differences among Akha are not a new phenomenon resulting from ‘modern capitalism’, but are rooted in trade and commercial activities going far back in Akha history (Geusau 1983, pp. 258–260; Toyota 2000, p. 205). Today, economic differences in the souvenir business are

reflected in the various vending styles. While the majority of Akha pursue mobile vending that requires the lowest endowment of economic capital (see chapter 6.2.2), the small number of permanent shop owners specializing in 'tribal art' and silver jewelry invests bigger sums of capital and also receives greater returns.

7.1.2 FOUNDATIONS AND OUTCOME OF INTERNAL SOCIAL CAPITAL

One central foundation of social capital is solidarity based on a group identity, which creates a self and an other and which can lead to group-oriented behavior and a transfer of material or immaterial resources (see chapter 2.2.3). In the case of Akha migrants working in Thailand's urban and tourist areas, the most obvious common features seem a common language (Akha) and a common geographical origin (Northern Thailand, and for some the Shan State in Myanmar). The two most important sources of internal solidarity, however, are collective experiences of outside discrimination or exploitation and a similar socio-economic status.

Most of the Akha migrants working in the urban and beachside tourist businesses experienced forms of outside discrimination or exploitation during their previous working and migration experiences as well as during their daily sales activities as souvenir sellers. In the context of previous migration and employment experiences, Akha vendors reported being tricked into prostitution or low-paid²⁷ and dangerous employment in construction or agricultural wage labor. Toyota (1998) reports that members of hilltribe minorities were preferred employees because they accepted lower wages, especially those without Thai citizenship (p. 208). When the first Akha migrated to Pattaya in order to run their businesses, Thai guesthouse owners denied them access (see chapter 5.3). In the context of routine vending activities, Akha vendors are confronted with pejorative exonyms like *meo* by members of Thai mainstream society, including shop owners, business people or domestic tourists, and other forms of disrespect and prejudice (see also chapter 7.2.2). Generally, Akha micro-entrepreneurs have weak relations to the bigger business owners at their market places: Neither do they have friends owning a place whose toilets they could use, nor are they allowed to sit down in most of the tourist bars in order to get a drink unless they go there with a tourist who orders for them.

²⁷ There was only one case of a male Akha whose previous job brought clearly higher economic benefits.

The second source of this form of social capital is based on similar socio-economic status, especially among the group of mobile sellers. The majority of Akha vendors have no or low formal education (see chapter 6.2.1), limited job opportunities in their home regions, and a responsibility for those 'left behind' in the villages.

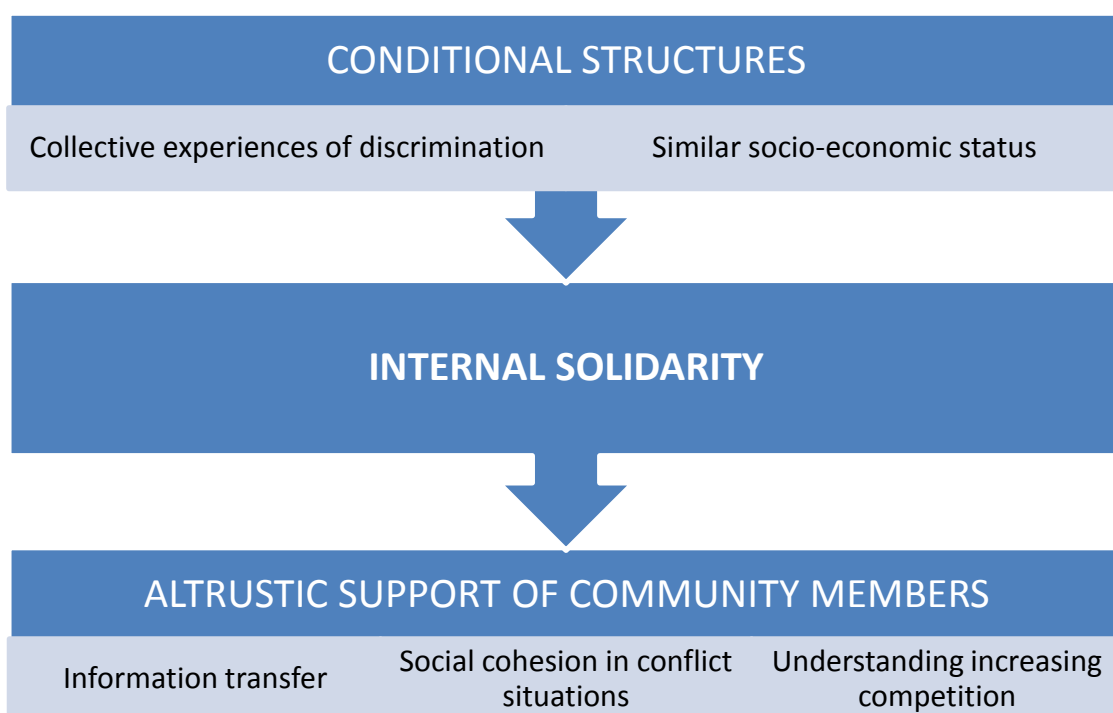
I know so many newcomers for now. But for me it is fine. They need money to survive and support their family that's why they come over. And we don't have high education for applying other jobs so we have to work as souvenir seller like this (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 24.08.2008)

Moreover, they share the same or similar hard working conditions. Akha souvenir vendors migrate to urban and beachside tourist areas in search for better work or independence. They start selling in the afternoon or early evening, and return home around midnight; before or after their sales activities, they work numerous hours to produce souvenirs (Trupp 2014c, p. 295). In a study on vendors at the Chiang Mai night bazaar in Northern Thailand, Fuengfusakul (2008) made similar observations: She notes that "all of them [ethnic minority vendors] share the same fate of being the lowest group of vendors and have often been looked down upon by Thai stall holders" (p. 122).

Under these conditional structures and social antecedents, a feeling of togetherness is embodied that is limited to the members of a specific group which share common experiences or events in a particular time and space. Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) argue that in-group solidarity rises the more distinct a group is in terms of cultural characteristics from the mainstream society and the more prejudice there is towards these traits (p. 1329). Compared to other highland minority groups, it was stated that the Akha have an even more negative image which is related to the lack of (or wrong) information about Akha culture and the fact that they migrated to Thailand later than other minority groups (Geusau 1983, p. 248).

Internal solidarity leads to consequences related to altruistic behavior such as information transfer, social cohesion in situations of conflict, and tolerance and understanding towards an increasing number of newly arrived souvenir sellers and thus competitors (see figure 18).

FIGURE 18: SOURCES AND OUTCOME OF INTERNAL SOLIDARITY AMONG AKHA VENDORS



Source: Own data illustration

Starting up a micro souvenir business requires a range of information. This includes information related to the migration process such as knowing where to migrate, which transportation to use, information related to the souvenir business such as knowing where to sell, how to reach the sales spots, where to buy raw materials or manufactured items, how to deal with customers and vending regulations, and information related to daily life such as knowing where to sleep, to eat, and to shop. Information is shared and transferred through mobile phone communication and face-to-face contact in the sales and home areas. Information transfer is also an outcome of internalized values and norms of social capital, which will be discussed in the following chapter (7.1.3).

Another outcome of social capital as internal solidarity is social cohesion in conflict situations with state authorities. As most mobile and semimobile vendors do not have official vending permits or licenses, they are in constant danger of being charged by supervisory bodies (see chapter 8 on legal issues). Akha mobile vendors warn each other when they spot municipal police checking up on them and even hang together in more severe situations of conflict. During my fieldwork in Khaosan road in Bangkok,

one Akha souvenir seller was arrested for illegal sales by municipal police. In such a case, the authorities take away the vendor's sales basket and return it only after the convicted vendor pays the fine. In that case, however, the vendor did not pay the fine, but – in a moment of distraction – took back the souvenir basket and ran home. The officials in charge got angry and searched all mobile sellers in the Khaosan area, threatening them with a fine of 500 Baht each if they were not willing to tell them the name of the 'fugitive' Akha woman. Even though all Akha vendors were well informed about that case, no one reported her to the municipal police. As a consequence, all Akha had to pay the fine and became angry with that Akha woman, but eventually protected their 'colleague' from state authorities.

A third outcome of collectively experienced discrimination, status, and working conditions leads to an understanding and tolerance for the increasing numbers of newcomers and competitors.

I cannot complain others to come over and run the same business. Some of them are also my relatives and they have to work hard to earn money to support their family and we have to do that too. I understand the situation very well even we have to work at the same area. (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 17.09.2008)

Vendors are well aware of the increasing competition in the field of urban ethnic minority souvenir businesses. Micro-entrepreneurs with vast souvenir selling and migration experiences were economically much more successful in their early years (see chapter 5). Yet, the majority of them showed understanding for the newcomers who shared a similar situation and background. Simultaneously, however, forms of negative social capital within the Akha seller group cannot be denied, especially in the context of deteriorating economic success (see chapter 7.1.4).

7.1.3 FOUNDATIONS AND OUTCOME OF VALUE-BASED SOCIAL CAPITAL

The second prevailing form of insider social capital is grounded on internalized values and norms which are learned and embodied during processes of (early) socialization and can thus be considered part of the habitus (see chapter 2.5). Established and experienced sellers in the migration destination areas feel an obligation for (extended) family and village members to act in non-selfish ways by providing support and advice for younger or inexperienced fellows.

If someone from my village calls me, I have to provide information and eventually take care of her when coming to Bangkok the first time (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 07.09.2008)

As a consequence, experienced Akha vendors provide information, especially for the business start-up, and take care of newcomers in the migration destination area by letting them stay in their homes and/or providing basic information concerning transportation, accommodation, and selling. In Akhazang (see chapter 4.3.1), the line and transmission of teaching and technical knowledge is held by specific persons with extensive education and unselfish attitudes (Geusau 2000, p. 145). In the urban and beachside tourist contexts, some experienced sellers take over a kind of 'mentoring function' for other younger and inexperienced Akha. These experienced sellers are often contacted by phone to give advice on the souvenir business in general and the souvenir sales places on site.

I got advice from my mother and Ador who is the first female Akha in Khaosan area. She always gives me advice for how to run this business: Don't be annoyer for tourist, shouldn't sell souvenir to tourist while they having food etc. (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 04.09.2008)

Ador, who is mentioned in this quote, is one of the first Akha souvenir sellers working outside of Chiang Mai. She gained sales experience in Chiang Mai, Bangkok, and beachside destinations such as Pattaya and Phuket. She comes from the same village as the advice-seeking Akha vendor, but is also well-known among souvenir sellers from other villages.

Prior to full nation state integration (see e.g. Tooker 2012) and intrusion of Christianity, Akha insider social networks were mainly based on concepts of clan and lineage systems (Geusau 1983, p. 271). Due to Christian conversion²⁸, Akhazang and the knowledge and importance of the Akha clan and lineage system has faded away (Kammerer 1990, 1996). The vast majority of Akha migrants (both female and male) I talked to have converted to Christianity and could not recount their ancestral lineage²⁹. Yet, relations to family members and friends left behind in the village are

²⁸ According to Kammerer (1990), lack of informational and economic resources to carry out Akhazang constitute the main reasons for Christian conversion.

²⁹ Hanks' (1988) ethnographic fieldwork carried out in the 1960s and 1970s in Akha villages states that "every male member of the tribe memorizes every name in the sixty or so generations of his complete patriline" (p. 25).

maintained and can be categorized as social ties based on values such as family or friendship.

Most Akha vendors have a mobile phone and are thus well connected to family members, relatives, and friends who stay in the village or work in different tourist destinations. In some highland areas where people cannot rely on stationary communication systems, cell phones have become crucial the media for exchange (Toyota 2000, p. 212). “Frequent and regular telephone conversations are an important way to keep families together, updating scattered members about what is going on in each others’ lives, providing emotional support and even directing and organizing more hands on care from other family members” (Zontini 2010, p. 821). The use of mobile phones certainly helped social capital transcend geographical borders and transfer information and capital across greater distances.

Strong family ties in reference to frequency and output (social and other forms of capital) were especially identified between mothers and daughters. In some cases, mother and daughter even lived and worked together in the migration destination areas while father and husband stayed behind in the village.

I came to Bangkok with my mother two years ago. In my hometown I really don't have anything to do and my mom already worked in Bangkok where she can earn some money. So better I work here as well. My mother negotiated everything for me when I started my first sales in Bangkok. (Interview with Akha vendor, Bangkok, 26.08.2008)

Young souvenir sellers mainly received financial support for the start-up of the business from their mothers, while a few other vendors received money from the Thailand village fund³⁰. This data corresponds with other research conducted by Fuengfusakul (2008) that indicated that highland minority vendors working at the Chiang Mai night bazaar mainly borrowed money from family members and only very seldomly from moneylenders (p. 118). In addition to providing information about the souvenir business (if they had experience themselves) and financial capital, mothers were the first reference persons in case of sickness or personal problems for the young vendor generation. Nee and Sanders (2001) argue that the nuclear and extended

³⁰ The Thailand Village Fund is the second largest microcredit scheme in the world and was initially launched under the former Thaksin government in 2001 (see Boonperm, Haughton, Kahandker and Rukumnuaykit 2012).

family constituted the most important capital asset for migrants by providing financial capital and a “basis for trust that enables individuals to sacrifice their private interests for the benefit of the group, a form of altruism that is more characteristic of the family than larger social groups” (p. 390). My research has shown that family (especially mother-daughter and husband-wife relations (see chapter 6.3)) continues to be highly relevant, in the migration destination areas, however, an internal solidarity among kin and non-kinship-related Akha vendors based on shared experiences of discrimination, hard working conditions, and a similar socio-economic status are at least equally important foundations of insider social capital.

7.1.4 SOCIAL CAPITAL ON THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

While the previous two chapters discussed social capital at the individual level, thus tackling the question of how individuals make use of and mobilize social relations, this chapter deals with social capital as a community feature. Thus the question shall be answered of how Akha vendors dealing or working together in groups develop and maintain social capital as a collective asset (Putnam 2000). The communitarian social capital “enable[s] participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives” (Putnam 1995, pp. 664–665). However, while Putnam looked into norms and networks created through participation in organizations, associations or other civic activities, I look into less obvious “community practices” that Akha vendors pursue in order to succeed in Thailand’s urban informal tourist places.

Even though large parts of the Akha souvenir business are individualized and related to personal freedom and independence (see chapters 5 and 7.3), specific circumstances require closer cooperation in order to reduce financial expenses, establish security, and create sociality. Such community practices are not carried out by the entire ‘Akha vending community’, but by a few (two to ten) persons. These practices include migrating to and in-between tourist destinations, walking in groups, going to and returning home from work, and room sharing.

Most of the Akha pioneers venturing to Bangkok and Thailand’s beachside destinations migrated in small groups. They did not necessarily come from the same home village, but got to know each other at the sales places in Chiang Mai and shared the goal of

starting their micro souvenir business at new locations. One of the Akha sellers recounted her first-time move to Bangkok:

We had appointment at Arcade [Chiang Mai Bus Terminal]. My mother and I came to Chiang Mai and bought the souvenir products, then we met other Akha people at Arcade. And all of us took the bus to Bangkok where went to Sriwawat Hotel together. (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 31.08.2008)

At the time, in the early 2000s, ten Akha sellers moved together to Bangkok and all of them shared a big room. Migrating in small groups distributes and reduces possible dangers and also allows the less adventurous to join. Today, experienced sellers move to already known or new sales destinations independently. They also know other Akha sellers working in other tourist destinations they can contact by mobile phone and personally upon arrival at the new destination. However, newcomers and inexperienced sellers continue to migrate mainly with friends or family members.

Depending on the sales time and location, Akha vendors can walk to their specific area, use modes of public transportation or have to rely on private transportation such as taxis or tuk-tuks³¹ (see chapters 5 and 8). While Akha vendors go to work individually or in small groups, they almost always return home in groups. Usually, Akha sellers work in the tourist areas until midnight and meet at a certain place to return home together in groups. To walk back home alone at night is considered dangerous, and sellers told stories about residents getting robbed or attacked in their areas. In Khaosan road, for example, Akha vendors gather at the start of the road around midnight and walk back in groups. These are community strategies aimed at self-protection from dangerous or vulnerable environments. In addition to safety concerns, the economic costs of returning home play a role, too. Late at night, there is no public transport connecting sales areas such as Silom or Sukhumvit area with their residence area. Therefore, vendors may share taxis or tuk-tuks to return home.

One can often observe small groups of mobile Akha sellers who stand or walk together in the tourist areas. The sales places also feature social functions where Akha vendors from different Akha villages come together and exchange information regarding sales and business, but also personal stories or news from the villages. As the Akha vendors

³¹ Tuk-tuks are three-wheeled auto rickshaws.

do not have much contact to outsiders (see chapter 7.2), these short and occasional meetings are important in order to share daily sales experiences or stories about unusual or unpleasant encounters with customers. They serve to relax and reduce stress in-between long working hours and can enhance the motivation to carry on mobile selling. However, it is especially the generation of inexperienced vendors who initially walk together or follow more experienced sellers.

Another common way to reduce economic costs and enhance sociality is room sharing. Migrating couples usually rent a room or a studio flat while individual migrants share a room, small apartment or house with two to five other Akha vendors. Costs are shared equally.

While the souvenir production and distribution process is generally rather individualized (see chapter 7.3), cooperation in these fields was also observed. When individual vendors received big special orders on a short-term notice – e.g. when a tourist ordered 200 wristbands – other Akha vendors were asked to share the work of the production as well as the benefits of the sale. Or when semimobile or permanent vendors selling from fixed stalls or portable racks return to their home region, they ask close mobile sellers to run their business in the meantime.

Social capital as described in chapters 7.1.2 and 7.1.3 based on solidarity, collective experiences, and shared values can be classified as altruistic, but social capital on the community level as well as the mobilization of social capital through outsider relations as discussed in chapter 7.2 mainly serves own interests.

7.1.5 NEGATIVE SOCIAL CAPITAL, WEAK INSIDER RELATIONS AND CONFLICTS

While the majority of studies on social capital highlight the positive effects of personal relations, Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) were among the first to point to the dark side, thus the negative effects of social capital that can constrain action or distract it from its original intention. These negative impacts may include the exclusion of outsiders as a result of community solidarity, constraints on individual freedom and outside contact due to community norms or jealousy due to close social relations and emerging inequalities within a group.

However, the costs of community solidarity pushing individuals to follow norms or to fulfill social expectations out of fear of negative sanctions did not hold true for the Akha case. As outlined earlier, most of the Akha (mobile) sellers shared the fate of a low socio-economic status and furthermore, there is no strong stratification within the sales group³². Moreover, one motivational factor for migration into tourist business was to escape dependencies, thus community norms and constraints on individual freedom in the migration destination areas played a rather marginal role. Migrants who do not follow norms of social exchange may get excluded from the vending group by revoking information transfer or social cohesion, but the positive effects of solidarity- and value-based social capital clearly prevail. These findings also correspond with a recent study on social capital of slum dwellers in Dhaka, Bangladesh, conducted by Aßheuer, Thiele-Eich and Braun (2013, p. 30).

Generally spoken, bigger conflicts between Akha vendors are rare but quarrels, especially in the light of increasing competition, do occur. According to Fuengfusakul (2008), competition at the Chiang Mai night bazaar started in the 1980s and has gradually increased ever since (p. 119), and my own observations suggest that it has spread to other tourist areas in Bangkok and beachside destinations (see chapters 5 and 8). One issue in this context is the absence of enforced rules within the Akha vending group. Rules “refer to prescriptions commonly known and used by a set of participants to order repetitive, interdependent relationships” and “are the result of implicit or explicit efforts by a set of individuals to achieve order and predictability within defined situations” (Ostrom 1986, p. 5).

Actually, we don't have any rules what sometimes makes it hard to deal with others Akha sellers. But I have my own rules: When another seller has customers I will not take their customers away or offer them my stuff as we all have the same products. When I have my own customer they should do it the same way. Sometimes I have to watch those persons [other Akha sellers] who come close to me while I try to sell. They should not do stupid things such as taking my customer by offering them cheaper prices as I do. (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 10.09.2008)

This quote reflects frequently observed situations of conflict in the course of sales situations. When one mobile Akha vendor seems to be successfully selling to tourists,

³² In Bangkok however, one Akha man working as a semimobile seller accumulated a stock of souvenirs in his rented home and became a local distributor to mobile sellers running out of goods (Trupp 2014c, p. 294).

other Akha who see the situation quickly approach and offer their products – often at a cheaper price – as well. Both tourists and Akha vendors are annoyed by that. The problem of price-cutting and ‘customer stealing’ is a result of cutthroat competition, but is also related to the lack of explicit agreements within the vending group and to the fact that most of the mobile micro-entrepreneurs offer the same or similar products. Moreover, for mobile sellers a stronger product diversification is impeded by the limited space their mobile basket provides, which in turn forces them to display and sell mainly smaller products. In addition, most Akha sellers enter the souvenir business with a similar incorporated cultural capital in terms of souvenir production skills. In many interviews, Akha vendors referred to the non-existence of rules within the Akha group as everyone sells where, how, and whenever they want. Yet Akha vendors incorporate the “rules of the game” which are not necessarily the product of deliberate action, but rather follow non-explicit and non-codified regularities (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 64). “Players agree, by the mere fact of playing, and not by the way of a ‘contract’, that the game is worth playing, that it is ‘worth the candle’, and this collusion is the very basis of their competition” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 98). Akha vendors implicitly agree that each individual can sell where, when, and how long they wish to do so. In this field of competition, micro-entrepreneurs deploy various strategies such as price-cutting, product imitation or ‘customer stealing’ in order to compete with each other and pursue their business (see also chapter 9).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the number of Akha vendors was rather low and everyone’s business seemed to be going well. Nowadays, economic success depends on various factors such as language and communication skills, charisma, the mobilization of social networks, sales strategies and eventually luck (see also chapter 9), which slowly leads to stronger differentiation within the sales group. Even though the majority still shares a similar socio-economic background and faces comparable sales and migration experiences, some vendors have clearly become more economically successful than others. These developments also lead to increasing jealousy.

I don't want to say bad things but you know some persons [other Akha sellers] think that we are newcomers but we are quite successful, much more than them. So somehow some of them are also jealous. Some also don't want to keep in touch with us. So I didn't have much contact

with them as well. But we can greet each other but there is not much deep contact. We will not have food together for sure. (Interview with Akha seller, Koh Samui, 07.09.2011)

In this context, one of the few non-Christianized Akha also criticized the gap between the Christian rhetoric of loving each other and the social practice of Akha vendors, which is more and more influenced by jealousy and gossip.

During my fieldwork, I observed several situations of conflict as described above, but antagonism resulting in transmitting wrong information or the denial of information occurred rather seldom.

I used to have bad experience with an Akha lady who was selling in Silom Area before. It was the first time for me to run this business as a souvenir seller in Bangkok. [...] I went to Silom by public bus with other Akha sellers. I was walking around without any experience until I got hungry. Then I asked one old Akha lady 'Where should I have some cheap food? Then that old lady pointed to one restaurant where I had to pay 120 Baht for one fried rice which was too expensive for me and that time I really didn't have much money. I felt so sad and wondered why she treated me like this. And on the way back to my place I really didn't have anyone who gave me information about how I can go back to the hotel. I kept waiting for the bus until 2 am. Later I found out that the bus service always finishes at midnight so we have to go back by tuk-tuk. They [the other sellers] had an appointment at some other place to catch a tuk-tuk. Finally, I took a taxi back to Khaosan Road because I didn't know the name of the street of the hotel and so I had to wait until morning. Then I could realize the area and could reach my place. It hurt me so much and I felt so disappointed from my relative because she knew it was the first time for me and I really didn't know anything in Bangkok and she didn't contact me or try to reach me even I had a mobile phone but I didn't have her number. (Interview with Aka seller, Bangkok, 10.08.2008)

7.2 SOCIAL NETWORKS II: MOBILIZING OUTSIDER RELATIONS

In addition to these forms of social capital and insider relations outlined above in chapter 7.1, Akha vendors have bridged a set of ties to outsiders such as tourists, expatriates, other minority groups, and members of Thai mainstream society (see pictures 19–21 in figure 19). Literature on social capital argues that “bonding social capital is good for getting by, but bridging capital is crucial for getting ahead” (Putnam 2000, p. 23) and suggests that outsider relations are more valuable than ties to family members or co-ethnics in order to substantially succeed and improve one’s socio-economic status. However, the question remains of how which actors can mobilize and utilize outside capital and how outsiders may influence one’s aims and economic practices in a negative way.

Ethnographic literature carried out in highland villages indicates that the Akha “show remarkable friendliness to outsiders coming in, and have developed a capacity to make even known bandits or hard-line administrators feel at ease” (Geusau 1983, p. 272). A study on ethnic diversity in urban Chiang Mai conducted by Vatikiotis (1984) ascertains that out-group socializing of the ‘urban Akha’ mainly occurs in Christian churches where they interact with Thais, with other converted minority groups and Europeans (p. 214). Christian missionaries in Thailand certainly played a role in the development and commercialization of urban Akha souvenir businesses in Chiang Mai (see chapter 5.1). Today, the majority of Akha in Thailand are Christianized and churches in Chiang Mai and Bangkok try to draw in members of ethnic minority groups. During my fieldwork in Bangkok, the majority of Akha sellers frequently visited the Sunday mass led by a Karen priest.

However, the Akha vendors’ daily sales activities in Thailand’s international tourist centers lasting from the afternoon to late evenings enable them to get in contact with a plethora of other actors.

7.2.1 AKHA – FARANG RELATIONS

During their sales activities, Akha vendors mainly meet and interact with Farang tourists. These daily interactions allow them to practice and improve their foreign language skills, thus accumulating further embodied cultural capital. During my first field visit in 2008 and my last visit in 2013, major language improvements could be identified among certain sellers. They have learned to carry out charming sales talks and negotiations in English and some even acquired additional (though quite basic) skills in Spanish, French or Japanese. However, the acquisition of further language capital is unequally distributed among Akha vendors, as especially the younger generation who is also fluent in Thai is eager to improve their foreign language skills while others hardly accumulate language capital over the years. The ability to communicate with international tourists in English is also one of the self-ascribed factors of sale success.

Another form of bridging social capital is to establish long-term business relations to tourists. Some of the visitors to Thailand have their own souvenir businesses in Europe or the United States and directly order great amounts of souvenir products from the

Akha micro entrepreneurs. This business opportunity also requires English and communication skills and is limited to a handful of vendors. Moreover, there are a number of frequent visitors and expatriates who enjoy talking to and socializing with Akha sellers. They can be regarded as steady customers and also invite vendors to after-work drinks in the evening. A study on tourism and ethnic minority Hmong women in Northwestern Vietnam conducted by Hanh (2008) shows that these women accumulated fluency in foreign languages, mainly English but also Japanese and French, and moreover established strong and long-lasting relations to foreigners. This made them feel smarter than the mainstream Vietnamese Kinh (p. 252) and facilitated upward social mobility by changing to better paid tourism-related jobs and achieve more convenient accommodation. The Akha vendors also have – at least partly – improved their language skills and established outsider relations to foreign tourists, but could not improve their socio-economic status and accumulate symbolic capital as the Hmong women described by Hanh did. I argue that the Akha women in Thailand's urban and tourist areas have to cope with more difficult working environments (see chapter 8) and that competition within the Akha vending group and with other vending groups has become fiercer.

In the case of Thailand, personal relations between tourists or expatriates and Akha vendors can eventually result in cross-cultural marriage and outbound migration. During my fieldwork periods, at least three young female vendors left Thailand as international marriage migrants to Australia, Europe, and the United States. Others married, lived with their Farang husbands in Thailand, and consequently stopped working as mobile sellers. In the context of informal conversations, young female vendors talked about the idea of finding foreign husbands during their souvenir sales activities who could take care of them and support their families in the villages. At first sight, this corresponds with the majority of studies on transnational marriage migration in Asia, which show that these migrants are mainly women who aim to marry up by finding a husband of higher economic status (Constable 2005) and thereby cope with “gendered familial obligations in the form of ‘daughter duty’” (Angeles and Sunanta 2009, p. 549). However, not every Akha-Farang relationship leads to retirement from the mobile souvenir business. One Akha woman in Chiang who had

been in a relationship for more than six years with an American expatriate provided accommodations and the main source of income for both of them.

While bridging social capital in order to improve language skills or establish long-term customer-relations and export opportunities can be seen as clearly positive impacts, negative experiences with Farang customers or tourists exist in the context of price negotiations, disrespectful dealings, and sexual harassment.

[...] it happened that a Western customer made me feel upset. I met him in Khaosan area where he spent time with his Thai lady and he was totally drunk. He called me and he wanted to buy my frog [popular souvenir product]. Then I sold it to him for 50 Baht and gave him my frog. After that he threw my frog on the floor and crushed it with his foot. It hurt me so much and I really didn't understand why he reacts like that. I didn't do anything wrong. I didn't even ask him to buy. I didn't annoy him or push him to buy my stuff. (Interview Akha seller, Bangkok, 26.08.2008)

Most of the Akha vending areas are also tourist entertainment areas featuring many places to hang out in the evenings. For Akha vendors it is thus not unusual to deal with drunken tourists, especially late in the evening. Even though situations of conflict with Western tourists or expatriates are experienced rather rarely, almost all vendors could recall at least one situation that made them feel at unease. In addition to situations of disrespect as reflected in the quote above, quarrels about price negotiations and exchange occur.

One Farang wanted to buy a belt which costs 100 Baht. He gave me 500 Baht so I gave him change 400 Baht but he said he gave me 1,000 Baht and asked 900 Baht for change. But I was lucky at that time because one Thai lady who is selling some stuff in Pattaya helped me and we called the police for that case. Finally, the policeman came and I didn't need to give him 900 Baht for change but I lost my belt. (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 07.09.2008)

In contrast to the example of this account, many other ethnic minority vendors in both village and urban contexts avoid contacting state officials because of their tendency to support or believe tourists rather than 'hilltribe people' (see also Trupp 2014a).

A third line of conflicts and negative experiences with foreigners mainly happened in those vending areas that are also popular for sex tourism and red-light entertainment. In these areas, young female vendors experienced sexual harassment. Western males were searching physical contact and openly asked for sexual intercourse.

Alex, do you know, sometimes there are some Farang who also ask me: 'How much?' [does it cost to sleep with you]. Then I say: 'Sorry, excuse me, I have a husband'. [...] But some people even said no problem we can do it and your husband won't see. Your husband is in the room. Nobody sees you. Come with me I give you 5,000 Baht. 10,000 Baht. They talk to me like this. (Interview Akha vendor, Koh Samui, 09.09.2011)

The offended vendor tried to learn to deal with such situations by asking those tourists where they came from and telling them that they should return to that place as soon as possible. She further explained that she could be very unfriendly and a bit aggressive. This would shock the offender who would consequently leave her alone. Literature on Asian tourism and the tourist gaze contends that women in Thailand have been exoticized and eroticized in tourism promotional materials and discourse, and that Western males have been socialized into perceiving women of color as somehow more willing and available (Pritchard and Morgan 2000, p. 125). Kammerer (1986) argues that Akha females have an overstressed reputation for sexual laxity among both foreign tourists and Thais (p. 56). Kammerer further argues that unlike Akha, Thais are traditionally reserved with their bodies in public spaces. Though couples holding hands have recently become acceptable, kissing in public is still quite a no-go. In the Thai context, a young woman sitting between two young men with an arm around the neck of each is considered an immoral woman. This however does not hold true for Akha women, as "physical friendliness is perfectly proper and is not necessarily a prelude to sex" (Kammerer 1986, p. 56). However, the majority of Western tourists who visit urban and beachside areas in Thailand are not aware of these cultural constructions and differences outlined by Kammerer.

One of the Akha men (who had migrated together with his wife) supported the view of the pre-formed Western male tourist gaze (Urry 1990) by arguing that many Farang men watch self-made videos online where Thai ladies have sex with Farang men and thus think that Thai women are promiscuous. This also shows that both tourist and local gazes exist, affecting and feeding each other, resulting in what Maoz (2006) termed "the mutual gaze" (p. 222). For migrating couples, such situations and environments also place stress on their private relationships. Akha men joining their wives' migration thus aim to regulate their economic practices and sales strategies by convincing them to sell in the same area or by prohibiting them to dress in what they perceive as too sexy.

FIGURE 19: PHOTO SERIES OF RELATIONS AND INTERACTION WITH OUTSIDERS

**PICTURE 19: MOVIE
ENGAGEMENT**



**PICTURE 20: EVERDAY VENDING
INTERACTION**



**PICTURE 21: RENTAL
OF ISAAN FOOD
STALL**



Photos: Kosita Butratana and Alexander Trupp

7.2.2 AKHA – THAI RELATIONS

This chapter deals with Akha vendors' relations to other members of Thai mainstream society. I am aware that the term Thai mainstream society can be problematic in this context, as it is difficult to define and as we have to take into account that people living in the Thai nation state have their own migratory trajectories, cultural traits, and various socio-economic backgrounds. Yet, we cannot deny the existence of the constructed notion of Thainess that has served to integrate or assimilate certain populations and exclude others (see chapter 4.2). By Thai mainstream society, I refer to persons of various regional and socio-economic backgrounds who are commonly not perceived as an ethnic minority group in Thailand.

Generally, Akha vendors' relations to members of Thai mainstream society can be characterized as rather weak. These relations are rather impersonal, not maintained on a regular basis, and difficult to mobilize and transform to other (sustainable) forms of capital. Thailand's internal tourist areas are dominated by traditional local and new economic elites, and most of the market places are owned or rented by Thais who can transfer the legal rights of use to friends and family or employ workers in their shops or stalls. The lack of bridging vertical relations to other Thai members of the market place as well as the lack of financial capital has led to the peripheral position of Akha vendors who mainly find themselves as mobile sellers in Thailand's urban and tourist areas. As mentioned in chapter 7.1.2, they do not have friends whose toilets they

could use, nor are they allowed to consume drinks in the traveler bars unless tourists invite them.

Registered vendors owning or working in shops often look down on mobile Akha sellers by calling them “*meo*”, a derogative collective term commonly used in Thailand to refer to highland ethnic minority groups and accuse them of bothering international tourists. Mobile sellers indeed actively approach and ask tourists to buy their products, but they have also become a popular tourist attraction and a widespread photo motif for travelers and tourism promotional materials. The bad image of ethnic minorities based on the reproduction of stereotypes described in chapter 4.2 shapes the negative images many urban-based Thais hold about ethnic minorities in general and Akha in particular. This is also reflected in the practice of municipal police checking up on ‘hilltribe vendors’ and the tendency of domestic Thai tourists not to buy any products from Akha vendors (see chapter 8). The argument of Hanh (2008) that socio-economic success of ethnic minority street vendors enhances their social status and prestige within the whole society remains contested.

Geusau (1983) argues that Akha are much more frequently subject to hostile comments than other groups because of the (at least back then) lack of information about Akha culture, which in turn is related to the (former) remoteness of their villages and because they moved to Thailand later than other highland ethnic minority groups such as the Karen or the Hmong (p. 248). Until today, there is a plethora of wrong interpretations and representations of Akha culture by Thai media, Thai tour guides, and Western reports. A very popular Thai song by Jaran Manopetch termed *Mida* tells the story of an Akha woman who seduces young men and teaches them intercourse. The song lyrics describe her the following way: “She stands, waiting for young, innocent boys that have never experienced the ‘way of flesh’. She speaks words of temptation, tells them that she can teach them the way of flesh, and she sacrifices her body”. Eventually the song uses the Thai term *I-kor*, which is perceived as derogatory. Another example is the popular Thai soap opera *kaew klandong* depicting highland ethnic minority groups in Thailand as dirty and uncivilized (Bangkok Post 2000). Further misconceptions are spread by Thai tour guides who wrongly explain Akha village playgrounds as courting grounds where Akha meet to subsequently carry out sexual

encounters. Akha villagers complain about tour guides who provide wrong and/or abridged information about them (Trupp 2014a). Tour guides directly construct and expose the images of the hilltribe people to Thai and international tourists (Toyota 1993, p. 52). Kammerer (1986) also points to tourist guide books from the 1960s “in which Akha are described as ‘malodorous and filthy people’” and to reports by Christian missionaries in Burma depicting the Akha as people of “very low standard and morality” carrying out “licentious orgies” (Kammerer 1986, p. 56). In addition to the historical and political developments outlined in chapter 4.2.1, these wrong external representations reproduce racist discourse and shape the way Akha are perceived in urban contexts.

The older Akha vendors collectively agree to plan to return to the village as soon as they have saved enough earnings, while parts of the younger generation can imagine a life in urban contexts. They do so by trying to fit into Thai mainstream society rather than referring to Akha cultural traits:

You know, we now live in this society and I want to be beautiful like others, right? [...] I have to adjust to society. I try to get accepted by Thai society. (Interview with Akha vendor, Koh Samui, 07.09.2011)

In dealing with other registered Thai vendors, Akha mobile sellers feel inferior and try to stay away from them and their shops in order to avoid conflict. They are aware of the implicit rules of the game and generally know how to deal with other vendors. In addition to staying clear from others’ shops, they should not sell the same products other vending groups do.

I never ever had [troubles with Thai sellers] but I know some had troubles with them so I just stay away from them. (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 17.09.2008)

During my fieldwork, one of the male Akha vendors started to sell the same mass-manufactured products (fake tattoos) as traders from the Isaan. As a consequence, he got into a big dispute with these other vendors. After many quarrels and discussions, they finally came to the agreement that this Akha vendor could sell the same or similar products, but that no other Akha could. Another conflict between an Akha vendor and Thai sellers on Koh Samui eventually resulted in a violent fight after which the Akha vendor had to leave the island.

Generally, adopting or copying the products of the 'own' group is tolerated, but not those of 'outsiders'. The main products of Akha mobile sellers such as the wooden frogs, the colorful 'Lisu hats' or the souvenir version of the Akha headdress may be on display by a few non-Akha owned shops or fixed stalls, but no other mobile vendors currently focus on these products. One day, however, a tourist bought a whole basket including all available souvenirs from an Akha vendor and showed up selling the souvenirs on Khaosan Road the next day himself. After one afternoon, this tourist disappeared and was not seen again. But despite the fact that it will not be tolerated that foreign tourists without work permits sell informally in international tourist centers, Akha mobile vendors became concerned about this situation and about what would happen if other people or vendors would follow the example of the tourist. They are not prepared to start fighting with other groups who adopt their products.

Though weak relations and negative experiences with Thai vendors, tourists and businesspeople prevail, Akha micro-entrepreneurs could also bridge and mobilize such outsider relations. When most of the Bangkok-based Akha vendors used to live in Hotel Thaiwarie, they did not have a kitchen at their disposal. However, they established good contacts with a Northeastern Thai street food vendor and agreed on a deal to rent her mobile kitchen. For a price of 120 Baht, they could use the kitchen as well as basic ingredients to prepare their food that they could bring back to their hotel room.

Moreover, their exotic appearing objectified cultural capital in form of the Akha dress and headdress facilitated a few extra jobs. One Akha, for example, was hired to take part in a Yamaha motorcycle commercial and at another occasion, a Thai film team was looking for Akha background actors for the movie *E-Tim Tai Nae* featuring the popular Thai comedian Udom Taephanid. In the movie, Udom plays a performer in the tourist area of Pattaya where he acts in reptile and boxing shows. Two females, a Japanese tourist whom Udom falls in love with, and a street vendor selling handicrafts and chewing gum, who seems to be in love with Udom, make up the other main roles. The female street vendor is dressed in full Akha custom, but played by Thai actress Sirin "Chris" Horwang. In the movie, the 'Akha vendor' speaks Thai with a strong

accent and is looked down upon by the boxer, and in turn also reproduces racist discourse.

In order to look for Akha background actors, members of the film crew went to Khaosan Road in Bangkok, approaching the first available Akha vendor and started to negotiate about two planned film scenes. That person, however, was not fluent in Thai and just understood that they were looking for Akha to act in a movie. So she contacted another Akha vendor fluent in Thai and with extensive sales and migration experience throughout Thailand, and was thus able to set up the arrangements with the film team. The deal was to join the film shooting for one day from 07.00 PM until 02.00 AM and to act – equipped with ‘traditional’ Akha clothing – in two scenes for 1,200 Baht per person. I got the director’s permission to observe the two scenes. Only those Akha women were allowed to join who could bring their own Akha skirt, shirt, and headdress. None of the Akha women brought their original silver headdress and jewelry, but wore the touristified version of the Akha headdress, which was of no concern for the film team, however. The first scene was shot in the hotel room of a group of vendors including seven Akha vendors while the second scene, including 18 vendors singing an Akha song for the main actor, was shot at a McDonald’s restaurant. The working day for the Akha background artists eventually lasted until 03.00 AM (one hour longer than agreed on), and those eleven persons just joining the second scene (from 12.00 PM until 03.00 AM) received 500 Baht each. This unequal distribution of payment aroused conflict within the Akha who participated in the movie and the film team put all the responsibility on the Akha woman who had organized the background actors. One month later, this person was contacted to join and organize another film scene outside of Bangkok, but she refused this offer due to the bad experience and low benefit of this movie project.

This extra job described above was a welcoming diversion for many participants and economically comparable with a good sales day, but did not contribute to greater economic or social benefits. Indeed, the lead character of the movie that should have represented an Akha woman was played by a Thai actress and rather reconstructed negative stereotypes such as the inability of hilltribes to speak proper Thai. Also, film crewmembers used the pejorative term *meo* when talking about the Akha background

actors. Moreover, it showed that mainly those vendors could establish outside ties who were fluent in Thai and had experience in dealing with Thai mainstream society. In addition, cultural capital that was used in the movie to display the exotic other was a prerequisite to achieve economic capital. Entering and mobilizing outsider relations depended on the actors' uneven endowment of capital (e.g. cultural capital such as language and possession of clothing and headdress) and proved to be rather unsustainable as most of these Thai-outsider business relations were one-time possibilities with rather limited impact. Linking vertical social capital in order to accumulate further economic or cultural capital is not the dominant feature of Akha micro-entrepreneurs. Vertical relations hardly exist, neither within Akha urban society nor with Thai outsiders. This result also relates to a study on young entrepreneurs and social capital in Hanoi that states that vertical and outsider relations in order to get ahead are notably rare (Turner and An Nguyen 2005). However, ties between Akha and foreigners – as shown above – can generate positive and long-lasting relations transformable into economic and cultural capital, but may also lead to negative experiences in the context of difficult working conditions and environments (see also chapter 7.1.5 and figure 21).

7.2.3 AKHA – OTHER MINORITIES RELATIONS

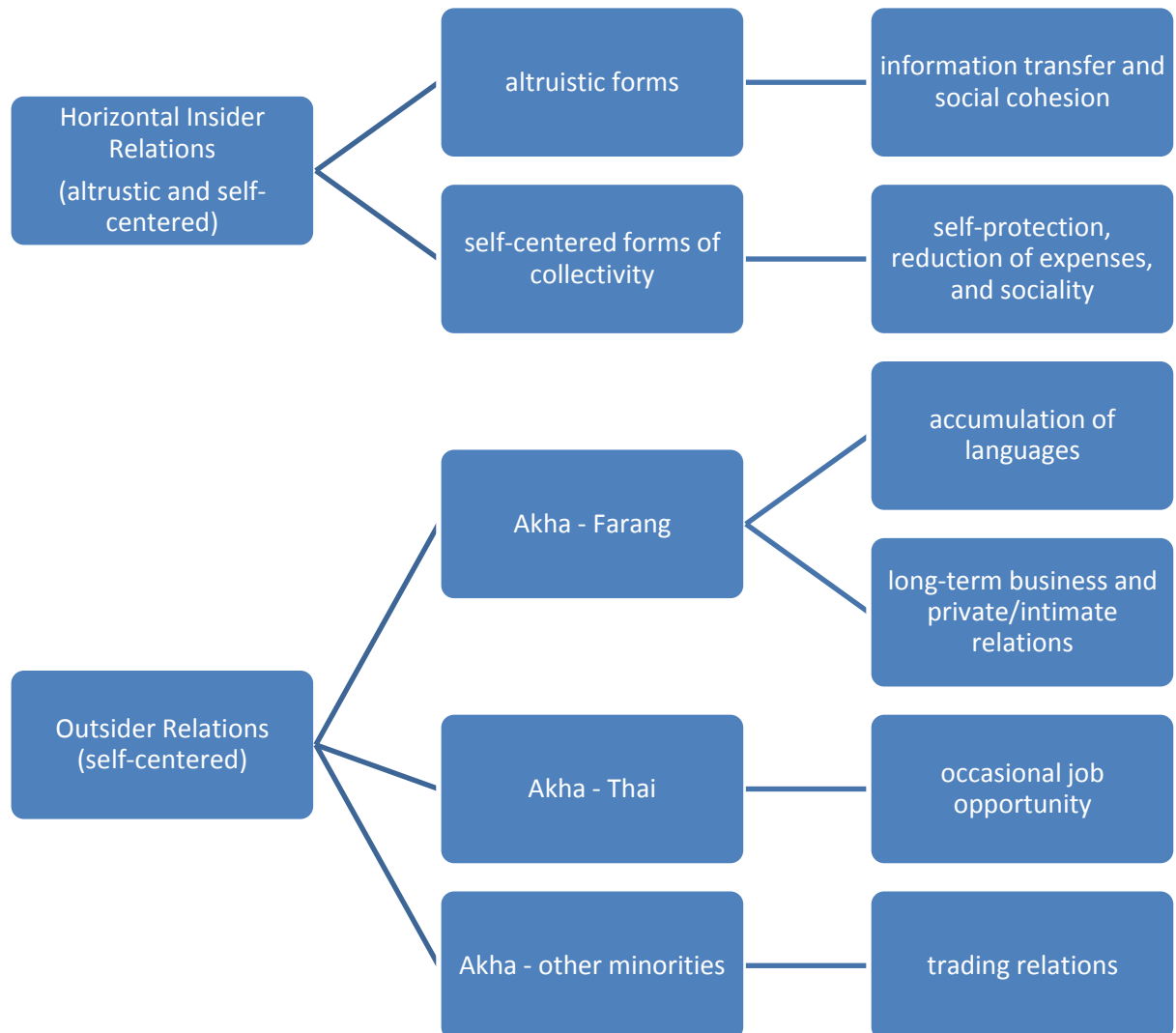
Akha cross-ethnic trade relations with various groups such as the Yunnanese, Shan or Thai Lue have existed for centuries (Toyota 2000, p. 205). In chapter 7.1.1, I briefly outlined how the Phami Akha have reached comparatively high socio-economic status in urban Chiang Mai due to their extended networks with other ethnic groups. Studies on handicraft and souvenir trade in Chiang Mai state that each ethnic group is equipped with its own supply channel: Hmong vendors in Bangkok or Chiang Mai have a special connection to Nepalese traders who sell silver stones and ornaments from Tibet and Nepal, and Akha tribal shop owners deal with Hmong middlemen in Kunming (Yunnan) and Hmong border traders supplying them with various textiles (Fuengfusakul 2008, p. 130). According to my observations, the handicraft, souvenir, and jewelry trade is more complex. For instance, Akha running a big silver shop in Chiang Mai buy silver from Karen middlemen and wholesalers coming from Lamphun, other Akha shop owners deal with other Akha and Kachin from Burma supplying them with minority textiles as well as elaborate and costly reproductions of the Akha silver

headdress. These rather expensive products can be mainly found in handicraft and tribal art shops, but do not represent the souvenir products of the Akha mobile and semimobile vendors. The organization, production, and distribution of the souvenirs is carried out rather independently (see chapter 7.3), yet, some business relations to other ethnic minority groups exist. Members of the ethnic group of Lisu in Northern Thailand are producers and wholesalers of colorful hats and bags which the Akha resell in Thailand's urban and tourist areas. Lisu vendors themselves mainly sell in Pai and Chiang Mai, but generally do not migrate further south like the Akha. Due to a trend towards mass-manufactured products and a decrease in the use of 'traditional' textiles for 'boutiquized' hybrid souvenirs, relations to ethnic groups providing such raw materials have become less important (see also chapter 5.4).

It is surprising that the mobile ethnic minority souvenir business is dominated by members of the Akha group. Fuengfusakul (2008) notes that at Chiang Mai night bazaar, few mobile sellers from other ethnic minority groups engage in this type of selling, but that the Akha attract more attention and thus more customers due to their striking (head)dress (p. 113). Asking mobile sellers themselves for the reasons, I mainly received the following answer: "Don't ask us, talk to them who do not work as we do". Accepting this advice, I talked to permanent and semimobile highland minorities who argued that mobile selling is not worth the effort as it involves lots of walking and insecurity when dealing with state officials such as the municipal police.

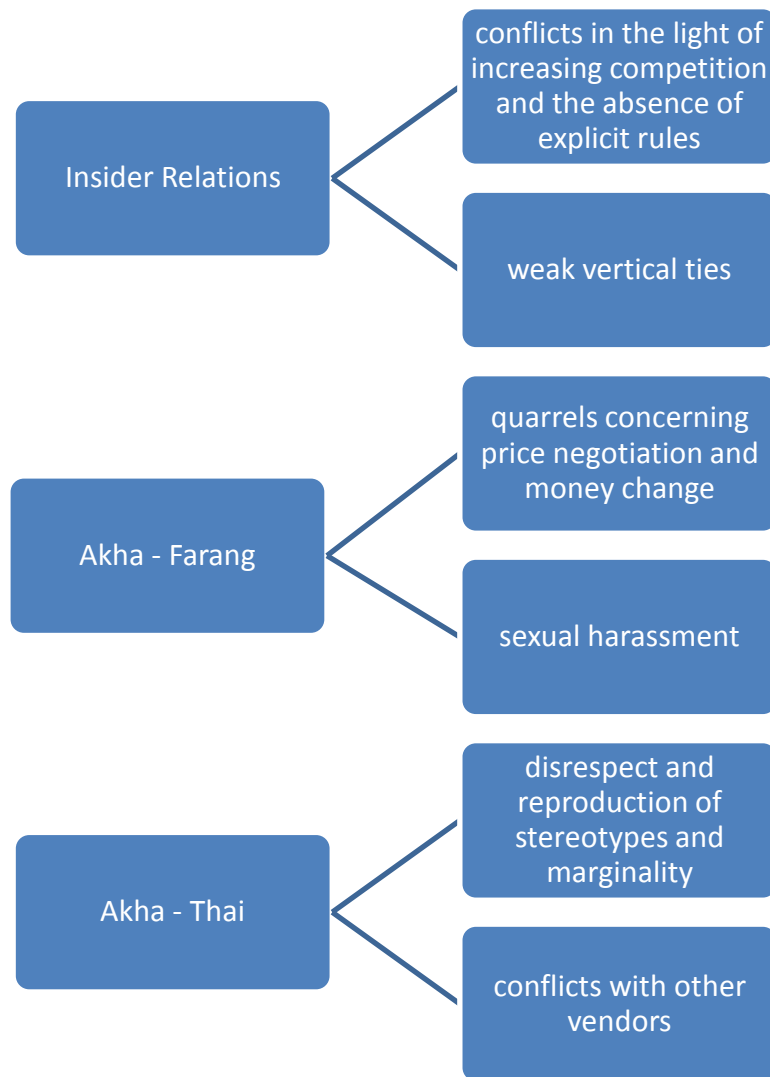
It has been shown that Akha micro-entrepreneurs can make use of altruistic and self-centered insider relations as well as of self-centered outsider relations. These relations can be mobilized into various forms of capital (see figure 20 and chapter 9.2), but also engender negative impacts (see figure 21).

FIGURE 20: OVERVIEW OF MOBILIZATION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL THROUGH INSIDER AND OUTSIDER RELATIONS



Source: Own illustration

FIGURE 21: OVERVIEW OF THE "DARK SIDE" OF SOCIAL RELATIONS



Source: Own illustration

7.3 DETACHING ONESELF: QUESTS FOR INDEPENDENCE

After the description and analysis of the importance of social relations, it might appear contradictory to subsequently write a chapter on social disembeddedness and independence. I argue, however, that processes of bonding and bridging social relations co-exist with quests for independence and dynamics of individualization.

In chapter 5, I discussed the motivations for migrating into the tourist business (see also figure 14) where the aim to become one's own boss and thus being able to decide when and how to work proved a crucial factor. The facilitation of these migratory movements and the success in the contested field of ethnic minority business certainly require the mobilization and transformation of both insider and outsider social capital

(see chapters 7.1 and 7.2). Yet, Akha micro-entrepreneurs keep highlighting their independence by stating that “everybody is totally free” or pointing to the practice of working or administrating the income alone.

With the exception of short social gatherings during sales times and the tendency of young and inexperienced mobile vendors to walk and sell in small groups (see chapter 7.1.4), the act of selling is strongly individualized. They may walk or drive to and from their sales areas, but usually quickly spread as soon as they start selling. When I accompanied vendors from their living area in Bangkok to the vending area of Silom, many of them took the same free public bus, walked together from the bus station to the beginning of the sales area, but from that time on, sellers spread and were responsible for themselves.

In the interviews, almost all mobile and semimobile vendors mentioned they worked alone because they mainly sold and also administered the income independently (or together with their co-migrating partner) as there was no collective scheme where vendors pay in (parts) of their earnings. Furthermore, major parts of the souvenir purchase and organization are carried out independently. It has to be noted, however, that souvenir networks and cooperation on a larger scale have existed for quite a while, but that they are not relevant for the (semi) mobile vendors of this study. For example, one Akha woman founded a souvenir and handicraft shop in the city of Chiang Mai in 1985, which encouraged many village-based Akha in Thailand and Burma to produce handicrafts and textiles (see Choopah and Naess 1997, p. 197f.). When Akha mobile or semimobile vendors get big special orders such as producing a few hundred belts or wristbands within a short period of time, they share the production process and earnings with others. Usually each person produces, sells, and thus earns on his or her own. Selling hours partly depend on the location, but may start in the afternoon and last until after midnight, while the souvenir production is carried out after and before the sales duties. Therefore, as one of the sellers put it: “I am working alone [...] The harder I worked the better I earn” (Akha vendor, Bangkok, 26.08.2008). They also buy mass-manufactured products as well as the raw materials for the souvenir production individually in Chiang Mai, Bangkok or Mae Sai (see also chapter 5.4).

8 ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STRUCTURES

In the previous chapters (6.3 and 7), I focused on the role of social relations and their mobilization and demonstrated how economic practices are interrelated with social structures. This chapter outlines the market or economic conditions (8.1) as well as the politico-legal framework (8.2) the everyday practices of Akha micro-entrepreneurs take place in. By deploying an analysis of economic and political structures in the migration destination areas, I build upon a mixed approach of embeddedness (Aldrich & Waldinger 1990; Kloosterman 1999) that does not only focus on social dimensions but takes the broader context and structures relevant to human agency into account (Strauss 1987). Such opportunity structures constitute the specific locus where Akha vendors – endowed with various forms of capital – carry out their daily economic practices. Chapter 8.3 shows and analyzes how Akha vendors deal with and respond to these larger economic and political structures.

8.1 ECONOMIC STRUCTURES AND MARKET CONDITIONS

In order to analyze and compare opportunity structures between different locations, it is useful to distinguish between three levels of observation including the national, the regional/urban, and the local/neighborhood level which in turn facilitates the discovery of location-specific traits and their spatial variations (Kloosterman and Rath 2001; see also chapter 2.3.2.1). In my study, the national framework of the opportunity structure is self-evidently the same for the various places of research in Thailand, but the urban and local structures differ from place to place. Furthermore, even though the legal frameworks regarding citizenship, street vending or the informal sector hardly vary between different places, the local practice of state authorities that enforce these laws and regulations can differ significantly (see chapter 8.2). This also shows that the distinction between macro and micro levels or national and local perspectives is somewhat artificial, as most situations and actions are a combination of both. Yet it makes sense to describe these levels separately as long as the relations between micro and macro perspectives are traced. The economic and politico-institutional opportunity structures can contrast not only between nation states but also between or even within cities as results of this study show. A comparative perspective on divergent urban regions within one country and their relationship to

the opportunity structures for migrant or ethnic minority entrepreneurs has been identified as a research gap (Kloosterman and Rath 2001, p. 198).

8.1.1 NATIONAL LEVEL

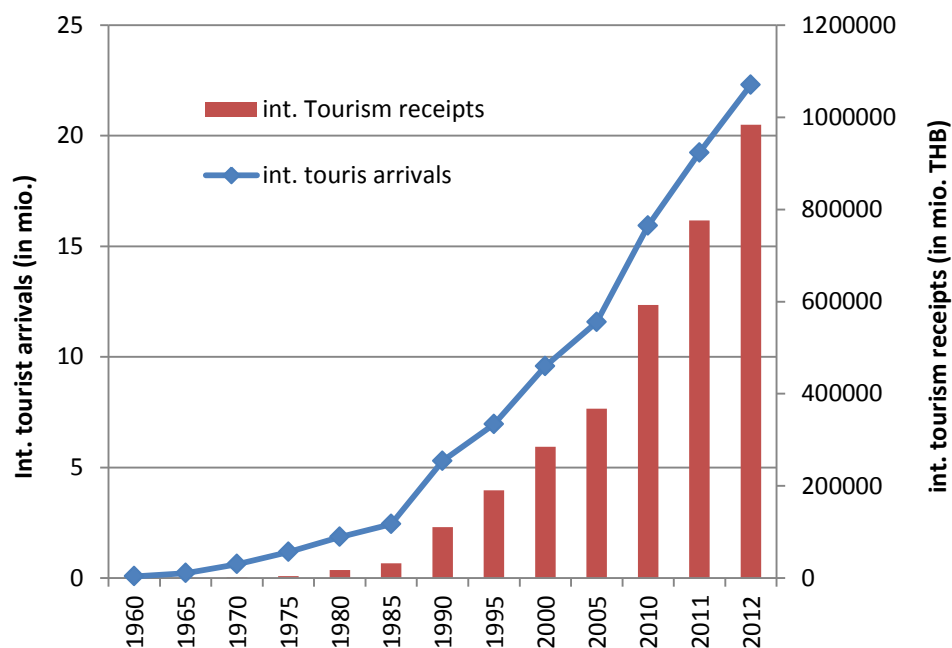
Differences on the national level are important for studies comparing international migrant groups. Yet, national laws, regulations, and changes regarding ethnic minority and citizenship policies (see chapters 4.2 and 8.2), tourism development, dealing with political protests or economic policies such as setting standards of minimum wage can impact on the daily practice of Akha vendors. On 1 January 2013, Thailand officially adopted a new nationwide minimum wage policy forcing employers to pay at least 300 Baht per day. This regulation goes back to a 2011 election campaign promise made by the ruling Pheu Thai Party and started as pilot project in seven provinces on 1 May 2012 (Alexander, Salze-Lozac'h and Winijkulchai 2013). Besides the observations that minimum wages were weakly enforced in the past (Paitoonpong, Akkarakul and Sukauji 2005), the new minimum wage secures less than 8,000 Baht per month, which still cannot compete with average monthly incomes of most Akha vendors. Their monthly income depends on many factors, but usually varies between 8,000 and 20,000 Baht. However, in Chiang Mai where competition is at its edge, monthly income for mobile or semimobile mat vendors can go down to 3,000–5,000 Baht (also cf. Fuengfusakul 2008, p. 119; Ishii 2010, p. 115), and in beachside destinations vendors reported to be able to earn 40,000 Baht per month or more. Regarding international tourism development, Thailand has experienced remarkable growth rates on the national level over the last decades (see figure 22). Thailand's fifth national economic and social development plan (NESDP 1982–1986) further marked Chiang Mai as the economic center of Northern Thailand by putting special emphasis on tourism promotion (Toyota 1999, p. 12), but also successfully aimed to decentralize tourism development by fostering beachside destinations such as Pattaya or Phuket. International tourism growth has continued despite several political crises (e.g. PAD airport closure in Bangkok and Phuket 2008, UDD protests at Ratchaprasong intersection in 2010, PRDC protests 2013–14)³³ or ecological disasters (e.g. Tsunami 2004, Bangkok floods 2011),³⁴ to just name the major events of the recent years. While

³³ See for example Glassmann 2010 or Nostitz 2011.

³⁴ See for example Cohen 2007 and 2012.

the early decades of Thai international tourism development was aimed at developing relatively inexpensive facilities, governments since the early 2000s have promoted tourism policies targeting ‘quality tourists’ spending great amounts of money within relatively short stays (Cohen 2014).

FIGURE 22: INT. TOURISM ARRIVALS AND INT. TOURISM RECEIPTS IN THAILAND 1960–2012



Source: Alpha Research 2012, Department of Tourism 2014, own illustration

Yet, many Akha vendors state that they have fewer customers compared to the past. This fact is related to increasing competition among Akha vendors (see also chapters 5 and 7.1.5), a saturation of demand as Thailand receives the high percentage of 63.7% returning visitors (Alpha Research 2012, p. 511), and an increasing importance of non-Western tourism markets who according to the Akha vendors’ assertions – with the exception of Japanese and Arab tourists in certain sales areas (8.1.2) – do not represent the main clientele of Akha vendors. Tourism ceased to be a primarily Western phenomenon (Cohen and Cohen 2012), which also becomes clear in table 4 indicating Thailand’s largest increases in the number of tourist arrivals and current tourism growth rates. Thailand’s most important inbound tourism markets are dominated by Asian countries, and the most important Western countries Australia and United Kingdom have significantly lower growth rates than other Asian countries.

However, each tourist and sales area has its own characteristics and attracts different types of tourists as will be shown in the following section.

TABLE 4: THAILAND'S MOST IMPORTANT TOURISM MARKETS BY NUMBER OF TOURIST ARRIVALS 2011 AND GROWTH RATES 2010/2011

Top ten tourist arrivals 2011			Top ten tourism growth rates 2010/2011		
1	Malaysia	2,492,034	1	Cambodia	80.8 %
2	China	1,704,800	2	Russia	63.5 %
3	Japan	1,103,073	3	China	50.6 %
4	Russia	1,052,361	4	Spain	40.3 %
5	South Korea	1,001,105	5	Hong Kong (China)	35.8 %
6	Laos	895,535	6	Saudi Arabia	34.6 %
7	India	891,748	7	Kuwait	33.6 %
8	Australia	835,719	8	Indonesia	29.8 %
9	Singapore	789,339	9	Vietnam	29.5 %
10	United Kingdom	771,466	10	Argentina	28.6 %

Source: Alpha Research 2012, p. 507

8.1.2 URBAN AND LOCAL LEVELS

The economic opportunity structure on the urban and local level mainly refers to expenses for daily life and business such as costs for accommodation, food, business costs, and local transportation as well as to income possibilities which are (in addition to one's endowment of forms of capital) related to market access and competition, tourism development, and the characteristics of the various sales areas.

Chiang Mai certainly features the cheapest living conditions, lies geographically close to the Akha home regions, and offers daily and weekly tourist markets as part of regional and provincial tourism development programs. Costs for renting a permanent stall on a monthly basis at the popular night bazaar range from 2,000 up to 20,000 Baht (Fuengfusakul 2008, p.111) and are thus not affordable for the usual Akha (mobile) vendors. For semimobile vendors, monthly costs of up to 1,500 Baht can occur while mobile sellers do not have to pay fees for running their business. Distances

within the city between main sales and living areas are not too far and thus walkable for most vendors. Generally, the required start-up budget for mobile and semimobile vendors ranged from 5,000–10,000 Baht.

The tourism destination Chiang Mai is promoted as a “cultural and natural wonderland with ethnic diversity, a multitude of attractions and welcoming hospitality” (TAT 2014b, online). The city and the region is thus known for its cultural and historical attractions such as the heritage of the Lanna kingdom, Buddhist temples, a lively silver and handicraft scene, traditional markets, classical dances, northern Thai style massages, and hilltribe cultures. The surroundings of urban Chiang Mai cater to nature-oriented tourists interested in trekking, mountains, waterfalls or activities such as elephant riding or bamboo rafting. Even though Chiang Mai has its busy corners and a share of nightlife and evening entertainment, “tourists seemed quiet and well behaved. Partygoers may stay in Bangkok and southern Thailand” (Howard 2007, p. 80). Such favorable contexts however also facilitated increasing competition resulting in an estimated number of 100 Akha mobile and semimobile vendors, and an expansion of the Akha souvenir business to Bangkok and Thailand’s southern tourist areas (see chapter 5). In 2012, the province of Chiang Mai received a number of approximately 2.23 million domestic tourists and 0.52 million international tourists mainly coming from France, USA, China, Japan, and the United Kingdom (Department of Tourism 2013).

Bangkok features an opportunity structure quite different from other regions, but also local characteristics of tourism zones within the capital city vary significantly. As outlined in chapter 5.2, most Akha vendors rent rooms or houses in the area of Wan Chart market or the Thaiwarie hotel close to the democracy monument which are located within walking distance from Khaosan Road (see picture 23). Monthly rental fees cost approximately 1,700 Baht per room, excluding water and electricity, and can be shared by two to four persons. These houses are scattered next to a local market where staple foods can be purchased for rather cheap prices. Bangkok hosts three tourist areas where Akha vendors can run their daily business by pursuing mobile and semimobile vending styles (see figure 23). Bangkok is Thailand’s most important tourist destination registering more than 15 million international and almost 19 million

domestic tourist arrivals in 2012 (Department of Tourism 2013). In the following, I further describe the specific sales and tourist areas.

The first area is Khaosan and Rambuttri Road and its surroundings, which lie in the 'old city district' of Banglamphu and within walking distance from the vendors' living area. Due to its vicinity to the Akha living areas and its comparably relaxed atmosphere, many Akha vendors (approximately 30–50) choose Khaosan as their preferred sales location. For a long time, this area has been popular with international backpackers and was labeled a concentrated tourist enclave where most tourist services and facilities such as travel agencies, guesthouses, bars, internet coffees, shops, and street vendors are aggregated (Howard 2007, p. 74; Spreitzhofer 2008). Once avoided by locals as "a slum linked to hippies and drug taking" the area has partly been reclaimed by Thais over the last ten years, especially by the young nightlife seeking generation (Howard 2005, p. 359). Khaosan Road is quiet in the morning, as most shops open and street vendors start selling in the afternoon. In the evening the area gets busiest, when open bars and massage places cater to bypassing tourists (see picture 25). Howard (2005) surveyed the demographic characteristics of Khaosan tourists and found that more than 82% of international tourists are younger than 36 years, 63% are male, and most of them come from the United Kingdom, USA, and Germany (p. 365). He also noted that the majority of Khaosan tourists stayed three days at a time, but visit the area two or three times (p. 363). This common practice of revisiting one area within a trip also contributes to the previously mentioned saturation of tourist demand. Most tourists buy souvenirs from the Akha only once and as Khaosan area is well-known for cheap services and products, many tourists bargain hard for cheap deals. While still presenting many characteristics of a backpacker zone, Khaosan Road has slightly moved upmarket in recent years as a variety of mid-range accommodation and gastronomy have emerged.

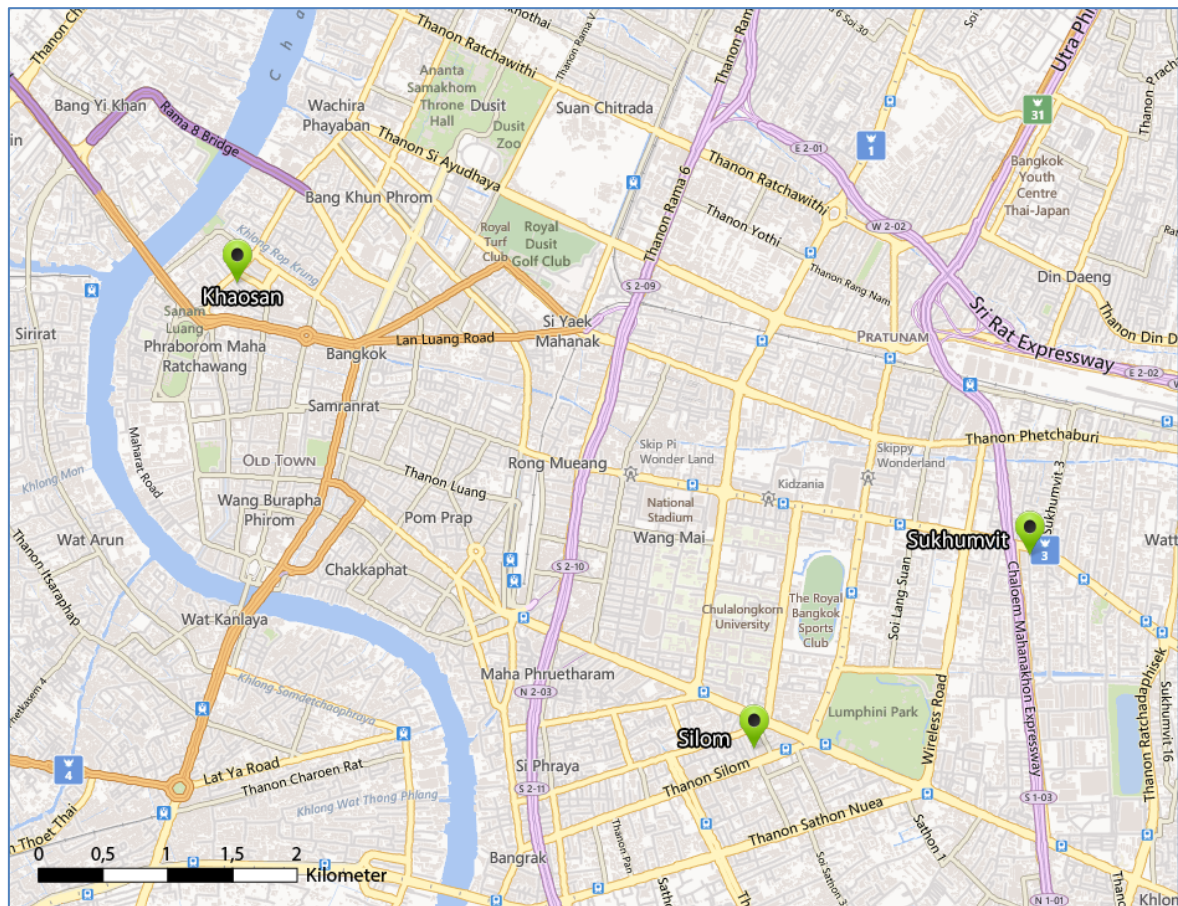
The second most popular sales area is the lower Sukhumvit Road and its adjacent lanes, which is just five kilometers away from Khaosan Road but caters to a completely different type of tourists. The Sukhumvit area features many upscale international restaurants, hotels, shops, shopping malls as well as bars, massage parlors, and a well-known red-light district called Nana Plaza. Its main clients are older males (Howard

2005, p. 360) as well as expatriates. The residential area is inhabited by wealthy Thais and foreigners. However, in addition to upmarket service, the area also features many semimobile and permanent street vendors offering food, clothing, DVDs, other accessories, and souvenirs. Within this hedonistic upper market tourist zone lies a Middle Eastern Muslim tourist enclave sometimes also referred to as *soi arab*. This area was 'developed' by Arab sex tourists in the 1980s and has become Bangkok's center for sex tourism for visitors from the Middle East and more recently also a focal point for medical tourists from the same region (Cohen and Neal 2012). Akha vendors are aware of these existing tourism markets and a varying number of approximately 20 Akha vendors (comprising mobile and semimobile vending styles) daily ventures to Sukhumvit area. They leave their accommodation around five or six PM and take a free public non-air-conditioned bus to Nana. The bus is usually packed with other workers, thus getting a seat or even a place to stand can be hard. The busses should arrive frequently, but due to traffic problems the waiting time can be up to forty minutes. The bus ride takes about 50 minutes and from the bus station to the vending area the vendors have to walk for five to ten more minutes. Vendors could use faster and more convenient air-conditioned buses but prefer the less comfortable one to save money. Compared to Khaosan Road, the journey to reach the sales area lasts at least five times longer. In order to return home after midnight, the vendors have to take a taxi or tuk-tuk, which saves time but involves economic costs.

Bangkok's third main business area for Akha souvenir vendors is located between Silom and Suriwong Road featuring a busy tourist night market, a red-light district, a rainbow-tourism zone, and *soi Thaniya*, a Japanese tourist enclave especially catering to male Japanese tourists. The Silom area was one of the first Western strongholds of Bangkok where many Christian missionaries settled down initially. Today the zone embraces Bangkok's financial district, many embassies and luxury accommodation. During the Vietnam War, the Patpong lanes became a center for sexual service in the context of rest and recreation programs for US soldiers and remained so until the present even though the Bangkok city administration launched several attempts to remove this red-light attraction out of the city center (informal conversation with Bangkok city planner, Bangkok, 12.12.2013). The area generally caters to up-market tourists, but its popular night market and red-light district also attract casual visitors.

As for Sukhumvit area, Akha vendors take a free public bus to reach the area and have to return home by privately hired transportation. The number of Akha micro-entrepreneurs in Silom is similar to that in Sukhumvit area by accounting for roughly 20 persons.

FIGURE 23: LOCATIONS OF MAIN AKHA VENDING AREAS IN BANGKOK



Map source: Bing Maps, © 2014 Microsoft Corporation

Another factor influencing working conditions is related to health and hygiene issues. Especially in Bangkok, Akha vendors frequently suffer from coughs or infections. In case of more serious sicknesses, Akha vendors return to Chiang Mai or their home villages, but minor diseases are self-cured through medication bought in drugstores or practices of local wisdom. Coughs or colds are often treated with the traditional local healing technique of *sague*, tweaking or pulling the throat (see picture 22). Studies on air pollution in Bangkok conclude that occupational groups such as street vendors who are directly exposed to roadsides and traffic are at the greatest risk of negative health

effects (Ruchirawat, Navasumrit, Settachan, Tuntaviroon, Buthbumrung and Sharma 2005).

PICTURE 22: HEALING TECHNIQUE



PICTURE 23: RETURNING HOME FROM KHAOSAN ROAD AFTER MIDNIGHT



Photos: Kosita Butratana and Alexander Trupp

Beachside destinations like Phuket, Koh Samui, Pattaya, and Hua Hin again boast their own opportunity structures. Especially on the islands of Koh Samui and Phuket, transportation between sales and living areas is expensive. Regular transportation by buses or pick up cars between popular beach destinations already cost 50-100 Baht per person and chartering such vehicles adds 200-300 Baht or more. In those areas, it is of great advantage to have a motorbike at one's disposal in order to navigate between accommodation and sales areas as well as between sales areas. Moreover, prices for accommodation and daily expenses for food and drinks are considerably higher as Akha vendors in Koh Samui pay monthly room rates between 2,500 and 3,500 Baht. "In Bangkok you can survive with 100 Baht per day, but here you need 150 Baht" (Akha vendor, Koh Samui, 07.09.2011). Yet, many Akha vendors decided to move to Thailand's beachside destinations in recent years, partly due to economic motivations, partly due to personal reasons (see chapter 5 and figure 14). On the island of Koh Samui, 42 Akha vendors mainly working on the roads of Chaweng and Lamai area could be identified. Within two decades, the island has been transformed from a small beach bungalow and backpacker destination (Cohen 1982) to a mass tourism destination and Thailand's second most popular island destination receiving 780,000 international tourist arrival in 2010, with 80% from Europe (Bangkok Post 2011). Phuket is Thailand's most popular tourist destination and also the workplace of

60–80 Akha micro-entrepreneurs who work along the western beach towns, with Patong leading the way, followed by Karon-Kata and Kamala tourist areas. Phuket province, consisting of the main island and 39 minor islands received 2.1 million international, mainly coming from China, Australia, Russia, and Germany, and 950,000 domestic travelers in 2012 (Department of Tourism 2013). Pattaya – hosting a number of approximately 40–60 Akha vendors – represents Thailand’s most important tourist region outside Bangkok and received a total of eight million (domestic and international) hotel guests in 2012, while 59% percent of the market share is constituted by Thai domestic, Russian, and Chinese guests, followed by travelers from Germany, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom (Pattaya Today 2012). Pattaya is especially notorious for sex tourism, but has also attracted an increasing number of family beach-seeking tourists and benefits from its close location to Bangkok Suvarnabhumi international airport opened in 2006. Koh Samui and Phuket, on the other hand, focus on beach and family tourism but also have their share of party and red-light entertainment.

These briefly described profiles of urban tourism characteristics make the spatial differences of the economic opportunity structure between and within urban migrant destinations evident. In the following chapter 8.2, I discuss the opportunity structures with regard to politico-institutional embeddedness.

PICTURE 24: RESTING AND HIDING IN A LANE OF KHAOSAN



PICTURE 25: DEALING WITH 'PARTY TOURISTS' IN KHAOSAN



PICTURE 26: AKHA SOUVENIR STALL IN FRONT OF RED-LIGHT ZONE



Photos: Alexander Trupp

8.2 LEGAL AND POLICY STRUCTURES

The vast majority of Akha micro-entrepreneurs work as ethnic minority street vendors in Thailand's informal urban and tourist sector (chapter 2.1). They have become part of the country's tourist and commercial landscape, but their work is neither formally recognized by state institutions nor supported by NGOs. By asking how Akha vendors are embedded in politico-institutional structures and how they respond to them, it is necessary to look at the relations, interactions, and power relations between minority street vendors and state agencies. This chapter thus mainly deals with state and urban government policies and regulations and how these frameworks are enforced on micro levels.

Since the late 1950s, Thai state authorities have implemented a range of development projects officially aimed at promoting socio-economic development in the highland areas (chapter 4.2). However, such projects and plans, under the umbrella of national and economic integration, also led to the loss of many highlanders' land and forest resources as well as to a destruction of social and political village structures, which in connection with improved road and communication infrastructure improvements has facilitated increasing urban migration (chapters 4.3.2 and 5.1). While these 'development policies' implicitly foster migration, the government's ambiguous policies regarding citizenship impede hilltribe mobility. Until the 1980s, hardly any registration of highland minorities took place (Vadhanaputhi 2005, p. 161) and recent studies assume that 40–60 percent of ethnic minorities in Thailand have a legitimate claim to Thai citizenship but remain without it (Toyota 2006, p. 1). Due to long-lasting military conflicts in Myanmar, some highland minorities migrated to Thailand rather recently "but it is estimated that their number is not more than 10–15 percent of the total tribal population" (Boonyasaranai 2001, p. 4). Citizenship applicants have to prove that they were born in Thailand and that at least one of their parents possesses Thai citizenship or live with a registered place of residence in Thailand. The majority of highland ethnic minorities were not included in Thailand's national census from 1956 that recorded Thai origin and nationality and therefore obtaining proof and the required documents has become cumbersome. In addition, corrupt local officials who encounter highland ethnic minority applicants with negative preconceptions have impeded the process (Vaddhanaphuti 2005, p. 162). Lacking citizenship, they are

forbidden to leave their district or province, vote, work legally, or buy land; they are excluded from the social security and health care systems and have no access to higher education. For those Akha who remain without Thai citizenship, the pure act of migration from the northern provinces of Chiang Mai or Chiang Rai to Bangkok or a beachside destination puts them at risk. Several of the Akha vendors I interviewed did not have Thai citizenship when they first migrated, but eventually received it over the last ten years. Absence of citizenship limits their spatial mobility and therefore prevents them from starting a business outside of their own district or province. Yet there is a small number of Akha vendors in Thailand's urban area who pursue their businesses without formal residence and citizenship status and therefore live in constant danger of detention or even deportation. In contrast to 'regional Thai migrants' from the South or Northeast who also work in the informal sector, minority hilltribe vendors remain under suspicion of living illegally in the country, which makes them even more vulnerable in conflicts with state authorities.

The second line of policies clearly shaping the politico-institutional opportunity structure refers to laws, regulations, and enforcement related to street vending. Street vending constitutes a highly contested and controversial field in Asia's urban areas (Etzold 2013). In Thailand and especially in the capital city Bangkok every visitor notices the presence of street vendors who provide food, drinks, accessories or souvenirs to tourists and the local population alike. Petty trade aimed at reducing poverty and defined as "a means for economic self-reliance" has also been positioned in Thailand's Economic and Social Development Plans since the 1980s (Nirathron 2006, p. 23). On the one hand, state authorities and urban planners tolerate street vending to a certain extent because they acknowledge it as an economic necessity for the urban poor, and on the other, they view street vending as an obstacle to urban development which should be prohibited by law enforcement (informal conversations with officials of the Department of City Planning, Bangkok, December 2013). Officials of that department told me that they received many phone calls from Bangkok residents complaining about street vendors occupying public space and requesting the areas be cleared. Indeed, relocations and evictions of street vendors are frequently observed in South and Southeast Asia (Walsh and Maneepong 2012, p. 256) and it has been noted that "the state in Thailand has taken the view that vendors are one [...]"

undesirable element, or ‘weeds on the modern landscape’” (Tepwongsirirat 2005, p. 152).

Vendors, like other honest professionals, need to respect rules and regulations even though they are poor. Kaosan Road is not a vendors’ road but a street for anyone as a public asset. When pedestrians, motorists and tourists complain about their right of way and traffic congestion problems along this road, an official needs to enforce the rule of law. Vendors need to manage their vending in designated areas not in the public area and have concern for the public benefit and not just their own personal interest. (Municipal policeman in Khaosan Road, Bangkok, quoted in: Walsh and Maneepong 2012, p. 263).

Nevertheless, the popularity of street vending in Thailand goes back to King Rama IV (ruling from 1851–1868) when the construction of major roads was completed (Nirathron 2006, p. 13). Under King Rama V (ruling from 1868–1910), the administration of Thailand was centralized and in 1941 (after Thailand became a constitutional monarchy in 1932), the Thai government launched its first attempt to control street vending, when the municipality of Bangkok ratified regulations to monitor fixed and mobile vending (Nirathron 2006, p. 21). In 1972, Bangkok Metropolis was established and the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) became the city’s body for formulating and implementing urban policies regarding all spheres of urban planning (BMA 2014). Yet, there is a somewhat ambiguous division of responsibilities between the local, regional, and national levels. On the one hand, the overall power of the BMA is limited by the central government and on the other, there are unclear responsibilities between district offices and agencies (Tepwongsirirat 2005, p. 72).

Kusakabe (2006) lists the following state policies related to street vending in Thailand (pp. 27–29):

TABLE 5: SUMMARY OF POLICIES AND REGULATIONS ON STREET VENDING IN THAILAND

Policies and Laws	
Laws prohibiting street vending	• Cleanliness and Order of the City Act 1992 • Traffic and Land Transportation Act 1992 • Highway Act 1993
Laws regulating street vending	• Public Health Act 1992 • Orders from BMA governor
Laws specifying authorities in charge of regulation	• Cleanliness and Order of the City Act 1992 • Public Health Act 1992 • Traffic and Land Transportation Act 1992 • Highway Act 1993
Taxes and fees	• Sanitation fees since 2000 • Street vendors do not pay taxes • Extortion and rent-seeking in some places
Registration of vendors	• Started in 2000
Other policy documents	• Beautification of city (can impose harsh measures on vendors) • No concrete direction for vending activities • Management, but left to BMA governor's discretion

Source: Kusakabe 2006, pp. 27–29

In comparison to rules as social practices discussed in chapter 7.1.5, which are negotiated between and within vending groups and individuals, these laws are rules defined and enforced by institutions of the nation state. Such legal frameworks allow to designate certain vending areas (and simultaneously determine prohibited zones), can forbid individuals from cooking and selling products on public roads and public areas, can outlaw the use of carts for economic purposes in public areas, can specify certain days and times when vendors have to cease all vending activities and regulate vending identification and registration.

Generally, it is important to distinguish between registered and non-registered vendors because the second category faces stronger and more frequent conflicts with law enforcement (Walsh and Maneepong 2012). The Bangkok Metropolis Administration officially assigned 713 street vending zones and registered 21,094 street vendors in the capital city (Department of City Law Enforcement 2013; see table 6 for the number of registered street vendors in the districts relevant for the empirical research of this study). However, even the department's officials (in the context of informal conversations) admit that these numbers only reflect a minor share of Bangkok's street vendors. Concerning the Akha vendors, none of the mobile sellers throughout the country obtained official registration and also the majority of semimobile vendors remain without it. Permanent vendors running a fixed stall at one of the markets have to register with the specific responsible urban institution. Moreover, Akha mobile and semimobile street vendors are tolerated in the various vending areas outlined in chapter 8.2, but are currently not allowed to enter other popular tourist areas such as Bangkok's Chatuchak weekend market or the famous beachside resort of Krabi in Southern Thailand.

TABLE 6: NUMBER OF REGISTERED STREET VENDORS IN SELECTED DISTRICTS IN BANGKOK IN 2012

District	Includes area/places	Number of allowed vending sites	Number of registered vendors
Phra Nakon	Khaosan and Rambuttri areas	17	1,657
Watthana	Sukhumvit Road and uneven lanes	40	774
Khlong Toei	Sukhumvit Road, Nana Plaza, and even lanes	28	718
Bang Rak	Silom-Patpong	11	350

Source: Department of City Law Enforcement 2013

Eventually, most of these laws and regulations remain ambiguous (Kusakabe 2006, p. 29), especially concerning their enforcement by local authorities. Local practice of law enforcement significantly differs according to time and space and often contradicts official guidelines. In 2013, for instance, the BMA announced it would go easy on street vendors and avoid imposing fines on sellers in Bangkok (Kongsai 2013), but at the same time Akha vendors recounted that the amount and frequency of fines increased.

Without prior notice, controls by local municipal police became harsher. In addition, the lack of clear regulations encourages 'local street politics of corruption and bribing'. Although none of the Akha mobile sellers obtained an official vending registration, they may have to pay monthly bribes ranging from 100 to 1,000 Baht. These unclear policies and arbitrary practice of law enforcement also annoy the Akha vendors: "I don't understand [the regulations]. Now everyone just wants money money" (Akha vendor, Bangkok, 14.12.2013).

Analogous to the economic opportunity structure, also politico-legal conditions vary due to different regional and local characteristics. My own research results suggest that in Chiang Mai, where long-lasting relations between highland and lowland populations exist, Akha mobile vendors are more accepted (and even supported) by state authorities compared to further away destinations such as Bangkok and the beachside areas where hilltribe economic activities are a rather recent phenomenon. In Chiang Mai, Akha vendors are usually not confronted with charges from municipal police and do not have to fear constant scrutiny. One vendor even mentioned that a Chiang Mai policeman made statements such as "here [in Chiang Mai] we help each other" which indicates signs of a location-specific solidarity limited to the area of Chiang Mai. Historically and geographically, Chiang Mai province has been part of a broad highland area closer to the hill areas of Myanmar, Southern China, and Laos than to Bangkok. Chiang Mai has been a multi-ethnic region where various highland and lowland groups interact for a long time (Vatikiotis 1984). Meanwhile, ethnic highland diversity has also become one of the city's tourist markers commonly used for commercial promotion. In this context, also Boonyasaranai (2001) noticed that the Akha became a seminal attraction of the urban Chiang Mai night bazaar and that "even the police seem[s] to be satisfied that these women are here" (p. 10).

When I asked Akha souvenir vendors in migrant destination areas outside of Chiang Mai if they had ever had problems with authorities monitoring street vending, they immediately replied with phrases such as "Yes of course". The historical-geographical context undoubtedly distinguishes Chiang Mai from Bangkok and the beachside destinations in Southern Thailand. "The geographical zone connecting Chiang Mai and Bangkok within territorial boundaries is, by contrast, a rather recent phenomenon in

history” dating back to the turn of the 20th century (Toyota 1999, p. 11). Until very recently, the presence of highland ethnic minorities in Bangkok or beach areas has been almost entirely ignored by both media and academic reports as hilltribe images are still predominantly perceived in the context of ethnic tourism, highland development projects or ‘problematic issues’ outlined in chapter 4.2. Highland minorities in urban or tourist areas often also work in gastronomy, massage places, at petrol stations or construction sites and therefore remain invisible for outsiders. Their work as mobile souvenir sellers in international urban tourist areas can slowly change this negligence as reports in media such as travel magazines (Khaosaner 2009) or TV reports have emerged. Most Akha vendors recall that in the early 1990s and 2000s, they had many problems with municipal officials at urban destinations outside of Chiang Mai. They controlled them not only in reference to street vending regulations, but also in reference to their residence and citizenship status.

I am already selling here [in Khaosan Road in Bangkok] for more than six years. And in the past the policemen here did not see hilltribe people, so they always kept watching me and caught me if they could. Sometimes, they ran after us and caught us but not for now. (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 17.09.2008)

At that time they had trouble with policemen who always checked their ID card. The policemen checked their ID cards because they thought that the Akha have fake ones and that they live in Bangkok illegally. [...] All of the Akha people are scared of the policemen because they really don't want to have any trouble. The policemen did not understand the situation of the Akha and why they come to live in Bangkok. (Interview with hotel owner where most of the Akha vendors in Bangkok used to live in the early 2000s, Bangkok, 28.09.2008)

Statements by Akha vendors and outsiders such as the hotel owner quoted above indicate that Bangkok and beachside based officials enforcing laws on the street lack knowledge about and experience with members of ethnic minorities. The overall image of highland ethnic minorities in Thailand’s urban areas is rather negative and connected to reconstructed stereotypes involving alleged drug involvement and environmental destruction (chapter 4.2.1). While I was presenting parts of this study at a conference in Bangkok, the dean of a Thai university whispered to my colleague that the Akha’s true reason for living in Bangkok was the drug trade and not the souvenir business. Indeed, “upland minority peoples are often blamed for the methamphetamine trade and more easily convicted, although ethnic Thai are deeply implicated in the trade (Gilligly 2004, p. 142). In Phuket, I met a Thai professor from

another university who seemed quite surprised and amused that it was possible to do PhD research about Akha minorities in urban contexts. In chapter 5.3, I described how Akha vendors in Pattaya faced difficulties getting accepted as guests in hotels. Such conversations and experiences uncover how deeply stereotypes of ethnic minorities are ingrained in people's minds, even among academia.

As mentioned earlier, street vending in Bangkok is officially managed by the BMA, which is chief-executed by the Bangkok governor. The law enforcement on the streets, however, is executed by municipal policemen. During my fieldwork periods, street vending controls were harsher in Khaosan than in Silom or the Sukhumvit area. Akha vendors stated that fines and bribes were generally higher and more frequent at the beachside destinations of Phuket, Koh Samui, and Pattaya than in Bangkok. In these areas Akha vendors are strictly forbidden to sell along the beach, so their economic activities remain confined to the main tourist roads and places. In the case of Patong on Phuket Island, the city municipality supervises mobile selling and limits beach vending to a number of 70 food vendors. Vendors can hand down such highly popular licenses costing only 800 Baht per year to family members (Gantner 2012, p. 277). All other mobile vendors such as the Akha sellers are dependent on informal arrangements with law enforcement. In December 2013, Akha vendors told me that they had to bribe local officials in Phuket with 500 Baht per month. This would result in yearly expenses of 6,000 Baht, which is 7.5 times more than licensed vendors pay. In Pattaya, recent reports recount that regulatory enforcement officers fine street vendors up to 1,500 Baht per day and imprison them for up to three days for disrupting traffic and causing annoyances (Chatree 2013). In addition to bribing on a regular basis, another system of executing state power exists. Referring to laws and regulations listed in table 5, street vendors can be fined for various violations of the law. Figure 24 shows a fee of 200 Baht issued to a mobile street vendor on Koh Samui for breaking the Act on Maintaining Cleanliness and Order (1992). In fact she had carried out her mobile sales activities as on many other days. After they arrest street vendors, municipal police take away their souvenir baskets and bring them to the main office. If a vendor wants his or her sales products back, they have to report to the municipal police station in person and pay a fine. In order to reclaim their products, vendors based in the Chaweng beach area in Koh Samui have to go to Nathon 25

kilometers away. In other cases where vendors pay fees directly on the spot, Akha vendors reported being charged up to three times a day.

FIGURE 24: FEE INDICATING A VIOLATION AGAINST THE ACT ON MAINTANING CLEANLINESS

ใบเสร็จรับเงิน

พนักงาน.....เทศบาลเมืองเกาะสมุย

ได้รับเงินค่า.....**กับดักขยะความผิด พ.ร.บ.รักษาความสะอาด**

จาก.....

เป็นเงิน.....**๗๐๐.-**บาท.....สตางค์

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8.3 AKHA RESPONSES AND SPATIAL DIFFERENCES

This chapter shows how Akha micro-entrepreneurs deal with these varying opportunity structures outlined above. First of all, it has to be noted that the majority of Akha vendors is aware of these divergent structures and is able to adapt quickly to changing conditions. A strong network of insider relations mobilized into social capital secures information transfer among vendors living and working in different locations (chapter 7). Second, Akha sellers do not only react to existing structures, but are also agents creating or changing prevailing conditions by developing new souvenir products (see 5.4) and negotiating power relations with tourists and state authorities.

Successful vendors deploy various sales strategies in various sales locations. They are aware of the divergent tourist profiles and characteristics of certain areas and experienced that e.g. Arab tourists in the lower Sukhumvit area exhibit different consumption demand than Japanese visitors in Silom or families on beach holidays. Therefore, they change their souvenir products according to their sales location and the expected clientele. In the lower Sukhumvit area, Akha vendors have started to focus on blinking plastic souvenirs that have become bestsellers among Arab tourists. One of the Akha vendors selling in that area recounted that she could not sell the souvenir Akha bags here that she successfully sold to Western families in Pattaya some year ago. She now features a twofold sales pitch, one including blinking plastic souvenirs targeting Arab tourists and the other containing self-made wristbands mainly targeting Western tourists. Others have specialized in selling in Soi Thaniya which is mainly frequented by wealthy Japanese tourists and showed me their products such as 'magic wallets' which were especially popular among Japanese tourists during my fieldwork. The vendors focusing on this area also tried to acquire some Japanese language skills. Evident sale success in Arab or Japanese tourism enclaves demonstrates that for Akha micro-entrepreneurs, international tourism is not limited to travelers from the West. Yet, the majority of Akha vendors' customers come from Western countries. However, there is one tourist group Akha vendors can hardly find access to, Thai domestic tourists.

I never ever had a Thai customer even though I have sold souvenirs for almost a year. (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 24.09.2008)

And concerning Thai customers [...] I can count how many I had in my life. They never bought my stuff [in the last six years]. (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok 17.09.2008)

Generally, Thai domestic tourism has become increasingly important as the Thai middle class has grown wealthier and begun to frequent upper-end tourist facilities, which had initially been installed for foreign tourism (Cohen 2014). Tourism destinations such as Chiang Mai or Hua Hin feature significantly higher numbers of domestic travelers, but even major strongholds of Western vacationers such as Pattaya, Phuket or Bangkok's backpacker enclave in Khaosan Road have acknowledged the importance of Thai visitors. Akha vendors, however, cannot benefit from these developments. Cohen (2003) identified two ambiguous characteristics of Thai domestic tourists (pp. 5–6). First, they have a cultural background related to local people enabling them to share more socio-cultural values such as religion, language, beliefs, and attitudes with each other than with foreigners or Western tourists. Second, the middle class domestic tourists mostly judge local people as uncivilized or primitive, especially ethnic minority groups. In the context of Akha vendors, I argue that domestic tourists generally do not share socio-cultural characteristics with highland minorities (see chapter 4.3) and that they continue to associate hilltribe minorities with negative stereotypes (see chapters 4.21., 7.2.2, and 8.2).

Moreover, Akha vendors do not only categorize sales areas and customers in terms of nationality or ethnicity, but also in terms of expected purchasing power of these tourists. Generally, living expenses are lowest in Chiang Mai and highest at beachside destinations. This applies to local residents as well as to tourists. Akha vendors know that they can sell their souvenirs on the island of Koh Samui or Phuket for higher prices than in Chiang Mai or Bangkok and understand that many family or package tourists will not venture north to the highland areas. For example, self-made fake silver-turquoise bracelets are sold in Bangkok for 50–150 Baht and in Koh Samui for 150–350 Baht, prices for simple wristbands can even increase fivefold. However, economic opportunity structures also differ within one city. While Khaosan Road mainly attracts low- and mid-budget travelers, Silom and the Sukhumvit area predominantly cater to mid-budget and high-end tourists.

In my opinion Silom and Patpong are better [sales areas] than Khaosan Road because there are much more rich tourists. In Silom and Patong area tourists can buy my stuff without any bargain. [...] And in Silom you do not have as many Akha sellers as on Khaosan Road so I don't have much competition over there. I prefer Silom and Patpong area much to Khaosan Road. (Interview with Akha souvenir seller, Bangkok, 10.09.2008)

Now I am selling souvenirs in Silom area which is better than Khaosan. I prefer Silom because it is easier to make money there. There is no need to walk around and there are no municipal policemen from whom I have to run away or hide all the time. Over there I just find some place where I can sit down and wait for customers to come by and I just sell. (Interview with Akha souvenir seller, Bangkok, 04.09.2008)

Akha micro-entrepreneurs not only assess opportunity structures in terms of economic conditions related to competition and income opportunities, but also in terms of legal-political structures as well as conditions generating a sense of wellbeing. The city of Bangkok features three main and distinctive vending areas (see chapter 8.2). Those vendors wanting to avoid red-light areas (see picture 26) or tedious transportation prefer the backpacker enclave of the Khaosan area.

I used to sell in Nana, Silom and Sukhumvit area before but I really don't like to sell at the bar areas. There are too many drinkers and too many bars with sexy girls, sexy dancers and many rich tourists. I know that I can earn much more money there than in Khaosan area but I still prefer to work here in Khaosan. (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 17.09.2008)

I know that there are some other sales places but I prefer Khaosan area. I really don't like to take public bus to go anywhere. Here it is good enough for me. (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 04.09.2008)

The other strand of Akha responses and strategies I would like to discuss here is related to the politico-legal frameworks outlined above in chapter 8.2. Most of the main vending areas outside of Bangkok are characterized by rather strict controls or fines and bribes executed by municipal police. Another way Akha mobile sellers deal with or avoid state control is becoming invisible. This tactical practice of the weak (de Certeau 1984) appears twofold: first, hiding the body and second, hiding ethnicity.

A common practice among street vendors to defy state control is to run away from municipal police as soon as they are spotted. Khaosan Road features small lanes where Akha mobile vendors can hide when law enforcement approaches (see picture 24). Vending areas such as the broad walking streets and zones of Pattaya or Patong on Phuket with fewer or no lanes make it more difficult to hide. For semimobile vendors

who sell their products from mats or racks on the sidewalk, it is more difficult to immediately pack their souvenirs and leave the sales place.

“If they catch me and I have to pay 500 Baht, then I have no more money for food” (Interview with Akha seller, Bangkok, 25.08.2008)

When municipal police show up in Khaosan Road, vendors quickly run away into one of the small lanes, take off their Akha dress and try to hide their souvenir basket behind some scattered objects.

In the previous section 8.2, I argued that Akha street vendors are not only subject to general street vending controls, but also checked regarding their residence and citizenship status. Due to this fact and due to the reconstruction and perpetuation of negative hilltribe images in Thai mainstream society, highland ethnic minorities in Thailand’s urban areas experience stricter controls than other vending groups. In this context, their objectified cultural capital in form of the Akha costume and headdress is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the visibility of the exotic other arouses tourists’ attention and helps make a better sell, but on the other it is a clear indicator of ‘hilltribeness’ that can be easily identified by law enforcement. Therefore, several sellers decided to discard their (head)dress in order to hide their Akha identity.

I used to wear the Akha costume before but the [municipal] policeman always caught me. I think so it is easy for them to identify me as hilltribe. (Interview Akha vendor, Bangkok 17.09.2008)

8.4 INTERIM CONCLUSION

This chapter on economic and political conditions in various sales destinations has shown that opportunity structures vary considerably on regional/urban and local levels. A three-level approach suggested by Kloosterman, van der Leun and Rath (1999) distinguishing national, regional/urban, and local levels is useful for acknowledging micro and macro perspectives. In doing so, I gathered and analyzed data from statistical offices, stakeholders of policy planning, implementation and enforcement, and street vendors.

However, these structures outlined above cannot exist independently, but are created and connected through actors and their interactions. Akha micro-entrepreneurs are

not passive figures simply reacting to these structures. They are aware of existing and distinctive opportunity structures and use them for their own purposes. Yet, interactions between law enforcement and Akha vendors also uncover unequal power relations between the state and highland minority vendors, which also unfold spatial variations due to regional geographical and politico-historical developments. Finally, we have to acknowledge that structures or conditions of specific spaces can change as they do not constitute contained or carved settings (Cresswell and Merrimen 2011b, p. 7).

9 SYNTHESIS: STRATEGIES OF AKHA MICRO-ENTREPRENEURS

This chapter brings together the main results of the research by synthesizing structural conditions of migrant destination and source areas with social structures, power relations, and agency perspectives which explain the evolvement of the Akha souvenir business over time and space and the (everyday) practices of Akha micro-entrepreneurs. Strategies show how Akha vendors deal with, change, and internalize existing social as well as economic and politico-legal structures. I developed two main core categories explaining the development of urban Akha souvenir businesses and the Akha's deployed strategies: "being mobile" and "mobilizing capital".

Strategies and everyday activities as social practice can operate on the conscious and on the unconscious level. That said, actors on the one hand are active agents having goals, aspirations, and future expectations, but such intentions are limited by their endowment of capital and their capacity of mobilizing and transforming the various forms of capital. However, to explain and understand Akha strategies in the field of ethnic minority enterprise with rational choice and intention-led action only fails to recognize embodied dispositions that are acquired through social experience and operate as organizing principle of thought and action under the level of consciousness. In the following, I discuss conscious and unconscious strategies Akha micro-entrepreneurs deploy in order to get ahead in the urban ethnic minority souvenir business. All of these practices are directed towards the main phenomenon of this research, succeeding in urban tourist business, and are inherent in the two core categories presented below.

9.1 BEING MOBILE

Being mobile and flexible has been a central feature of Akha history and remains so in the context of urban ethnic minority enterprises. Since the Akha have faced confrontations with stronger ethnic groups in their 'homeland' areas of Tibet, Szechuan, and Yunnan they regularly moved southwards until reaching Northern Thailand's highlands, and eventually, urban areas. It can be stated that "the mobility of an average Akha family is very high indeed" (Geusau 1983, p. 271).

In the context of urban migration and souvenir business, a five-level-mobility has become significant (see figure 25). “Being mobile” has been identified as a core category as it represents the main themes of the research and is linked to five interrelated processes with each of them featuring its own contexts.

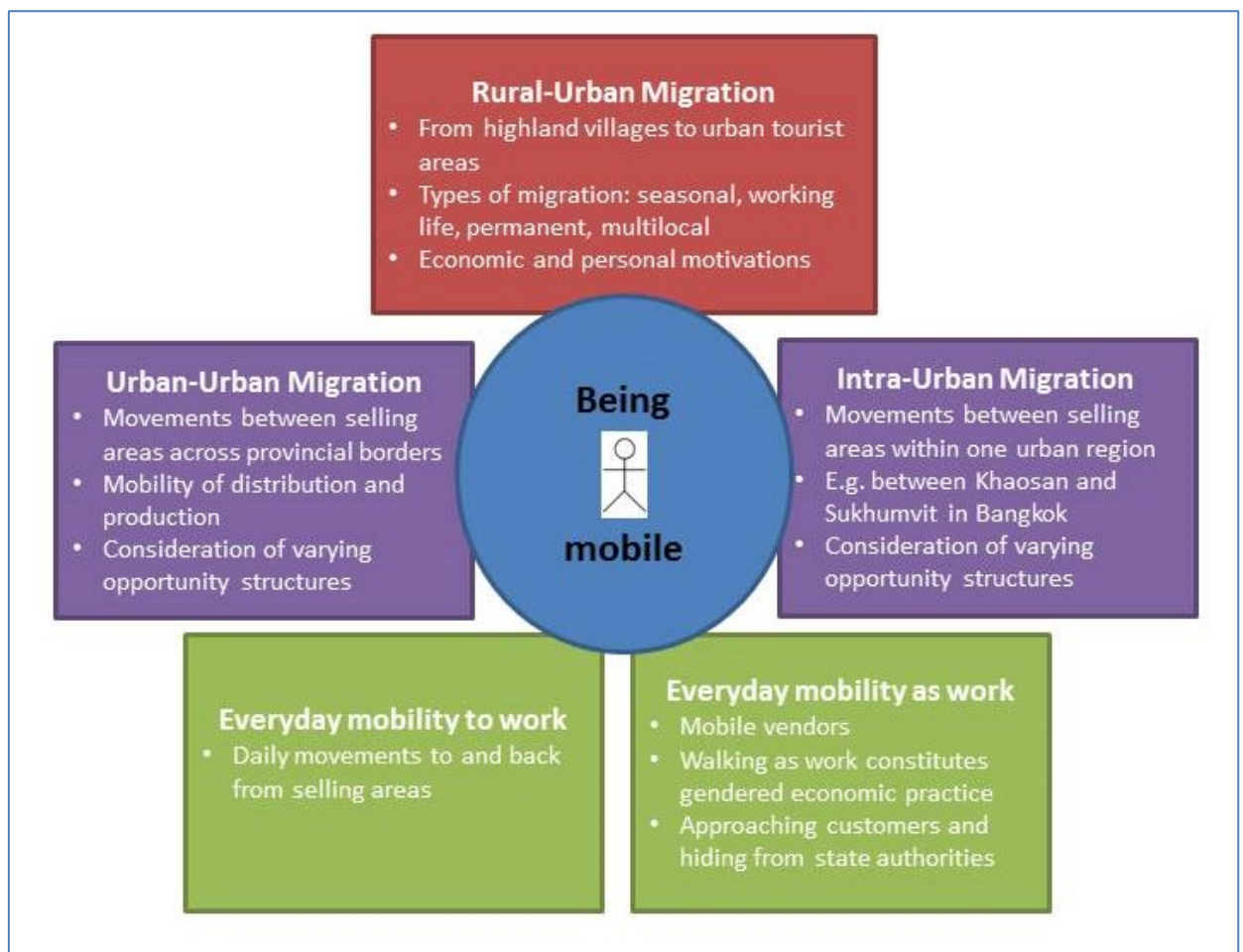
First, a continuous rural-urban migration from highland ethnic minority villages to Chiang Mai, to the capital city, and to Thailand’s southern tourist destinations characterized by translocal relations between home and destination areas has evolved. I discussed Akha urban migration in general in chapter 4.3.2 and the development of Akha migration into tourist business in particular in chapter 5. This migration pattern is not homogenous, but features different types of migrants and migration in reference to time, distance, intention or relation to home. Moreover, these migratory movements are influenced by economic, social, and psychological motivations as well as by conditional changes in the village and urban tourist areas. In village contexts, loss of land and forest, destruction of social and political village structures as well as improved transportation and communication structures have become significant while in the migrant destination areas, the increase of international tourism, and the establishment of commercial institutions and opportunities have been identified.

The second and third levels of mobility refer to movements between sales areas, be it (a), urban-urban or island-island migration across provincial borders, e.g. between Bangkok and Chiang Mai or between Phuket and Koh Samui (Surat Thani province), or (b), intra-urban mobility between sales areas within one metropolitan region, e.g. between Khaosan and Silom area in Bangkok. As outlined in chapter 8, each vending area is characterized by its own economic and politico-legal specifications which most of the vendors are well aware of. Based on these opportunity structures as well as on divergent motivations and influencing factors discussed in chapter 5, Akha vendors select their vending and living areas. They pursue spatial strategies by e.g. adopting their souvenir products according to the type of expected customers in various locations.

It is important to note that such a mobile livelihood in the context of urban-to-urban migration encompasses two central processes of economic action, leading to a mobility of distribution and production. In addition to the primary goal of selling their

souvenirs (distribution), Akha vendors can also engage in production work no matter where they are located at the time. As described in chapter 5.4, Akha entrepreneurs sell a mix of mass-manufactured and self-made products. Whereas the organization or the purchase of mass-manufactured items is usually bound to certain locations of factories or resellers, souvenir production takes place at their houses in various sales areas and even during home visits in the highland villages. The souvenir production equipment is rather minimal and can easily be transported. In addition to raw materials such as fabrics, threads, seeds or plastic pearls, vendors often just need needles and pins.

FIGURE 25: THE CORE CATEGORY “BEING MOBILE” REPRESENTING A FIVE-LEVEL MOBILITY



Source: Own illustration

The fourth and fifth levels relate to everyday mobilities in the migrant destination areas. They thus differ from the urban-urban or intra-urban movements described

above which, in contrast to everyday mobilities, do not represent daily routines. Moreover, they serve different purposes.

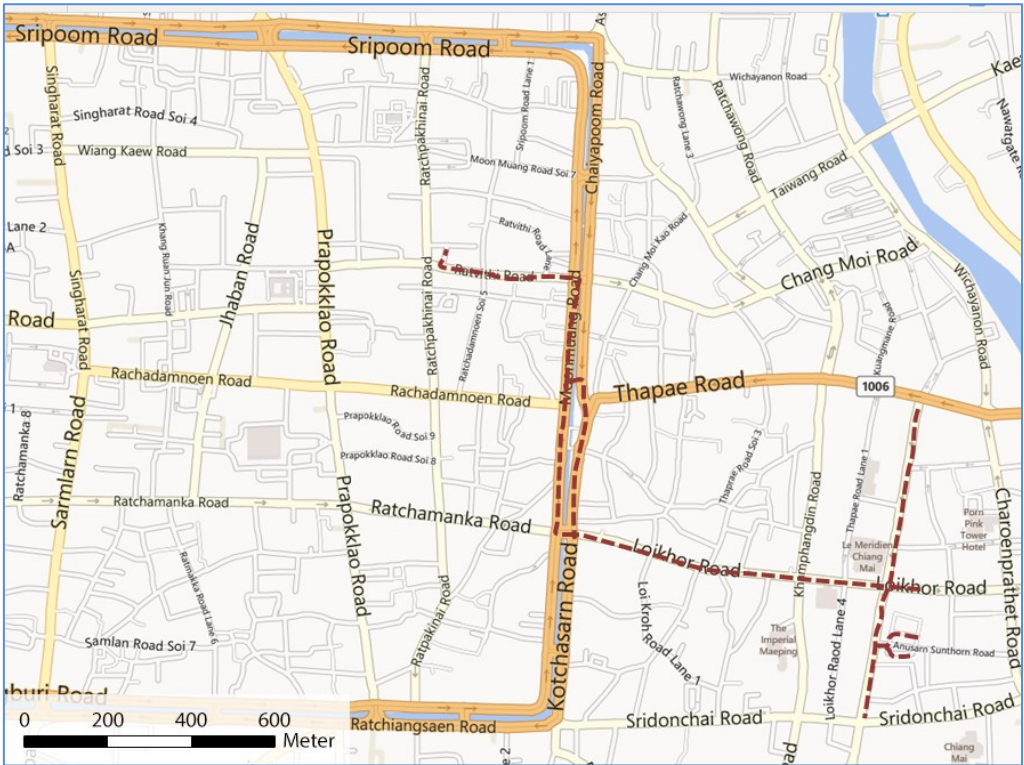
Moving to and back from sales work by foot, public transport or a combination of both can last from 30 minutes (e.g. for Bangkok sellers in Khaosan) to up to three hours (e.g. for sellers in the Sukhumvit area) and is a daily necessity for all Akha micro-entrepreneurs.

More importantly, *walking as work* constitutes a major part of economic business for the dominant group of mobile vendors (see also chapter 6.2). Depending on the vending area, mobile vendors start selling and walking from the early afternoon or early evening until midnight or later. They thus cover a dozen kilometers on foot per day, as represented in the following figures.

In Chiang Mai, the length of the night bazaar of Chan Khlan Road amounts to 750 meters and the distance via the bar and red-light zone of Loi Kroh and to the bar and backpacker area in the northeastern part of the historical city accounts for 2.3 kilometers (see figure 26).

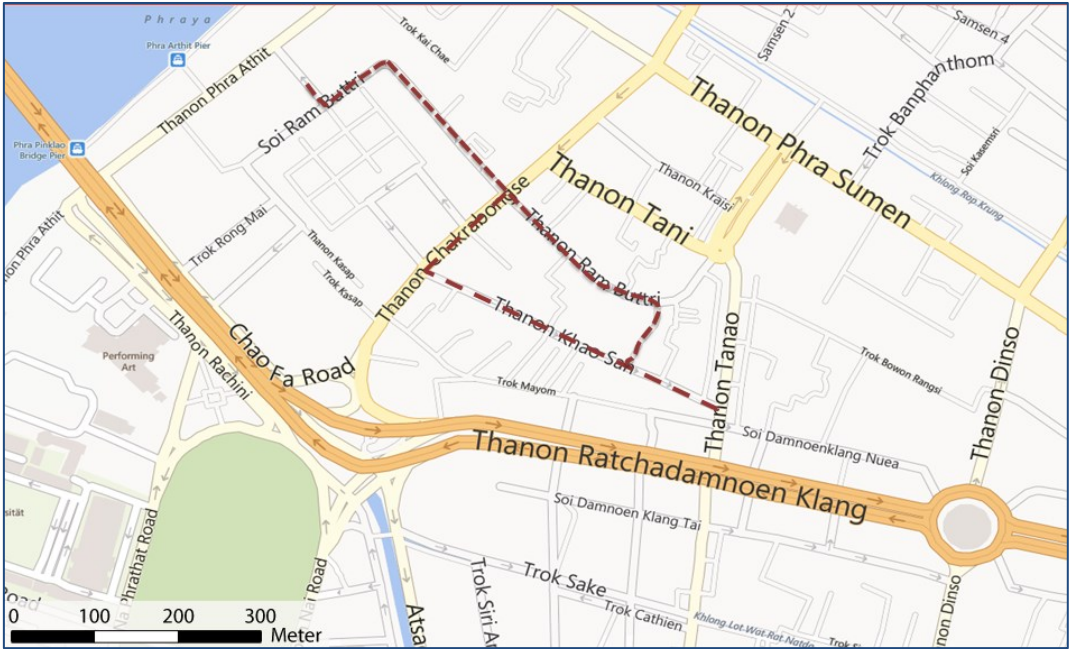
In Bangkok in the Khaosan area (see figure 27), mobile vendors usually walk along Khaosan Road, heading on to Rambuttri village and return to Khaosan Road via Rambuttri alley and a small lane. The total loop walked several times a day features a distance of 1.7 kilometers. The walking circuit for mobile sellers in the Sukhumvit area (see figure 28) passes the red-light zone Nana Plaza, the Middle Eastern tourist enclave around Soi three, and goes along both sides of the Sukhumvit main road under Bangkok's BTS skytrain lines, amounting to approximately two kilometers.

FIGURE 26: MAIN ROUTES OF MOBILE VENDORS IN CHIANG MAI (EXCLUDING WEEKLY MARKETS)



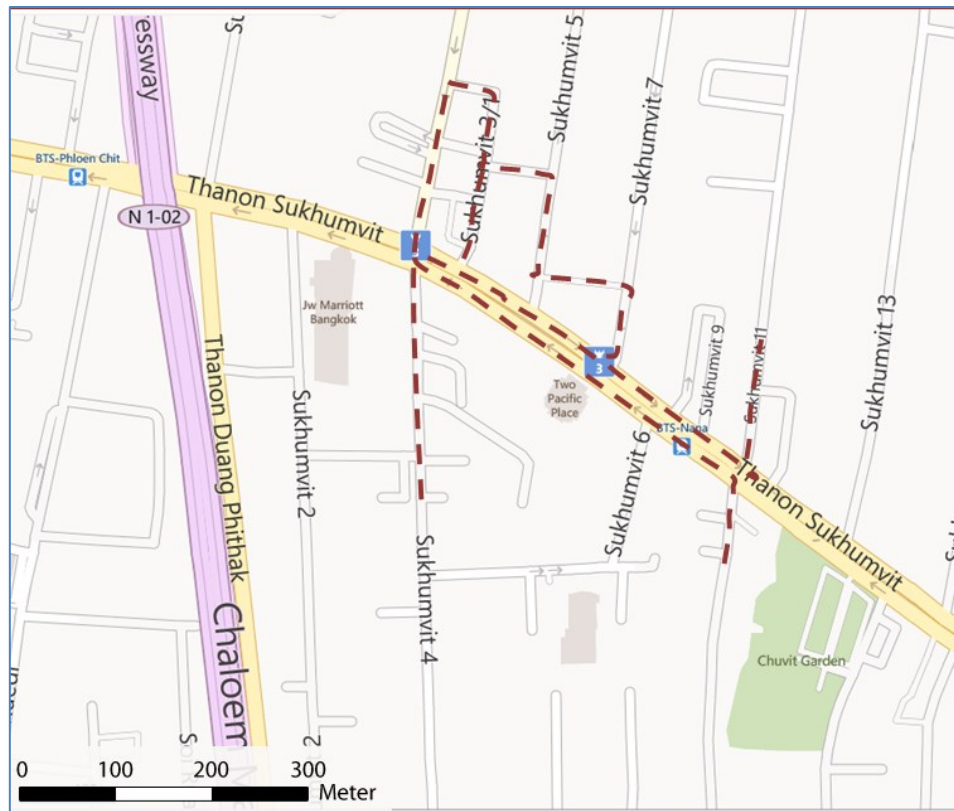
Map source: Bing Maps, © 2014 Microsoft Corporation

FIGURE 27: MAIN ROUTES OF MOBILE VENDORS IN THE KHAOSAN AREA, BANGKOK



Map source: Bing Maps, © 2014 Microsoft Corporation

FIGURE 28: MAIN ROUTES OF MOBILE VENDORS IN THE SUKHUMVIT AREA, BANGKOK



Map source: Bing Maps, © 2014 Microsoft Corporation

Mobile selling requires a good physical condition as vendors walk many kilometers each day while carrying a heavy souvenir basket. In the context of qualitative interviews, many mobile vendors mentioned that they would prefer to have their own souvenir shop or stall, but that they lacked the financial resources for such investments. Yet, they knew that their mobility also featured economic advantages.

Even though I have to carry this basket I can walk around wherever I want without any expenses (Interview with souvenir seller, Bangkok, 10.09.2008)

The [semimobile] footpath sellers don't need to walk around as I do but they have to wait for customers passing by. That is their way they get customers. And they have to pay for the rent 500 Baht per month. But I can walk around, so I can easily get more customer than them. I don't need to wait for anyone. And I don't need to pay for the rent but I have to pay for fine when the municipal policeman catches me. (Interview with souvenir seller, Bangkok, 17.09.2008)

Mobile vendors can actively approach customers while semimobile or permanent vendors passively have to wait for customers. Indeed, mobile vendors are very vigilant. They address and follow bypassing visitors and approach tourists sitting in bars and

restaurants. Moreover, despite being constantly in danger of getting apprehended by municipal policemen, mobile vendors – in contrast to fixed vendors – still have the chance to hide or escape. Becoming invisible is achieved through hiding body and ethnicity (chapter 8.3).

Walking as a mobile practice is not (geographically) destination-oriented, but aims at enhancing sales success and at hiding from state authorities. As an economic strategy, walking for mobile sellers has become a feature of everyday working life.

In his study on pedestrianism, Hayden Lorimer (2011) notes that “occupational sedentarism is increasingly the norm among today’s work forces” and that “those sectors of employment where walking remains central to work seem increasingly the stuff of an older society, now passing away, predominantly agrarian in organization” (p. 22). Ethnographic research suggests that “the Akha have long been famous for accepting the necessity to walk enormous distances to their fields” (Geusau 1983, pp. 2171–272). Today, with many Akha having lost their (customary) rights of land tenure, urban migration has become significant. In the light of Lorimer’s quotation, it might seem paradox that Akha mobile sellers have migrated into Thailand’s globalized international tourism centers such as Bangkok or Pattaya to work as roaming mobile street vendors.

Moreover, everyday activities of the souvenir business in general and mobile vending in particular represent a highly gendered practice (see chapter 6.3). The internalization of gender structures into the habitus as generating theme of thought and action operates on two levels. On the one hand, gender roles within Akha society regard souvenir production as women’s work and argue that Akha men just cannot work as roaming mobile vendors. With a few exceptions, this gender-related division of work is hardly questioned within the Akha vendors’ group. Yet, a few Akha men in urban tourist centers outside of Chiang Mai have started to contest existing gender habitus by engaging in female connoted souvenir production and distribution processes. On the other hand, Thai tourism, and especially ethnic tourism promotion in tourism brochures, postcards, etc. represent women and girls in the name of exoticism (and eroticism). However, Akha women’s strong participation in the production and distribution of tourism means that they enter new social and economic settings

outside the classical village or domestic spheres, which enables them to bridge and mobilize outsider relations, predominantly to international tourists, but also to members of Thai mainstream society (see chapters 7.2 and 9.2).

I can conclude that the high mobility and flexibility of Akha can be seen as a historical continuum remaining highly relevant in the context of their work in globalized tourist centers. Aware of spatial differences in regard to various opportunity structures over time and space, they ponder moving to other sales destinations, within and across cities and provinces. This specific type of mobile street vending embraces walking as highly gendered everyday work mobility and is an expression of the lack of alternative opportunities, but also makes specific sales strategies possible. The categorization of a five-level mobility from national to local level influenced by international trends such as tourism development, national or urban policies, and local law enforcement also makes the interconnectedness between micro and macro conditions visible. Being mobile in this context means that Akha micro-entrepreneurs embrace and pursue various mobile practices that are related to each other in a complementary way.

9.2 MOBILIZATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF VARIOUS FORMS OF CAPITAL

The second core category explaining Akha urban souvenir migration and their success and survival in the field of ethnic minority enterprise refers to the Akha vendors' mobilization and transformation of various forms of capital. Akha vendors bring a range of different forms of capital with them and are able to accumulate further capital during and after migration. The success or failure of an actor within the field of Akha souvenir businesses is related to his or her endowment of capital while the various forms of capital are unevenly distributed among players in the field of ethnic minority enterprises. Various actors such as mobile or permanent minority vendors, international and domestic tourists, state authorities, and other members of Thai mainstream society bring in various depositories of capital. Capital can be perceived as power, has to be understood in all its forms, and is accumulated, inherited, and transferred individually or collectively (Bourdieu 1986; see also chapter 2.4).

Money as the most obvious form of capital is required to start a souvenir business. Depending on the type of pursued vending style and sales location, a start-up budget of 5,000 – 10,000 Baht (Trupp 2014b, p. 126) is necessary in order to cover costs of raw

materials for souvenir production, manufactured souvenirs, possible rental fees, surcharges, bribes, transportation as well as food, water, and accommodation for the first days or weeks. The amount of one's economic capital impacts on pursued vending styles, and the majority of Akha micro-entrepreneurs, especially the group of mobile vendors, share a similar and rather low economic status. Economic capital is required for the very act of rural-urban migration, for moving between vending areas, and on a local level for daily expenses as well as for fines and bribes which are charged by law enforcement. Economic expenses as well as earnings relate to sales strategies and varying opportunity structures in different vending locations. Such costs as well as the seller's income considerably differ depending on the prevailing economic/market (chapter 8.1) and politico-legal conditions (chapter 8.2) actors are embedded in the respective living and sales destination.

In chapter 7.1, I thoroughly discussed the role of social capital for Akha micro-entrepreneurs as a prerequisite for gaining information, establishing security, cohesion and sociality, and reducing expenses. Based on collective experiences of discrimination in the context of previous migrations and work as well as on a similar socio-economic status among Akha vendors, an internal solidarity has been created that shapes altruistic forms of support for community members. Under these conditions and contexts, Akha vendors can mobilize their social relations for information transfer relevant for potential migrants as well as current migrants. Moreover, Akha vendors' social capital engenders social cohesion in conflict situations with state officials and tolerance and understanding towards an increasing number of newly arrived souvenir sellers and thus co-ethnic competitors. Furthermore, strong ties to family members and a tacitly required 'mentoring function' of experienced sellers facilitate further mobilization of social capital resulting in information transfer and advice and 'supervision' for newcomers. Through the widespread use of mobile phones among Akha vendors, information transfer regarding souvenir business start-ups and changing opportunity structures transcends geographic boundaries. In addition to social capital mobilization achieved on an individual level, Akha vendors pursue 'group strategies' such as migrating to and in-between tourist destinations, walking in groups, going to and returning home from work, room-sharing, socializing aimed at establishing

security, sociality and at reducing expenses. The mobilization of internal social capital follows a not or not quite conscious social logic orchestrated by the habitus.

In addition to bonding social capital within the own ethnic group, Akha micro-entrepreneurs bridge social relations to outsiders such as tourists, expatriates, other minority groups, and members of Thai mainstream society (chapter 7.2). In this context, the transformation of social relations to economic and embodied cultural capital are relevant. Through daily interactions with predominantly foreign tourists and expatriates, Akha vendors accumulate basic language skills in English, and some additionally in Japanese or Spanish, and can establish long-time business and in some cases social-emotional relations.

Moreover, souvenir production skills as another form of embodied cultural capital are either learned in the Akha villages where embroidery and sewing clothing have been part of women's duties and socialization for a long time or (have developed further) upon arrival in the sales destination areas (see chapter 6.3). These crafts are used to produce souvenir products such as wristbands, bags or simplified Akha headdresses that can be regarded as objectified cultural capital Akha vendors offer at the tourist market. In the context of souvenir production (see chapter 5.4), dialectic strategies of innovation and adoption can be identified. Several Akha vendors have developed new types of products such as wristbands made of rubber looking similar to leather bracelets or new designs of existing products. Innovation takes place, but on a minor scale and does not need to entail the ability to invent completely new products. But as soon as one new souvenir proves a seller, other vendors quickly adopt it. By doing so, the market price of the product drops, sellers gain less profit, and sooner or later develop and offer slightly different products again. Strategies of adoption and copying are tolerated within the Akha vending group, but raise a problem when entering other ethnic vending groups such as sellers from the Isaan. Arguing with Bourdieu, Akha vendors have incorporated the rules of the game tacitly knowing what to do without needing to carry out rational calculations.

Objectified cultural capital in form of the Akha headdress and Akha costume as an economic asset is increasingly disappearing, even in urban tourism contexts. Though previously frequently used to attract potential customers, several Akha have

abandoned the headdress for mainly two reasons. First, it represents Akhaness and thus 'hilltribeness' that is easily recognized by law enforcement who in turn apply strict standards of control upon ethnic minority vendors, and second, working in the tropical heat of Bangkok or Pattaya is more convenient with lighter clothing. However, in the northern city of Chiang Mai, where ethnic diversity is part of the urban flair, where law enforcement on Akha street vendors hardly takes place and where temperatures are cooler, the vast majority of female vendors wear the Akha clothing.

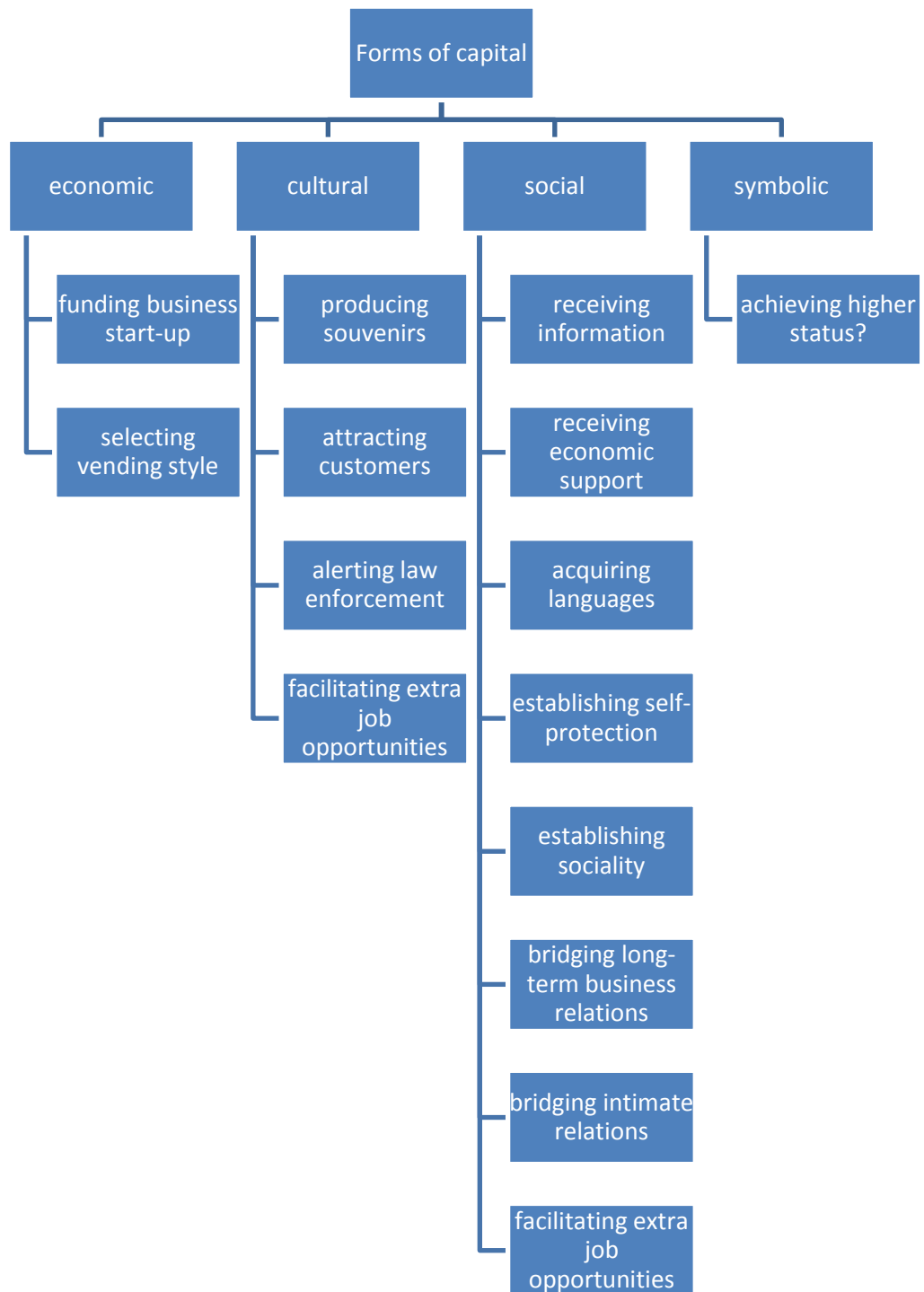
Figure 29 summarizes the various forms of capital and their related strategies relevant for Akha minority vendors in urban contexts (also refer to chapter 7). Generally, especially the group of mobile vendors is endowed with rather low economic capital and high social capital on horizontal levels. It is important to note that these capital assets and their outcomes do not exist independently, but are interrelated. For example, starting a souvenir business requires economic capital, which presupposes close social relations to a family member or a friend whom he or she can borrow the money from. Incorporated cultural capital in form of sewing is a prerequisite for producing and eventually selling souvenirs. Moreover, these forms of capital and their outcomes are mobilized at the five various levels of mobility outlined above in chapter 9.1. Receiving information, for instance, is highly relevant at all levels, while acquiring languages or establishing business or intimate relations takes place in the context of everyday mobilities of walking and selling. The acquisition of foreign languages is achieved through social relations but the result of such a learning process, thus mastering the language is an embodied form of cultural capital. The accumulation of symbolic capital in the sense of prestige and social status has hardly been achieved in urban tourist areas. Even though Akha vendors successfully mobilized outsider relations to tourists and expatriates, and newspapers and media in recent years have started to report about urban Akha minority souvenir vendors, negative images and preconception in Thai mainstream society seem to remain strong (see chapter 7.2.2). This leads to the question in which contexts it has not been possible or desirable to use, accumulate or transform capital or in which contexts capital endowment can have negative impacts. One major drawback related to negative reconstructed stereotypes and discrimination is that Akha vendors cannot access the fast-growing Thai domestic tourism market. This prevents higher economic success and maybe also the

deconstruction of prejudices. Other assets such as the Akha headdress as objectified cultural capital draw attention from both customers and law enforcement involving positive and negative impacts, respectively. Finally, parallel to processes of bonding and bridging social capital, I identified quests for social disembedding. Even though social capital is used and required for all levels of mobility, migration into tourist business is also directed towards a search for independence (see chapters 5 and 7.3). Becoming one's own boss is a central feature of the job and migration decision, and major parts of the souvenir production and distribution as well as of the income administration are organized independently.

Relying on their available capital assets, Akha vendors pursue mobile practices (see this section as well as 9.1) and a self-exploitation strategy. Akha sellers provide the same or similar products (e.g. wooden frogs or wristbands) as other shops, but they provide different services and accept hard conditions. They work longer than most shops or fixed stalls want to stay open by offering their products until midnight or even longer. In these contexts, Akha mobile vendors also compete with and outperform each other, e.g. by working even longer than most of the other Akha vendors, or by not returning home to their village, e.g. for Christmas or during school holidays, when the majority of other sellers do. Furthermore, Akha micro-entrepreneurs accept harsh working environments in busy, crowded, partly polluted tourist centers where they frequently have to deal with drunken customers.

In this chapter, I introduced the two core categories of “being mobile” and “mobilization of capital” that relate to a range of practices and conditional structures explaining survival, success, and constraints of Akha ethnic minority enterprises in tourist urban contexts. The categories are results of inductive and deductive thinking and underwent several steps of abstraction. The results are grounded on empirical data and were compared with existing research, but still remain constructs of the researcher (Charmaz 2008).

FIGURE 29: OVERVIEW FORMS OF CAPITAL AND RELATED OUTCOMES



Source: Own illustration

When asking Akha vendors directly to explain the factors of success in the urban souvenir business, I received two strands of answers. The first category denotes rational choice answers referring to money, language, and communication skills while the second category of answers all involved the Thai word *duang* that can be translated as luck, destiny or fate as the main explanation.

I think this business depends on fate. If today I can sell very well, then I am lucky but if I can't sell very well I have bad luck. That's it. (Interview with Akha vendor, Bangkok, 17.09.2008)

Studies in the field of personal psychology distinguish between internal locus of control where individuals believe that they can control events around them and external locus of control referring to individuals who consider themselves as powerless to control outside events rather believing in fate or destiny (Rotter 1975). Interestingly, also successful and experienced sellers who were aware of various opportunity structures referred to the factor of fate or luck. In a study on Vietnamese small-traders, Kirsten Endres (2013) argues from an anthropological perspective that luck “may be secured by moral virtue, enhanced by ritual practice, reciprocated in ritual exchange, distributed among kin, and transferred to future generations” (p. 362). Bourdieu (1990b), however, refers to the concept of “amor fati” (p. 63), which manifests itself as incorporated structure in the habitus and represents and acknowledges the dominant social order (Schwingel 2009, p. 68). In other words, actors remain embedded in their social class position and are content with what they have. Without rational calculation or deliberate estimation of the chances of success, actors ensure correspondence between the a priori probability conveyed on an event and the a posteriori probability that can be established on the basis of past experience (Bourdieu 1990, p. 63). Akha migrants are strongly influenced by past and present experiences and socialization processes that shape everyday practice in the field of urban ethnic minority enterprises. Their situation of a “perennial minority group” (Geusau 1983, p. 249) partly continues in urban tourist contexts. Yet, research results have also shown that Akha minority street vendors are not entirely controlled by external structural forces, but have shown themselves to be active and creative agents who pursue their own goals and ideas. Their agency is shaped by economic, social, and cultural capital endowment and their capacity to mobilize and transform these resources.

9.3 RÉSUMÉ AND OUTLOOK

To recapitulate, in this study I aimed to reconstruct the development of urban Akha souvenir businesses, analyze social as well as economic and politico-legal structure at various migrant destination areas,, and strive to understand strategies and everyday economic practices of ethnic minority vendors in Thailand's tourist areas. The research is based on nine months of ethnographic fieldwork in Thailand's urban tourist areas of Chiang Mai, Bangkok and the southern beachside areas deploying qualitative methods such as participant observation, semistructured interviews, personal network analysis, and informal conversations. In addition, I reviewed and analyzed secondary data material such as tourism and street vending statistics, law and regulations related to street vending, and reports by media and international organizations such as the ILO.

After outlining a literature review on the topics of ethnic minority entrepreneurs, street vending, and informality, I presented a range of 'sensitizing concepts' concerning social and mixed embeddedness, agency, mobility, and gender (chapter 2). In chapter three, I explicated my research approach by outlining procedures and challenges in the context of data collection and analysis. The following section (chapter 4) introduced the regional context by discussing the changing and enduring contexts of highland ethnic minorities in Thailand with special reference to the case of the Akha. The following chapters (5–9) presented the empirical results of the research as well as its contextualization with existing studies.

I described the evolvement of the souvenir business over time and space (chapter 5), outlined differences within the Akha vending groups in terms of types of migrants and migration, vending styles and gender (chapter 6), analyzed social relations to both insiders and outsiders (chapter 7), and identified specific economic and politico-legal opportunity structures at various sales and living locations (chapter 8). Finally, I connected all these identified and elaborated structures, contexts, developments, and actions into the two main categories and strategies of "being mobile" and "mobilization of capital" that operate on conscious and unconscious levels of agency and are interrelated to micro, meso, and macro structures.

It was the goal of this study to integrate structural and action-oriented perspectives and as a consequence, expand existing research designs in the field of street vending

and ethnic minority enterprises. The majority of studies either follow structural approaches which explain economic action as a response to larger structures, socio-cultural explanations exclusively focusing on ethnic or social networks, or theories of action following the postulate of rational choice calculation. By combining an analysis of micro and macro structures with a more nuanced understanding of agency via concepts of forms of capital and habitus which also pay attention to internalized practices under the level of consciousness, everyday strategies such as gendered types of sales styles and mechanisms of altruistic and self-centered social relations were uncovered.

This dissertation also contributes to concepts and studies of ethnic minority enterprises that hitherto have neglected to examine divergent opportunity structures of urban regions within one country. Case study research in this field tends to focus on one migrant source or destination region or on a combination of both, but hardly addresses the differences between migrant destination areas. Akha vendors realize differences in terms of urban and local characteristics, be it in terms of tourist profiles or practices of law enforcement through municipal police, and pursue 'mobile strategies' and 'capital mobilization and transformation' in order to deal with various locations. At the same time, such local configurations are linked to macro developments such as international tourism development or national legislative power.

In the regional Thai context, this study widened the academic perspective on highland ethnic minorities from classical village and urban Chiang Mai contexts to the capital city Bangkok and beachside destinations such as Phuket, Koh Samui or Pattaya.

Despite undergoing political turmoil and other crises, Thailand's international and domestic tourism is expected to experience further growth. Tourism statistics and trends indicate a growing importance of Asian tourists, especially from China and the Middle East. Akha vendors have shown that they can partly adapt their sales strategies towards new tourism markets as observed in Bangkok's *Soi arab*. Most Akha vendors, however, also stated that competition in recent years has become harsher and souvenir earnings have decreased. Until recently, the discovery of new sales areas in Thailand's southern tourist areas was a way to expand and balance Akha business.

Akha pioneers in Chiang Mai and later in Bangkok and further south could accumulate both social and economic capital. Today Akha vendors in most of the sales areas pursue a self-exploitation strategy involving long working hours and difficult working conditions in order to succeed economically. Their income is still higher than bad paid wage labor, but bigger savings for future investments have become rare. Even though the majority of Akha migrants regard their work as self-employed souvenir sellers as temporary and formulate ideas to move back to their highland villages, a number of younger Akha females can imagine a life in urban contexts or international migration in the context of cross-cultural marriage.

Future research on highland ethnic minorities in Southeast Asia has to acknowledge that an increasing number of hilltribe people lives temporarily, permanently, and multilocally in urban areas beyond the city of Chiang Mai. While this study explores Akha embeddedness and agency in various migrant destination areas, further aspects to be studied include changing household arrangements in the light of increasingly complex forms of mobility. Another interesting question concerns the 'left behind' husbands and families in the villages and how they are affected by urban migration. Such research would require empirical investigation in both migrant home and source areas. Moreover, keeping in mind that the urban ethnic minority souvenir business outside of Chiang Mai represents a rather recent phenomenon, future research regarding the relationship of tourism, ethnic or migrant diversity, and urban regions is necessary. The question of how migrants and urban or tourist regions alike can benefit from mobility-driven diversity and how power relations are negotiated between different groups and stakeholders requires further comparative perspectives and evidence. This may include an analysis of agency and embeddedness of different mobility types such as international labor or highly skilled migrants in the tourism sector, but also long-term tourists, international retirement or marriage migrants who – despite facing economic, social or political constraints – constitute central parts of urban and tourist landscapes.

10 REFERENCES

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ANNEX 1: LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Most of the interviews were carried out during my first field trip between August 2008 and February 2009 with Akha souvenir vendors (except otherwise specified). Based on a preliminary analysis of these interviews, more than one hundred informal conversations with various actors as well as observations were conducted in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket, Pattaya, Hua Hin, and Koh Samui until December 2013 (see chapter 3.5).

Inter-view Nr.	Female/ male	Nr. of participating interviewees	Vending style(s), function	Dlance	Date
1	female	1	mobile	Bangkok	24.08.2008
2	female	1	mobile	Bangkok	17.09.2008
3	female	1	mobile	Bangkok	17.09.2008
4	female	1	mobile	Bangkok	26.08.2008
5	female	1	mobile	Bangkok	04.09.2008
6	female	1	mobile	Bangkok	31.08.2008
7	female	1	mobile	Bangkok	01.09.2008
8	female	1	mobile	Bangkok	24.09.2008
9	females	2	mobile	Bangkok	02.09.2008
10	females	2	mobile	Bangkok	07.09.2008
11	female/ male	2	mobile	Bangkok	10.09.2008
12	female/ male	2	mobile/ semimobile	Bangkok	11.09.2008
13	female	1	mobile	Bangkok	29.09.2008
14	male	1	mobile	Bangkok	15.09.2008
15	female	1	mobile	Bangkok	19.09.2008
16	male	1	wage laborer	Bangkok	21.09.2008
17	female	1	mobile	Bangkok	25.09.2008
18	female	1	mobile	Bangkok	25.08.2008
19	female	1	Hotel Thaiwarie owner	Bangkok	28.09.2008
20	female	1	mobile	Bangkok	04.09.2008
21	male	1	mobile	Bangkok	14.09.2011
22	male	1	fixed	Chiang Mai	17.12.2008
23	female	1	semimobile	Chiang Mai	16.01.2009
24	female	1	semimobile	Chiang Mai	17.01.2009
25	female	1	mobile, fixed	Chiang Mai	16.01.2009
26	female	1	mobile	Chiang Mai	22.01.2009
27	female	1	mobile, semimobile, fixed, online	Chiang Mai	26.01.2009
28	female/ male	2	mobile	Koh Samui	07.09.2011
29	female	1	mobile	Koh Samui	08.09.2011
30	female	1	Mobile	Koh Samui	09.09.2011

ANNEX 2: CURRICULUM VITAE

Date of birth: 15.02.1982, Nationality: Austria

University Assistant, Department of Geography and Regional Research, University of Vienna

Editor of the Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies (ASEAS)

Research Interests:

Tourism studies, migration studies and 'ethnic' business, socio-economic and cultural transformation, qualitative research methods, Southeast and East Asia



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Education

- 06/ 2014 Dissertation in Theoretical and Applied Geography, University of Vienna
Title of dissertation:
Migrating Into Tourist Business – Agency and Embeddedness of Ethnic Minority Street Vendors in Thailand
- 12/ 2006 Master thesis (Msc) in Theoretical and Applied Geography, University of Vienna
Title of master thesis:
Ethnotourismus in Nordthailand am Beispiel zweier touristisch unterschiedlich entwickelter Hilltribedörfer – Handlungen und Wahrnehmungen aus der Perspektive der Bereisten (Ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand)

Further education and training

11–12/2012	Media training for scientists. University of Vienna
11/2012	Developing Multiple-Choice-Exams. University of Vienna
12/2011	Communications and conversation techniques. Twin Solutions Vienna
04/2011	“Der Rote Faden” in English Academic Writing and how to spin it. University of Vienna
03/2011	Coaching Workshop for Scientists. FWF (Austrian Science Fund) Vienna
12/2010	“Introduction to Atlas.ti” (Software for qualitative data analysis). University of Vienna
10/2010	“Typo3 Software for editors”. University of Vienna
05–06/2009	“Writing Scientific Texts in English”. University of Vienna
11–12/2008	Language course in Thai Conversation at the American University Alumni Language Center (A.U.A) in Chiang Mai, Thailand
06–09/2007	Language courses in Thai Conversation and Thai Reading & Writing at the American University Alumni Language Center (A.U.A) in Chiang Mai, Thailand

Research activities

12/2013	Thailand: ASEA-UNINET research fellow at the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia, Mahidol University, Thailand
02–03/2013	Thailand/Laos/Vietnam: Organization and guidance of the Scientific excursion Southeast Asia to Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, organized by the Department of Geography and Regional Research at the University of Vienna, Austria.
06–09/2011	Thailand/Laos/Vietnam: Fieldwork for dissertation in Bangkok and Koh Samui Island, Thailand. Organization and guidance of the scientific excursion “Southeast Asia” to Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, organized by the Department of Geography and Regional Research at the University of Vienna, Austria.
08/2009	Thailand/Austria: Research for documentation project “Hans Manndorff’s anthropological fieldwork in Northern Thailand (1961–1965)” in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, Thailand as well as in Austria. In cooperation with the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center in Bangkok and Chiang Mai University.
08/2008– 02/2009	Thailand: fieldwork for dissertation in Bangkok, Phuket and Chiang Mai hosted by the Center for Ethnic Studies and Sustainable Development (CESD) of Chiang Mai University and the National Research Council of Thailand. (additional shorter fieldwork periods in 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013)
01–04/2006	Thailand: fieldwork for master thesis in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Mae Hong Son province (“Ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand”) hosted by the Social Research Institute of Chiang Mai University and the National Research Council of Thailand.

Scholarships/Awards

2013	Theodor Körner Award: Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven auf soziale Bewegungen in Südostasien. [Social movements in Southeast Asia]. A project of the Austrian society for Southeast Asian Studies (SEAS), (project head Dayana Parvanova)
2009	Scientific scholarship of the City of Vienna.
2008	Research scholarship of the University of Vienna.
2007	Thesis scholarship for Academic Research abroad (KWA), University of Vienna. Asea-Uninet Scholarship. Special grant of the state of Upper Austria.
2006	Thesis scholarship for Academic Research abroad (KWA), University of Vienna. Research Scholarship of the University of Vienna.
2005	Achievement scholarship of the University of Vienna.

Teaching

Department of Geography & Regional Research, University of Vienna, Austria (since 2009):

- Introduction to Scientific Thinking and Method
- Qualitative Research Methods
- Immigrant Entrepreneurs – the socio-cultural role of ‘ethnic’ economies in urban areas
- Ethnic Tourism. Equality in intercultural encounters?
- Field trip abroad: Southeast Asia – Rural Areas and Megacity Development
- Excursion: Southeast Asia and East Asia in Vienna

- Preparatory Course for the Scientific Excursion 'Southeast Asia'
- Southeast Asia: Socio-economic and demographic Transformations

Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Vienna, Austria (2010 and 2012)

- Ethnic Tourism. Forms, Structures and Power Relations

Department of Geography, Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, Maha Sarakham University, Thailand. (invited guest lecturer 2010)

- Human Geography
- Qualitative Research Methods for Geographers

SEAS (Society for South-East Asian Studies in Vienna) Study Experience Southeast Asia 2011 (invited lecturer 2011)

- Retirement Migration in Thailand
- Ethnic Tourism in Southeast Asia

Further work experience, projects, and volunteering

10/2011–07/2012	NGO Südwind (conscientious objector performing military service): <i>supporting public relations</i>
08–12/2009	Leopold Museum Vienna: <i>Co-development of the exhibition "Bambus, Blech und Kalebassen – das andere Spielzeug"</i> and guidance of special interest tours
2009	Digital Database on Anthropological Archives (The Collection of Hans Manndorff), in cooperation with the Social Research Institute of Chiang Mai University and the Princes Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre
2005–2006	Co-organization of EGEA (European Geography Association) conferences and workshops in Bad Aussee and the Kleinwalsertal
2005–2007	Organization of „Asian Evenings“ (lectures, book presentations, film presentations) at the Department of Geography and Regional Research at the University of Vienna, Austria (together with Rainer Einzenberger)
04/2004	Volunteering for FAIRTRADE Austria
02/2004	Internship for Südwind-Agentur in Wien
2000–2002	Staff (interviewer) for TRICONSLT (Wirtschaftsanalytische Forschung)

Memberships

- SEAS: Society for South-East Asian Studies in Austria
- EGEA: European Geography Association for students and young geographers
- DGA: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Asienkunde (German Society for Asian Studies)
- DGA-Nachwuchsgruppe Asienforschung
- ÖGG: Österreichische Geographische Gesellschaft (Austrian Geographical Society)

Additional skills

- Languages: German (mother tongue), Englisch (fluent), Thai (good, spoken), Indonesian (basic), Italian (basic), Spanish (basic), Latin (six years)
- Computer literacy: Office, SPSS, ATLAS.Ti, Photoshop, Mindmanager, EndNote, F4 – transcription software, Windows, Apple OS

Conference and workshop presentations

- Ethnic Minority Street Vendors in Thailand's Tourist Areas, 7th EuroSEAS Conference, University of Lisbon, 02.–05.7.2013
- Barriers and Opportunities for Ethnic Minority Street Vendors in Thailand, AAG Annual Meeting, Los Angeles, USA, 09.–13.4.2013
- Migrating into Tourist Business. Agency and Mixed Embeddedness of Ethnic Minority Women in Thailand, GLTRG PhD Colloquium, University of Surrey, UK, 06.–07.09.2012
- *A Journey to Self-employment: Tourism and Ethnic Minority Enterprise in Thailand*, International Geographical Congress, University of Cologne, Germany, 26.–30.08.2012
- *Workshop leader: Anthropology of Tourism* (together with Claudia Dolezal), 7. Tage der Kultur- und Sozialanthropologie, University of Vienna, Austria, 24.–25.05.2012
- *Tourism and Migration: Ethnic minority entrepreneurs between self-fulfillment and self-exploitation*, Tourism and Hospitality Conference Suan Dusit Rajabhat University, Thailand, 30.03.2012
- *Southeast Asian Studies at the Department of Geography and Regional Research*, Conference of the Department of Development Studies, University of Vienna, Austria, 28.–29.10.2011
- *Migrating into Ethnic Business – Akha Entrepreneurs in Thailand's Urban and Touristic Areas*, 11th International Conference on Thai Studies, Bangkok Mahidol University, Thailand 26.–28.07.2011
- *Unequal Relations in Ethnic Tourism in the Greater Mekong Subregion*, 6th EUROSEAS (European Association for South East Asian Studies) conference, University of Goteborg, Sweden, 26.–28.08.2010
- *Hierarchien, Segmentation und soziale Netzwerke im Akha-Souvenirgeschäft – Eine Studie zu MigrantInnen in Thailand's urbanen Zentren*, Deutscher Geographentag 2009. Kongress für Wissenschaft, Schule und Praxis, Wien, 19. –26.09.2009
- *Networks, Segmentation and Social Capital of Migrant Women – Female Akha in Thailand's Urban Areas*, Tagung der DGA-Nachwuchsgruppe Asienforschung, Bonn, 03.–05.07.2009
- *For Sale – Selling off Authentic Hilltribe Culture to Tourists in Northern Thailand*, International Workshop on "Irreconcilable Differences? Ethnic Minorities and the State in Southeast Asia", Institut für China- und Südostasienforschung, Wien, 14.04.2008
- *Migrationssysteme und Netzwerke internationaler Akha-ArbeitsmigrantInnen in Asien*, Konferenz „Migration und Entwicklung“, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz (Deutschland), 16.11.2007
- *Hans Manndorff's anthropological Research on the Hilltribes of Northern Thailand*, International Workshop on "Cultural and Scientific Relations between Thailand and Austria", Institut für China- und Südostasienforschung, Wien, 07.11.2007
- *Hilltribetourismus in Nordthailand – Handlungen und Wahrnehmungen aus der Perspektive der Bereisten*, 3. Tage der Kultur- und Sozialanthropologie, Wien, 26.04.2007

- *Ethnotourismus in Nordthailand, dargestellt am Beispiel zweier touristisch unterschiedlich entwickelter Hilltribedörfer*, Tagung der DGA-Nachwuchsgruppe „Asienforschung“, Buchenau (Deutschland), 09.12.2006
- *Austrian Research on the Hilltribes of Northern Thailand after the Second World War*, International Workshop on “Austrian Research in Continental Southeast Asia”, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien, 03.11.2006

Invited lectures

- *Migration in die berufliche Selbstständigkeit – Chancen und Herausforderungen ethnischer Minderheiten in Thailand*, Vortrag im Rahmen der RV GLOBAL STUDIES: Welten in Bewegung. Neue Perspektiven auf Migration und Entwicklung, Universität Graz, Graz, 13.11.2013
- *Migration in die berufliche Selbstständigkeit – Chancen und Herausforderungen ethnischer Minderheiten in Thailand*, Vortrag im Rahmen der RV Migration und Entwicklung, Universität Wien, Wien, 14.10.2013
- *Tourism and Migration: Ethnic minority entrepreneurs between self-fulfilment and self-exploitation*, Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia, Thailand, Mahidol University, 29.03.2012
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ANNEX 3: ENGLISH SUMMARY

Rural-urban migration and related forms of mobilities of highland ethnic minorities in Thailand have become significant (Toyota 1998; Buadaeng, Boonyasaranai and Leepreecha 2002): Processes of socio-economic development and restructuring in both Thailand's mountain and urban areas have contributed to an increasing number of ethnic minorities living in the capital Bangkok as well as in medium-sized cities and tourist centers in the North and in the South of the country. Existing research on highland groups in Thailand has focused on village case studies while urban perspectives beyond the northern city of Chiang Mai have been neglected.

This doctoral study deals with the phenomenon of urban migration and ethnic minority business by means of the case of the minority group of Akha. A growing number of primarily female Akha have moved temporarily or permanently into Thailand's urban tourist areas in order to sell souvenirs. They have become micro-entrepreneurs or self-employed street vendors. This research aims to reconstruct and understand the Akha migratory processes into Thailand's urban tourist areas and to analyze agency perspectives of these micro-entrepreneurs as well as their embeddedness in social, political, and economic structures. I study strategies Akha entrepreneurs employ to succeed in the field of urban ethnic minority business and to meet constraints and challenges related to their work.

The research is informed by a range of sensitizing concepts acknowledging not only the concrete embeddedness of the entrepreneurial migrants in social networks, but also their embeddedness in the economic and politico-legal environment of the country and the specific area of settlement (Kloosterman and Rath 2001). In order to explain individual and collective agency, I draw on Bourdieu's concept of forms of capital and habitus. Consequently, this research focuses on the interplay of human agency of self-employed migrant street vendors and the structural forces they are confronted with. The question of self-determination versus external determination or agency versus structure is still unclear and is one of the pivotal issues in the entire debate about ethnic minority enterprise (Jones and Ram 2007, p. 60), and is especially interesting in the case of the underrepresented group of female entrepreneurs and self-employees (Henry 2007).

The research is guided by grounded theory principles as formulated by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (Strauss 1987; Corbin and Strauss 2008). Their approach acknowledges the importance of both action/interaction (agency) and structure and thus proves fruitful for the purposes of this study. The empirical data collection involved participant observation, informal conversations, semistructured interviews, and personal network analysis which were all conducted at the various living and working areas of Akha souvenir vendors across Thailand. Research results present the development of Akha souvenir businesses over time and space, distinctions within the group of Akha vendors, the role of social relations, and the location-specific economic and political conditions. I developed two core categories, "being mobile" and "mobilization of forms of capital" which have become central in order to explain the opportunities and success of migrant micro-entrepreneurs in urban-tourist contexts.

ANNEX 4: GERMAN SUMMARY

Land-Stadt Migration und verwandte Mobilitätsformen ethnischer Minderheiten haben in Thailand stark an Bedeutung gewonnen (Toyota 1998; Buadaeng, Boonyasaranai und Leepreecha 2002). Sozioökonomische Entwicklungen sowie verschiedene Transformationsprozesse in Thailands Stadt- und Bergregionen tragen zu einer steigenden Anzahl ethnischer Minderheiten, die in der Hauptstadt Bangkok sowie in mittelgroßen urbanen und touristischen Zentren im Norden und Süden des Landes leben, bei. Bisherige Minderheitenforschung in Thailand konzentrierte sich auf Studien in klassischen Dorfkontexten, was zu einer Vernachlässigung urbaner Perspektiven führte.

Die vorliegende Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit dem Phänomen urbaner Migration und ethnischer Ökonomie am Beispiel der Minderheitengruppe der Akha. Eine steigende Anzahl an überwiegend weiblichen Akha migriert temporär oder permanent in Thailands urban-touristische Gebiete, um Souvenirs zu verkaufen. Sie werden zu KleinstunternehmerInnen bzw. zu selbstständigen StraßenhändlerInnen. Die vorliegende Arbeit hat zum Ziel, Akha-Migrationsprozesse zu rekonstruieren und zu verstehen sowie die Handlungsspielräume der KleinstunternehmerInnen und deren Einbettung in soziale, politische und wirtschaftliche Strukturen zu analysieren. Dabei werden Strategien identifiziert und untersucht, die Akha-VerkäuferInnen anwenden, um im Feld urbaner ethnischer Ökonomien zu überleben und Erfolg zu haben.

Die Dissertation basiert auf einem konzeptuellen Rahmen, der nicht nur die Einbettung von MigrantInnen in soziale Netzwerke, sondern auch in breitere wirtschaftliche und politische Strukturen berücksichtigt (Kloosterman und Rath 2001). Um individuelle und kollektive Handlungsebenen zu erklären, beziehe ich mich auf Bourdieus Konzepte der Kapitalformen und Habitus. Folglich beschäftige ich mich mit dem Wechselspiel von Handlungsmöglichkeiten und Handlungseinschränkungen. Die Frage nach Selbstbestimmung versus Fremdbestimmung oder Praxis versus Struktur ist noch nicht ausreichend beantwortet und einer der zentralen Aspekte in den Debatten zu ethnischer Ökonomie (Jones und Ram 2007, S. 60), vor allem im Kontext der unterrepräsentierten weiblichen Unternehmerinnen und Selbstständigen (Henry 2007).

Die Forschung orientiert sich an den Prinzipien der Grounded Theory im Sinne von Anselm Strauss und Juliet Corbin (Strauss 1987; Corbin und Strauss 2008), die sowohl handlungsorientierte als auch strukturelle Analysekatoren zulassen. Die empirische Datenerhebung umfasste teilnehmende Beobachtungen, informelle Gespräche, semi-strukturierte Interviews und persönliche Netzwerkanalyse und wurde in den verschiedenen Arbeits- und Wohngebieten der Akha SouvenirverkäuferInnen durchgeführt. Forschungsergebnisse präsentieren die raum-zeitliche Entwicklung der Akha Souvenirökonomien, diskutieren Unterschiede innerhalb der Gruppe der Akha, analysieren die soziale Dimension wirtschaftlichen Handelns sowie die ortsspezifischen wirtschaftlichen und politischen Strukturen. Ich entwickelte zwei Kernkategorien, „being mobile“ und „mobilization of forms of capital“, welche die Möglichkeiten und den Erfolg von KleinstunternehmerInnen in urban-touristischen Kontexten erklären.

Hiermit erkläre ich,

dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit selbst verfasst und nur die angegebene Literatur verwendet habe,

dass ich dieses Dissertationsthema bisher weder im Inland noch im Ausland als Prüfungsarbeit vorgelegt habe,

dass diese Arbeit mit der von den BegutachterInnen beurteilten Arbeit übereinstimmt.

Wien, 23. März 2014

Alexander Trupp