



Beyond work and TESOL: an ethnographic exploration of culture and identity among resettled Karen

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Australian neoliberal policy discourses increasingly depict humanitarian entrants through narrow lenses focused on economic indicators. While important for bringing policy to bear on social problems, this limits field-of-view by imposing a singular reading of these groups as vulnerable, 'problem' populations. Alternatively, interpretive methods associated with qualitative ethnography offer a more synoptic apprehension. Since 2010, around 36 Karen families (refugees from Burma (Myanmar)) have settled in Tasmania. This ethnic group of permanent residents are visually, linguistically and culturally distinct in Burma – and remain so in Australia. Among the Karen, English proficiency and employment is low - in line with other humanitarian entrants – yet this means the subjective experiences of Tasmanian Karen remain unexplored. My use of ethnographic observation and visual methods has de-centred English-language use and yet allowed a picture of refugee journeys and resettlement experiences to develop. My use of photography, colour and symbol charts (using icons and Karen language) provide a discursive space for individuals to narrate their stories in their language and on their terms. This exploration sits outside dominant frameworks, adding depth and detail to descriptions of settlement experiences.