TO BUILD A HOME:

THE MATERIAL CULTURES, GENDER RELATIONS AND THE CULTIVATION OF

MEANING BY KAREN REFUGEES FROM BURMA

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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to trouble the concept of home being rooted in one place by further understanding how refugees create a sense of belonging across their sites of displacement and settlement. Their mobility and flows consist of punctuated starts and stops and often a history of violence. It is from this past experience that they make new meanings in a new place of residence. Since the late 1980s Karen refugees from Burma have been seeking refuge along the Thai-Burma border region. They flee persecution and gendered violence at the hands of the central Burmese armed forces to be protected legally by international regulations and materially by international aid organizations. Though Thailand is not a signatory member of the 1951 UN Convention Relating to Refugees that would recognize these individuals as Convention refugees, the Thai State does allow them to live in camps with limited freedoms and rights. It is within this context that Karen refugees make a home through their material cultures and relationship to food. These practices are influenced by their power negotiations with various stakeholders and by gender relations. I argue that by analyzing these embodied practices on a smaller scale, we can glean new meanings of home, including the resistance to existing structural regulations, nuances and richness of everyday life while being displaced. It is precisely through the mundane rhythms of living that we learn of how issues such as loss, citizenship, renewal and dissatisfaction all participate in creating a place, a home, that is not rooted to a singular location but rather constructed and deconstructed through life and space.

Acknowledgements

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Myanmar Thailand border

As at end April 2008

FICSS
Field Information and
Coordination Support Section
Division of Operational Services

Sources:
UNHCR, CCSDPT Thailand,
Global Insight digital mapping
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The boundaries and names shown
and the designations used on this
map do not imply official endorsement
or acceptance by the United Nations.

Legend:

	Capital
	UNHCR Regional office
	UNHCR Representation
	UNHCR Field office
○	Location of interest
	International boundary
	Province boundary
	Main road
	Secondary road

Refugee camps / Populations

▲	Karen /	100,124
△	Karenni /	21,259
	Total :	121,383

Elevation
(Above mean sea level)

	3,250 to 4,000 metres
	2,500 to 3,250 metres
	1,750 to 2,500 metres
	1,000 to 1,750 metres
	750 to 1,000 metres
	500 to 750 metres
	250 to 500 metres
	0 to 250 metres
	Below mean sea level

Printed: 21 May 2008

mapping@unhcr.org

UNHCR Myanmar Thailand Border (2008)

http://www.unhcr.org/4416887c0.html

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Humans break themselves in… [or] learn to hold themselves.

-Henri Lefebvre in <u>Critique of Everyday Life Volume III: From Modernity to Modernism</u> (2005)

You could have a kitchen like that someday. It costs dearly, but home always does.

-From the film <u>Munich</u> (2005)

Chapter One: Introduction

POSITIONING

One remembers very little as a six year old child, or at least that's what parents tell themselves when they pack the bags, sign the papers and hastily depart one's home in the midst of political upheaval. The truth of the matter is that you remember a fragmented version of it all, a version that you come back to and meditate on to keep the place in mind. Migration takes its emotional toll when a part of you breaks in those airports and cold Canadian mornings. A part of you hardens to weather the disappointments, loneliness and recognition of the vast opportunities that lie ahead precisely because you fled. It's only later, when you study and live with those political rights and freedoms, that you thank your parents; when the privileges you've acquired are so banal that you can sometimes take it for granted. Being uprooted not only changes your material conditions but your sense of self and conceptualizations of home.

Those who stay and those who leave experience very different things. While some live out the lives of immigrants and all that it involves, lives continue in the places we left behind. Your family experiences the constraints of political fear and economic struggle, those very concepts that you speak about in class. So that is where my commitment to this project comes from. What is at stake was rooted into that six year old girl, waiting for departure in May 1989 who lost her home in Yangon, Burma and ended up in a liminal state of in-between. Because even when I want to belong, someone will find a way for me to be from somewhere else. But mostly this project is for those who live day in and day out in Burma, Thailand or the Thai-Burma border with their realities of home and limited political freedoms.

There have been different approaches to writing up this dissertation. For several drafts I kept my distance and wanted to get the job done with the precision of a scientist. But in this version I am finally present. I am here to tell the stories of citizenship, loss, endurance and contentment that are part of the life narratives of my respondents. I'm also here to fully embed myself in the midst of this document, ready to be held accountable for what is written and said.

PURPOSE

When I planned this project of studying the conceptualization of 'home' within displacement with the guidance of my committee, there were several aspects that were taken into consideration. One, where am I going to position the project theoretically and how can this research contribute to the fields of cultural and feminist geography? Two, how can the findings inform policy for not only how refugees are managed but engaged with productively as equal stakeholders? Therefore, throughout this dissertation you will find reference to both the aspects of refugee governance and the lived experiences involved in displacement. I chose to work with members of the Karen community, one of many ethnic[1] groups that lives within the borders of Burma[2] (aka Myanmar), because when proposing this project they had been newly resettled in

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[1] Ethnicity, which is both a way for individuals to refine their identity and how social groups emerge when people form affiliations with others according to similar backgrounds, is socially-socially constructedconstructed. (Please refer to Dictionary of Human Geography (4th edition) (2000) on pages 235–237)

[2] I chose to use the term "Burma" instead of the current formal name of "Myanmar" throughout this dissertation. Though the name "Burma" is problematic since it was bestowed during the colonial era to describe the majority ethnic group, the Burmese, it is equally complicated how the name "Myanmar" came into being. The country's name was changed to "Myanmar" in 1989 by the military junta that took hold of power after the violent ruptures of 1988. Having lived through this historical moment with my family, I choose to not acknowledge that political maneuver in 1989 or the rulers associated with it by continuing to call my former home Burma.

Canada and were facing challenges in acculturating due to issues of literacy, lack of employment, culture shock and health. What emerged was strong leadership that helped, not only to bear the hardships, but also contributed to the capabilities to thrive in this new home and political context. Not only are they devoted to their faith and to each other but also to their past, which is compelling. It is through the examination of my research objectives that I found that these attachments to home are equally as urgent at the Thai-Burma border and perhaps even more so because the only thing that separates them from the Karen State is a river, the Salween River to be exact, which is the very physical thing that they crossed in the first place.

As graduate students we quickly learn that a doctoral degree is very much a process. You take each setback as a learning opportunity and the chance to grow as a researcher, educator and person. Of course I am committed first and foremost politically, to find sustainable and dignified solutions for the displaced Karen people who are part of one of the longest protracted refugee situations in the world. I hope also that political reforms in Burma improve negotiations between the different ethnic parties within the nation and that this state of transition will lead to cooperation, the respect of human rights and democracy. But many of the stories I heard were those of violence and resilience; to be constant in the face of precarity. While in Burma, I was raised by my nanny who is a woman of Karen descent. Having parents who were fully committed to the demands of their careers, I spent much of my time with her as a child and I caught a word here or there when she was speaking with her friends. I caught glimpses of family members, villages and landscapes. I kept thinking of her being away from those joys when she was in Yangon with me. I thought of how she lived alone. So in the stories that I listened to and

analyzed I always saw her and her longing for that place, much like the longing that all of my respondents spoke of.

Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to provide background on how, since the late 1980s, political violence has created displacement from the Karen State in Burma to the Thai-Burma border region and how resettlement become one of the most viable solutions to what had become a protracted refugee situation. With deeper understanding of this conflict, one begins to witness how being in exile nurtures longing and desire for a place from one's past and to feel at home in one's present. The specific details about the policies and programs that the Karen refugees engage with in Canada illustrates the interventions by various parties to make the acculturation process easier. However, the success of these initiatives does not necessarily consider more abstract negotiations, like creating home and a sense of belonging. My findings about the role of their material cultures and relationships to food in conceptualizing the meaning of home address this gap in program implementation and demonstrate why these practices need to be taken into consideration when working with displaced populations.

POLITICAL CONTEXT

Numbering around 4 million, the Karen people mainly live in the southeast region of Burma. Since the late 1950s, the civil strife between the central military government and dissident groups in Burma has caused the displacement of Karen refugees (CIC, 2009). They flee the practices of armed groups, including the confiscation of farmland, forced labour and gendered violence. Though the Royal Thai government is not a signatory member of the 1951

Convention Relating to Refugees, which means that while policy-wise they are not committed to protecting refugees or the practice of *non-refoulement*, they do allow those who seek refuge to live in temporary settlements along the Thai-Burma border. Therefore, though they are not recognized as legal persons and can be jailed and deported back to Burma if they are found outside of the camp's limits, they have resided in this region since the late 1980s, making this one of the longest protracted refugee situations in the world (Dudley, 2010). The political instability in the Karen State continues to this day, which influences waves of displacement and prevents those who have fled to Thailand to return to Burma. Approximately 140,000 refugees live in nine camps along the Thai-Burma border, many of them who affiliate themselves with the Karen language and culture. The Karen ethnic category is difficult to define due to the diverse sub-groups within it but are generally understood to be geographically located from Eastern Myanmar to Northern Thailand. The religious practices include Christian, Buddhist and local faiths and the languages range from Karenni, Sgaw, Pwo amongst 20-25 other dialects (CIC, 2009).

In 2005, the Thai government agreed to participate in the large-scale resettlement of Karen refugees located within their borderlands and the UNHCR deemed Karen individuals to be a priority group. This international project ran from 2005-2008 where approximately 20,000 refugees of Karen and of other ethnic-minority groups from Myanmar were resettled to the US, Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, Norway and Ireland. Some of the challenges that they faced while living in Thailand included having limited rights and privileges, compromised physical security and lack of opportunities for

education and employment. The resettlement initiative hoped to mitigate some of these issues

amongst others (CIC, 2009).

CANADA: POLICY FRAMEWORK

Considered to be one of the more sustainable answers to the security requirement of

refugees, third country resettlement follows the guidelines in the "Agenda for Protection" by the

UNHCR (UNHCR, 2003). This political declaration, along with the Immigration and Refugee

Protection Act (IRPA), which passed as law in 2001 in Canada, provides the groundwork for the

Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program to assist refugees who are based in countries

throughout the world. The refugees are defined as either being government-assisted refugees

(GARs) or privately sponsored refugees (PSRs). A new category called Blended visa-office

referrals (BVOR), launched in 2013, is also now in place which involves a collaboration between

the UNHCR and the government of Canada to match eligible refugees with private sponsors in

Canada (CIC, 2015). Not only does the UNHCR guide practice, but they play a key role in the

resettlement process, which begins through their referrals of refugees. Throughout the selection

process, which involved several interviews and a health examination, the Canadian government

relied on referrals from the UNHCR. It is important to remember, however, that only refugees

who were registered or reregistered with the UNHCR in 2004 or 2005 as Convention refugees

were eligible for this program and those who arrived at the camps after 2005 do not qualify for

state-sponsored resettlement (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny, 2011). The CIC then conducts a

background check on a case-by-case basis to ensure that they do not pose a security threat and

will also assess the condition of their health. In 2009, they referred over 128,500 refugees to be

assessed, 30,542 of which were from Burma. This initiative came in the aftermath of policy

changes in UNHCR that wanted to increase the number of refugees they were settling, to draw

from a more diverse groups for resettlement and to make the criteria more flexible so that more

long-standing resolutions are offered for refugees (Pressé and Thomson, 2007). The UNHCR

has a prominent role in the lives of Karen refugees at Mae La camp in Thailand, which is where I

conducted my research, since they document new arrivals, register them for food-aid and refer

them to other support services.

Refugees account for 10% of newcomers living in Canada and the motivations of the

country's resettlement program are humanitarian rather than economic (Yu et al., 2007). In 2010,

the IRPA was amended to place more emphasis on the protection needs of the refugees versus

their "ability to establish," which in turn deemed groups from long-standing protracted situations

like the Karen to be a priority (Hiebert and Sherrell, 2009). The basis for the selection process is

not the merit of their language ability or literacy, which seeks to eliminate prior histories of the

most highly educated or experienced individuals being selected for resettlement. These policy

changes also posed challenges for settlement agencies who now had to meet the needs of refugee

populations who faced certain challenges. Beginning in 2003, when the first post-IRPA GARs

landed in Canada, the profile of GARs has included more multi-barriered individuals, including

those with low literacy levels in their original languages and significant physical and mental

health issues, as well as increased numbers of single-headed households, large households, and a

much higher number of children and youth who were born and raised in refugee camps with

limited exposure to formal education (Hiebert and Sherrell, 2009: 35). These factors contribute

to how living in North America may pose different types of challenges to government-sponsored refugees as compared to other groups who migrate to Canada. The approximate number of GARs each year is around 7300-7500 although in 2012 the number did decrease to 5412 (CCR, 2013).

In 2006 the Canadian government, agreed to resettle 1,800 Karen individuals from the Thai-Burma border from Mae La Oon and Mae Ra Ma Luang camps, which are located in remote regions. Recruiting from long-standing protracted situations is a relatively new process and that is why the resettlement experience of the Karen will provide valuable insight for future strategies. Group processing itself, which was formulated in collaboration between CIC and UNHCR, involves the common protection of a group of refugees and is in its early stages of development since it was first used only in 2003. An evaluation of its successes and failures will encourage refinement of the initiative, but it is clear that group processing certainly informs how participants in the program cultivate their sense of home (CIC, 2009). The practice of group processing is different from prior initiatives that would aim to resettle groups of individuals from various geographical regions rather than focusing on one area or population. It is efficient to process refugees from large populations in a certain geographic locale when integration into the host nation or repatriation are not feasible options. Additionally, since the Karen could not rely on a pre-existing population to informally provide settlement services, to assist with finding employment quickly, or resource referrals, it served them to be resettled together rather than being spread out throughout Canada. Social capital is one of the most important resources on hand for the Karen refugees since integration is further enhanced by the existence of these networks (Simich, 2003; Lamba and Krahn, 2003). More specifically, social bonds

(relationships connecting members of a group) and social bridges (links between different groups) are important aspects of social capital in the experience of Karen refugees (Ager and Strang, 2008). Social bonds encourage the creation of feelings of belonging rather than diminishing integration and the formation of bonds and bridges work through each other (Ager and Strang, 2008). There may also be benefits to mental health with lower instances of depression due to the supports within the community. What remains to be further explored is the extent to which the groups feel economically, socially and politically integrated into Canadian society after they have been provided with legal status. Put differently, one needs to explore the degree to which they feel at 'home' in Canada, especially since strategies have been put into place to settle them together.

The first wave of Karen refugees (810 people) arrived in 2006 and by 2007 they had facilitated the migration of approximately 2000 individuals from several refugee camps in the region. By 2010, over 3,900 Karen refugees were living in Canada, with 95% of them considered to be GARs and 5% are defined as PSRs (Wood et al., 2011; CIC, 2009). The majority were resettled through group processing and a small number were processed through Joint Assistance Sponsorship (JAS) because of their high-needs situation. They were settled all throughout Canada, except for Quebec, and most were assigned to Ontario (40%) and the Prairies (38%) followed by BC and a few families in the Atlantic provinces (CIC, 2009). In most of the cases, the refugees choose to continue living in the province they migrated to (90% in Ontario and Alberta) but those in the Atlantic provinces and Saskatchewan reported more instances of secondary migration (Okonny-Myers, 2010). Those who do decide to move after initial resettlement cite the desire to be closer to family and friends along with the appeal of

living in larger cities as the motivating factors (UNHCR, 2011). Demographically, over half of those settled were male (53%) and a large proportion of the group was children or youth. The presence of so many young people amongst the resettled Karen meant that service providers had to organize access to education and help facilitate childcare. As government sponsored refugees they are provided with financial support for one year after which they are eligible to apply for social assistance if they have not found employment within this time period.

PLACES OF TRANSITION: THAILAND AND CANADA

My study of the creation of home by Karen refugees draws from three different sites. Since I am interested in the conceptualization of home within flows of movement, conducting research in different locations was an intentional aspect of the design. The first research location is within refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border and the second and third in the two Canadian cities of Toronto and Thunder Bay after they have been resettled as government-sponsored refugees. In Toronto, most of the interviews were with GARs, but although there are GARs currently living in Thunder Bay, the majority of my respondents in this city were mainly privately sponsored through church organizations.

Due to the continued strife in Southeast Asia, many of the inhabitants have lived in the refugee camp for over twenty years while others are born as stateless people in the camp (Brees, 2012). Although a cease-fire agreement was negotiated in 2012 between the central military government and Karen National Union, there are still periods of instability. Since repatriation to Burma, which is the wish of some refugees, may take some time to be established and

displacement from the country will continue to take place in the foreseeable future, it is critical to interrogate whether and how these individuals create a sense of home while living as a displaced person in the camp and in the liminal space that is the border (Mydans, 2012).

I have provided an overview of the policies guiding the practice of resettling Karen refugees in Thailand to Canada and I will now highlight some of the curriculum utilized to assist in the lived experience of seeking refuge in Mae La and migrating to a new nation. While living in the camp the inhabitants rely on international aid organizations for their sustenance, education, health and gender programs and skills development. They are able to receive this support once they are officially registered with the UNHCR and likeness and personal history is documented. The camp committee, which is elected within the population, is responsible for allocating an area of land on which to reside and the Thai-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) provides the materials for the construction or maintenance of these structures. Their mobility is limited to within the camp, which impacts their ability to seek employment and access medical care (TBBC, 2004; TBBC, 2008a). This general summary of life in a camp at the Thai-Burma border helps to demonstrate what they must transition from when migrating to North America.

Prior to arriving in Canada ISAP funds the Canadian Orientation Abroad (COA) program which are a series of classes to prepare them for life in North America, although only a small number of them receive this training. These classes were well-received and suggested improvements include providing community specific information, discussing the different options for sponsorship, using audio-visual material, addressing the emotional aspects of resettlement, having longer training times and beginning the life-skills training at the camp (CIC, 2009). In the case of the Karen, International Organization for Migration (IOM) and

International Rescue Committee (IRC) jointly facilitated this initiative to advise them on the settlement process and the hindrances they may face with integration, and the existing resources to help them overcome these challenges (CIC, 2009; Key informant from IOM; January 17, 2011; head of IOM Mae Sot office; Mae Sot, Thailand; Key informant from IRC; February 22, 2011; resettlement advisor; Mae Sot, Thailand).

The Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), which is funded by the federal government in all provinces except Quebec, sustains the refugees through 23 designated centres across Canada. The financial backing of RAP has remained consistent since 1998 although in 2010 there were proposals to increase funding, re-evaluate the selection criteria for resettlement and amend policies for the protection of refugees (CIC, 2009). The support is in the form of income subsidy for a year, temporary shelter at the reception site upon arrival, help finding housing and referral to other CIC settlement programs. These settlement services include the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP), Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), HOST and other provisions for their health and education (CIC, 2009). Privately sponsored refugees and asylum seekers are also eligible to take part in the CIC programs but the source and length of the financial support may take different forms. The report *Assessment of the Karen Refugee Resettlement Initiative in 2006 and 2007* suggests that providing advance notification to coordinate partnerships with local settlement centres, offering information about arrivals to educational and health institutions to plan for specialized program implementation, devoting more time to orientation and encouraging the formation of social networks will improve service delivery (CIC, 2009).

Resettlement is a process that involves several partners and reliance on community resources. There are challenges associated with measuring the success of settlement services at promoting integration, however, the most commonly used benchmarks include employment status and earnings, language proficiency, level of education, health and housing status (Yu et al., 2007). This is similar to the six measures of integration set out by the UNHCR which are demographics, language proficiency, housing, employment status, the reception provided by host communities, and feelings of belonging (UNHCR, 2010). Of these categories, finding a place to belong is both difficult to articulate and quantify. In equal measure, being at home and creating attachment to a location are not mutually exclusive but very much go hand in hand. The refugees who have arrived in Canada face several barriers in these categories (Yu et al., 2007). Although they earn lower incomes than the Canadian average due to the younger average age (60% under 24 years of age) at time of landing and limited educational attainment, their earnings do increase over time (Hiebert, 2009; CIC, 2010). Though the government of Canada hopes to encourage integration through their settlement programs, the complexities associated with feeling a part of a community and a nation can be far more difficult to take on. Policy-wise, they do want to make the transition of migrating to a new nation for refugee populations more accessible and straightforward.

Some of the most important initiatives that settlement agencies undertake to assist Karen refugees concern language-acquisition, health and housing upon arrival. Although only 10% of Karen government-sponsored refugees indicate that they are able to speak English, about half of them (49.6%) do take advantage of the available Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada

(LINC) courses (CIC, 2010). The completion rate is comparable to other immigrant groups even

though the literacy of refugees is below the average for immigrants (Derwing et al., 2010).

Different aspects of identity such as gender, legal status, race/ethnicity, age and ability are

not mutually exclusive but all contribute to the uneven access to healthcare. Compared to

refugees who originate from urban contexts, those from protracted situations need more health

support. Their ailments range from chronic conditions such as asthma and diabetes to treatable

ones like dental health, malnutrition, parasites (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny, 2011). This often

means that the treatment process requires both short-term assistance and long-term care through

a family physician. Their access to health care is also greatly improved in more urban regions.

Living with HIV may also be a reality for many refugees since statistics show that 1301 of

100,000 refugees who completed the mandatory screening tested positive. Support for managing

an autoimmune disease therefore needs to be available. Since many refugees have had exposure

to violence and trauma prior to migrating to Canada, they may need treatment for Post-traumatic

Stress Disorder (PTSD). The diagnosis of these conditions are further complicated by the

language barrier and unwillingness to share personal details with a healthcare professional.

These types of cultural challenges are demonstrated by *Teresa*, who is a Karen community

member recently resettled to Canada (October 5, 2011; Toronto, CA):

> When they provided counseling to the Karen there was a kind of culture clash, between
> the Karen clients and the service providers because the service provider tried to ask them
> something which they cannot conceptualize like the service provider ask them 'okay,
> tomorrow when you wake up and if you had a chance to change something in your life
> what would it be?' That kind of thing the Karen cannot conceptualize.

Seeking counseling itself can be a challenge if they are not located in large urban centres where such resources are available. This and other issues of mental health are of concern for government-assisted refugees (Beiser, 1993; Simich, 2003; Khanlou and Peter, 2005). There are also indications that the process of resettlement can be a very stressful experience since "the burden of the transportation loan is a major source of mental health and economic stress on GARs" (Access Alliance, 2008: 4) as demonstrated by research conducted on the Afghan, Karen and Sudanese refugees in Toronto. Specifically in Surrey, BC (Sherrell and ISSof BC, 2009), government-assisted refugees fear that their legal status will be in jeopardy if they do not repay their loan for transportation costs after one year. As a result, many are placed in a fragile state with regard to their economic wellbeing and their access to shelter from trying to repay their debt as quickly as possible. Issues of gendered experiences (Mulvihill et al., 2001) with resettlement need to also be considered when providing health care (CIC, 2010). Other aspects such as the country of origin, age, migration experience, changes in lifestyle and shifts in economic state all play a role in providing appropriate settlement support.

They also must grapple with issues of substandard housing conditions (Sherrell and ISSofBC, 2009) and this is especially prominent in cities such as Toronto and Vancouver with competitive and expensive rental markets where families will often spend half of their income solely for rent. Often having large families, they required larger units that are still cost-effective; there were also efforts to accommodate requests to find homes close to other community members. Along with their deteriorated living conditions (Murdie, Preston and Logan, 2009; Hiebert et al., 2008), there are also concerns about eviction and the safety concerns associated with overcrowding. Certain cultural practices such as chatting in the communal areas like the

hallways resulted in complaints from neighbours. Although the study does not focus solely on refugees, there are increasing issues with homelessness for newcomers as demonstrated by Preston et al. (2009) in their examination of York region. In the face of these problems, Government Assisted Refugees do take advantage of the support offered by settlement services more readily when compared to privately sponsored refugees or asylum seekers (CIC, 2009).

During the first two years of group resettlement the settlement agencies were mainly concerned with coordinating the travel arrangements for the refugees and providing the appropriate reception services upon arrival. Since many of the GARs had spent much of their lives living in more rural regions with limited access to education or formal employment, the settlement programs had to cater to these specialized needs by providing essential services concerning language, finding employment, offsetting culture shock and guidance within the home. Although coordinating the travel arrangements allowed groups to arrive and adapt together, this also posed challenges for settlement agencies who now had to support larger populations all at once (CIC 2010).

Clearly, the process of resettling to Canada has posed its own set of obstacles that members of the Karen community have tried to work through and transcend. The detailed statistics, facts and numbers noted throughout this chapter depicts one facet to the story, but there is also the emotional impact of migrating that one must consider. Wood et al. (2011) address the fairly recent resettlement of state-sponsored Karen refugees in Canada. Utilizing theories in emotional geographies, which examine the affective attachments that are associated with place, the authors demonstrate that resettlement involves complex emotional negotiations that are not always addressed by resettlement programs. Some of the challenges that the groups face once

they have arrived in Canada involve adjusting to the challenges of living in an urban environment, orienting themselves to their homes and negotiating with institutional systems, such as schools and hospitals. There are positive emotions associated with being able to successfully manage one's space, with accessibility being made easier by welcoming urban spaces and supportive institutions. There can also be frustrations and negative feelings associated with an inadequate transportation system that can foster feelings of isolation because they may not be able to connect with other community members on a regular basis. The authors argue that resettlement agencies provide both "hard" and "soft" infrastructure, with them defining "hard" forms involving material resources and "soft" ones the affective support systems that are a part of adapting to a new environment. These forms of infrastructure are not isolated entities but instead work with and through each other.

It's precisely these "soft" infrastructures that I am interested for this dissertation. In this introduction I provide specific policies involved with resettlement in Canada but even within the camp context, the theoretical reasoning behind the strategies for management are not so dissimilar. Survival is often the key objective and therefore these states of urgency are handled very materially with scant social consideration. What can get lost in the implementation of management plans is the emotional terrain and meanings behind feeling lost, isolated and "nowhere." That is why "softer" aspects of displacement and adaptation matter and need to enter the conversation. In too many cases politicians and aid workers don't always account for the other variable: time. When years have passed, many a life takes on a rhythm and one learns those routines necessary for survival. Now comes the question of thriving and feeding those other needs and desires of having self-worth and feeling secure. Though these everyday

negotiations may seem ordinary, what is at stake at this scale is still meaningful, which is why I pose the questions that I do.

KEY FRAMES

I am framing my study of 'home,' with support from the work of Blunt and Dowling (2006), Brickell (2013; 2011), Harker (2009), Brun and Fabos (2015) amongst others, as a multi-scalar site that is both real and imagined and a venue for power negotiations. The many facets of these theoretical principles ensure that 'home' is an ever-political site that engages with the public and private realms. Being far from static, it is the place where comfort, violence or a combination of both co-exists. So what are the nuances of making 'home' within the starts and stops that are often involved with displacement? Moments of both mobility and immobility make up many of the histories of those fleeing persecution. Therefore, in those instances where they lack legal recognition and are living in a country where they may not even be wanted, how do they practice their existence?

In Chapter Two entitled "Mobilities and the Creation of Place" I consider the development in scholarship that contributes to the theorization of 'home' and how the strategies and practices for its creation and maintenance serve fertile ground for political and personal acts. This rich history is composed of interventions from the humanistic, feminist and critical scholars within geography and the social sciences. Firstly the home is declared to be a site of significance (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977), and then is further refined as a place that is socially-mediated (Massey, 1994; Harvey, 1996). Being a contested-site that is not free from violence or

disempowerment (Rose, 1993), this location is a continual work in progress (Bourdieu, 1984; de Certeau, 1984). With the increasing mobility (Thrift, 1996) and immobility (Mountz, 2011) of individuals, goods and information, the creation of a place to belong can be nurtured through flows of movement that allow for the cultivation of new meanings (Cresswell, 2006). These works serve to ground current dialogues that will continue to push for why these everyday and often overlooked aspects of our lives matter.

When discussing the Diasporic engagements of Karen refugees and other displaced groups, how they make meanings in their new places of residence exist relationally to their former lives (Trapp, 2015; Fabos, 2015; Hopkins, 2010). It is precisely through these attachments and the management of these longings that their transnational acts become more defined when related to the home-making activities of food consumption, the construction and maintenance of shelter and border-making and crossing strategies. Transnationalism is influenced by the globalizing processes that are creating a more interconnected world across space and time. It is defined as the social, political and economic ties that individuals maintain with more than one nation-state (Goldring and Krishnamurti, 2007). These transboundary acts can assist in the formation of identities, multiple conceptualizations of home and continued interest in political issues. Attachment is integral to the performance of transnationalism because these individuals feel that their sense of belonging and sense of self is contingent on associating with more than one place (Capo, 2015; Grabska, 2010; Al-Sharmani, 2010). Levitt and Schiller (2004) argue that some people may feel that they are transnational subjects without actually practicing transnational acts, which they term to be 'transnational ways of belonging' while others are the opposite, or practice 'transnational ways of being.' This distinction is important

since the hyper-mobile form of transnationalism is reliant on gender, class and ethnic identities and is not accessible to everyone (Pratt and Yeoh, 2003; Nolin, 2006). How positionality comes into play when affiliating with more than one nation-state, recalls Massey's (1994) theories about how the 'social geometry of power' creates different ramifications and experiences with place according to the individual. This demonstrates that transnationalism is a multi-faceted phenomenon that does not produce uniform communities or outcomes.

Two particular contributions that influence my analysis of transnational connections for Karen refugees are the concepts of refugee transnationalism (Sherrell and Hyndman, 2006) and transnational meanings of home (Brun and Fabos, 2015). Sherrell and Hyndman (2006) heed us to remember how forced migration puts limits on the capital and resources of refugees who often are not able to prepare for their departure. Therefore, they have to negotiate their new surroundings and their social, cultural and economic practices across international borders accordingly, which differs from more hyper-mobile conceptualization of transnationalism. Social fields are also of central consideration in Brun and Fabos' (2015) analysis of the making of home in transnational contexts, which they suggest to be "constellations of home." Existing relationally, the meanings and attachments associated with each location differs according to the how it is observed, much like how perspective on the same object can change depending on the angle and positioning. These variances allow for the expansion of the definition of home to exist through the practice of creating and maintaining it (home), the values and feelings associated with it (Home) and how the category of home itself is defined within political and historical systems (HOME) (Brun and Fabos, 2015).

The special issue entitled "Making Home in Limbo" 31(1) in the journal *Refuge* that was published in early 2015 is a perfect example of writers trying to have a greater understanding of the transnational homes of refugee populations. With contributions about the social practices that form a sense of belonging (Capo, 2015), community development (Fabos, 2015) and how they come to terms with their precarious status (Trapp, 2015, Dona, 2015), the scholars are drawing on themes that I elaborate on in this project. Dona (2015) especially calls for the re-examination of the term 'protracted refugee situation' which is a category that defines the political displacement of the Karen who have been living along the Thai-Burma border for over two decades. She suggests that the term 'prolonged conditions of displacement,' more appropriately describes the experiential aspects of living in a temporary and liminal state for such a lengthy period. By considering how individuals negotiate their lives without more permanent solutions speaks to their form of transnational engagement as well. The authors in this special issue are also further developing the role of practice, values and the category of the relational home in the social imagination (Brun, 2015; Brun and Fabos, 2015), which are foundational when conceptualizing home. My project builds on their consideration of the everyday lives of transnational subjects by linking the cultivation of belonging more strongly to the material and tangible aspects of shelter and food since the role of desire and longing is already so well articulated by these authors in "Making Home in Limbo" and by others. I seek to demonstrate how these feelings are ever-present in the material home we construct for ourselves and how our constant negotiation with these everyday practices is part of coming to terms with present realities after forced migration.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My research questions investigate (1) how Karen refugees develop a sense of 'home' across multiple sites of displacement and (2) how borders and boundaries at the Thai-Burma border and Canada shape place-making[3] activities. I ground my arguments in Chapter Two by positioning my research contribution within theories around place and flows of movement. I meditate on my time in the 'field' by reflecting on issues of trust, access and identity within my research design in Chapter Three. I propose that the nuanced engagement with the concept of 'home' is much more than material. I demonstrate this with my empirical research on the lived experience with political borders in Chapter Four, their material cultures in Chapter Five, relationship to food in Chapter Six and the gendered meanings of home to conclude in Chapter Seven. With this frame I explore the ordinary, beautiful and extraordinary aspects of a full and textured life. Violence doesn't break everything.

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[3] Though my respondents have encountered unquestionable hardships by being violently displaced, I choose to focus on their practices of making a life again after much of their social and political worlds have been destabilized. This is not to devalue their history with brutality or their loss of their 'home.' I just believe that how they rebuild their social conditions through gumption and ingenuity is productive and contributes to the further theoretical understanding of 'home.'

Chapter Two: Mobilities and the Creation of Place

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF PLACE IN GEOGRAPHY

Contributions by various scholars have pushed us to engage with how theories of 'place' inform the dynamic construction and maintenance of 'home'. There are both commonalities and differences between how home and how place have been conceptualized. A home is a type of place, but other issues such as its dual nature of being both private and public, the role of emotions in supporting its existence and its relationship to mobility all add distinct facets to the definition. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the key concepts that I will be utilizing to support my empirical findings and main argument. I will begin by exploring the theoretical approaches to 'place,' which is a central component of geographical enquiry but has been, and continues to be, a site of contestation. Critical theorists further refine the concept of place by examining how its multi-faceted nature draws from and impacts social processes, its engagement with mobility and how it serves as fertile ground for identity projects. With greater awareness of this history, one can engage with current debates on how this realm of the home and the practices that build and destabilize it serve to remind us of its prominence in many lives. I then go on to elaborate on concepts that are particularly central to my thesis such as shelters, food and political borders and the role they play in the existence of displaced persons.

This discussion of the work of selected scholars strengthens my thesis that the practice of making home, through material cultures and consumption of cuisine, serves an integral role in the process of seeking refuge. Beyond the bureaucratic means to safeguard one's safety is the mundane rituals of everyday lives that can alter perspectives and create alternative modes of

existence. These negotiations are rife with the exchange of power relations, such as gender, class

and ethnicity and provide the means by which individuals create a sense of self in more tenuous

and liminal circumstances.

To conceptualize 'place' requires that we acknowledge its dual nature of being both an

object of study and a way of viewing the world. This means that there is an ontological[4] aspect

to place, or what exists, and an epistemological[5] one that recognizes that it is a way of better

understanding the physical world we live in (Cresswell, 2004). Cresswell (2004) specifically

distinguishes places as sites that are laden with meaning, power and symbolic value and go

beyond particular locations. The history and further development of this conceptualization by

various scholars will now be examined.

The use of the concept of place by human geographers has changed over the course of the

field's history. Regionalists emphasized the importance of the unique aspects of certain places

and proposed that these specificities should be studied to understand the commonalities present

within regions and to compare them. Before the 1960s many human geographers were interested

in describing the physical and cultural aspects of regions and these scholars contributed to a

further appreciation of the sociopolitical nature of places. Others in the field were pushing to

theorize geographical concepts with generalizations that could apply to many different contexts

(Livingstone, 1993).

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[4] Ontology: theories such as classical empiricism, transcendental idealism, transcendental realism, that
address what the order and nature of world must be to allow for the creation of knowledge. (Please refer
to Dictionary of Human Geography (4th edition) (2000) on pages 561-564)

[5] Epistemology is the production of knowledge and the study of what is considered to be valid
knowledge. (Please refer to Dictionary of Human Geography (4th edition) (2000) on pages 226-228)

Throughout the 1960s and beyond, there was also a tension between geographical inquiry that strove to be scientific in nature and those that were more interested in human interaction with the physical environment. One facet of this debate surrounded the treatment of 'space' versus 'place' in geography. For a time 'space' was seen solely in mathematical terms where it is quantified and measured. Such a concept was useful during this phase of geography called 'the scientific turn' to replace 'region' as a central focus because the field was trying to make more theoretical contributions and influence other disciplines. Humanistic geographers offered the concept of 'place,' as an embodied one that relied more on qualitative (Ley and Samuels, 1978; Lowenthal, 1961; Entrikin, 1976; Smith, 1984) renderings of a site as a response to this quantitative revolution from the 1960s (Billinge *et al.*, 1984; Haggett, 1965; Chorley, 1967). It is from this tension between different approaches of conceptualizing place that the significance of home as a site of meaning gained greater consideration.

HUMANISTIC GEOGRAPHY AND PLACE

At this historic juncture of geography starting from the 1970s, when the discipline was trying to further develop its focus and identity, scholars of the humanistic[6] school, such as Tuan (1974), Buttimer and Seamon (1980) and Relph (1976) were drawing away from regional study and spatial science, to define place and study how humans make certain places meaningful.

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[6] The term "humanistic geography" is being used to describe several scholars in the 1970s who were challenging geography's main concern with the spatial sciences through their investigation of the human's involvement in the construction of place and their experiences with social sites. The emergence of these scholars is historically specific to this era in the field of geography and their contributions are significant, even if the term "humanistic geography" may be limited or dated. (Please refer to Dictionary of Human Geography (4th edition) (2000) on pages 361-363)

They utilized several philosophical lenses to achieve this purpose but focused on phenomenology, a practice that centralizes the importance of subjectivity and experience. Emphasizing that a universal part of being a human involves interacting with the environment, the field asserts that we cannot be conscious beings without being conscious of something (Tuan, 1974; 1977). The two theorists I employ for my analysis are Edward Relph and Yi-Fu Tuan. Relph (1976) drew heavily from the work of Martin Heidegger (1971) and phenomenology to argue that places allow us to enact the everyday practices of our lives. Relph brought forth the concepts of being 'in place,' so experiencing a place, but also suggests that there is an actual 'place' which exists with or without one's interactions. He argues that it is not enough to consider just the material conditions of a place but also how this place determines people's interactions and attachments with it. Both material and emotional aspects uphold the practice of making a home. To help theorize these types of affective connections to place Relph draws from Heidegger's concept of *desien* or dwelling, which according to Heidegger, people rely on to gain the authentic experience of being in the world. Relph challenges Heidegger's conceptualization of the dwelling, which is very much rooted into the earth, or to a certain location, by stating that place does not rely on being at a specific site to exist and that is because of the phenomenon of affect. Another intervention is from the 'Frankfurt School' whose scholars and their critical lens emphasizes the potential for disempowerment that exists through both material cultures and imaginative realms (Johnston *et al.*, 2000). In order to support his argument to dislocate place from a certain locale, Relph utilizes the phenomenological concept of intentionality or consciousness, which allows humans to connect one's identity to the physical world. Relph argues that humans rely on places to exist and are active participants in the construction of the

place. This offers an important implication for the creation of 'home' since one's capacity to

enact a home may not necessarily be site-specific; affect can very much be transferred elsewhere.

Phenomenology also influenced the work of Yi-Fu Tuan who makes a more explicit

connection between place and home. He argues that human-beings experience places to perceive

and get to know the environment around us and in turn develop emotional bonds to places, which

he terms to be 'topophilia'. Like Relph, he was also dissatisfied with how spatial science did not

necessarily consider the importance of experience or the depth of affective bonds that people

form with the lived world (Tuan, 1977). He defines experience as being the strategies that

people utilize to create a reality through the use of their senses and the accumulation of

knowledge. This knowledge formation process is twofold because humans will discern the

geometric shapes in the environment to create an abstract thought of it in their mind and will also

try to convey their feelings and beliefs onto the material world. He believes that 'space' becomes

'place' when it is known more intimately and imbued with value. Tuan therefore, attempts to

better define the concept of place and encourage its centrality within the discipline through the

subjective interactions with the lived environment. Tuan's definition of place is in contrast to

space, which he deems to be one of dynamic action while place is one of rest and rootedness.

Since immobility is a central aspect of Tuan's 'place', this respite from movement allows human

beings to create a 'field of care' at these sites that encourages the formation of feelings of

attachment and belonging: "The city or land is viewed as mother, and it nourishes; place is an

archive of fond memories and splendid achievements that inspire the present; place is permanent

and hence reassuring to man, who sees frailty in himself and chance and flux everywhere" (Tuan,

1977: 154). He calls this pause from movement 'home' and privileges it as a site of comfort and

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regeneration since it provides integral components for living such as food and shelter. This reductionist characterization of home was challenged by later theorists who offer more nuanced insights into the political nature of the domestic sphere. But, his emphasis on how the bonds that people have to these home-sites are continually strengthened through the material aspects that encourage nostalgia and allow for the development of new perceptions, contributes to the dual role that affect and material cultures help form the home. Tuan (1977) believes that people become very attached to their homelands that serve as orienting points in the social world. If these sites were destroyed or made inaccessible, he argues that this traumatic experience would alter their sense of self and ultimately would require that they rebuild this sense of being centered through another location. These meditations on home and place by Relph and Tuan contribute to my analysis of the home making practices of displaced people because they point to the dwelling as a significant site that is felt and experienced deeply by humanity; assertions that resonate with my personal experience as well as my research findings.

I will draw on aspects of humanistic geography, especially the arguments of the two theorists I have elaborated on, to support my project but there are also generalizations that I will challenge, as described in the next section. The field of humanistic geography contributes to my work in two ways. Firstly, the theorists attempt to define the concept of place and advocate for its importance within the discipline. Secondly, by suggesting the limitations of spatial science and their use of experiential knowledge to define place, they acknowledge the important role of affect in the creation of place. Since attachment and belonging, or the lack thereof, are both important aspects of what constitutes a 'home' this theoretical contribution will be further examined in my work.

CHALLENGES TO THE STABLE HOME

There are three aspects of the humanistic argument that I will problematize with this project; these challenges are supported by the already established work of several scholars. For the purposes of the current inquiry, I build upon these critiques to interrogate the social-political sphere that is the home, while appreciating the humanistic contributions that renders it a meaningful site. And it is through the conceptualization, both real and imagined, by those participating in flows of movement that I question how these processes are impacted by time, space and everyday life. I will mainly be utilizing the 'critical geography of home framework,' developed by Blunt and Dowling (2006), that defines home as a type of multi-scalar place made up of the material and imaginative components that are impacted on by modes of power and identity. A sense of belonging, or lack thereof, is a central component of creating 'home' but these feelings intrinsically rely on spatial conditions. One can feel at home in some aspects but this same place maybe a source of estrangement in other ways, thereby creating an incomplete sense of belonging. While Young (1997) has studied the gendered nature of how the physical construction of the home has been assigned to men while women have been more responsible for the continued preservation of the site through domestic duties, home does not have to rely on a physical structure to exist. The concept of 'home' can also be a set of emotions that get assigned to a physical shelter (Brun and Fabos, 2015). As a result, the creation of these meaningful sites are fluid because emotions and identity can move across space and can be reinstated at new locations.

The first limitation lies in the fact that for Tuan and others of the humanistic geography tradition, the home is a haven from the social world, rather than being influenced and formed by it. David Harvey (2001) calls this notion into question by arguing that places are not apolitical sites within society but can also be utilized to exclude. In *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (1996) Harvey examines similar principles of the geographic results of capitalist accumulation by focusing on property rights. He gives an example of a murder case of an older couple in Baltimore who had been slain in their home in the neighbourhood of Guilford. After this incident there was a push to make the neighbourhood safer by turning it into a gated community. Through the use of barriers, surveillance apparatus and security personnel gated communities strive to keep the 'wrong' types of people and activities out to lower the risk of danger. In this specific case, the mainly white inhabitants in Guilford would be kept safe from the black communities that lived outside of the neighbourhood's limits. The media coverage of this case fueled this campaign since people suspected that an intruder had entered the area and murdered the victims. At the end of the investigation it was determined that the couple had been killed by their own family member who had full rights and privileges to access the house. Harvey utilizes this example to illustrate how places, while meaningful, can also be contested sites of exclusion and more so, how the presumed safety and comfort of the private sphere can inspire perverse attempts to protect it. It can also be used to reflect on how 'home' is not always safe, loving and free from violence, which is a common critique of some humanistic assumptions.

Like Tuan, Harvey acknowledges that places become sites of semi-permanence but this state is just in contrast to the continual circulation of capital that is forever shifting. In turn, these

places can be utilized to resist capitalist forces through alternative living or as sites for political

organization. In humanistic geography the idealized notion of place is threatened by the

contingencies of the social world. As both of Harvey's (2001) explorations into place

demonstrate, places are created and reproduced through, 'uncontrolled vectors of spatiality' of

the social world, more specifically the institutional and capitalist systems. This challenges the

humanistic notion that place can stand on its own without being conditioned and influencing

societal practices in its own right. Just as any place cannot exist outside of the social realm, the

building of shelters and semi-permanent sites in the case of Mae La camp operates through

political transactions that can destabilize notions of protection, rights and agency.

The distinction between space/place bore the problematic dichotomy of 'space' as being

more masculine in nature, or objective, with 'place' being more feminine in characteristic, or

subjective (Rose, 1993). Scholars have called these assumptions into question by recognizing

the masculinist nature of such characterizations and by also suggesting that a hard distinction

between space and place is not necessarily needed (Massey, 1994). Similarly, Lefebvre (1974)

suggests that there is a relationship between what mathematicians would term 'ideal' space, that

can be abstracted, and 'real' space, that embodies social processes. These two types of spaces

influence and exist through each other. This 'real' space called 'social space' is constructed

through social practices but is also a mode of power. The three important aspects that help create

'social space' are *spatial practices* that involve both the production and reproduction of social

performances, the *representations of space* that creates a sense of order in the space through

knowledge and meaning, and *representational spaces* that describe the complex symbolic codes

that are a part of lived spaces (Lefebvre, 1974).

By the 1990s, the field of Humanistic Geography would be more appropriately defined as engaging with Marxist principles. Therefore, the concept of place within Marxist Geography requires further meditation because of their notion of 'home' being static and rooted in contrast to flows and mobility. The definition of place as being more open, dynamic and flexible is explored by Doreen Massey (1994) in *Space, Place and Gender* where she argues that places are formed through a continued process of social interactions at various scales and are influenced by issues of class and gender. The ways in which the definition of places becomes more fluid is twofold. The first is due to what she terms to be the 'social geometry of power,' which asserts that different groups can have contrasting experiences with the same site because of their position within society (Massey, 1994; 3). Multiple meanings can be made from the same place, all of which are valid and exist relationally to each other. The second speaks directly to humanistic geographical literature by challenging the notion of place being bounded, fixed and defined according to a dichotomous view of what is beyond its boundary, to one that is defined through its connection to the flux that helps define it. The social interactions that help create place form connections in a mesh-like manner where some aspects are contained within the site while others reach beyond and influence other places (Massey, 1994). For displaced groups like the Karen who have lived in encampments for over twenty years, this more fluid approach to space supports their attachments to former home and the strategies they use to make sense of their current conditions.

This more inclusive conceptualization of place affords the opportunity to study its relationship to flows and movements that involve the phenomena of 'time-space compression' (Harvey, 1989; Gregory, 1989). This process addresses how the advances in

transportation and communication technology have allowed for people to overcome former

hindrances, such as long distances, to connect (Entrikin, 1991; Thrift, 1996). Information,

people and goods are now able to efficiently travel across space, which has also impacted

economic and geopolitical relations. The study of these types of activities have brought forth the

argument that place is no longer as meaningful in a world of increased mobility and

interconnectedness. Several scholars have responded to this assertion but I will mainly be

focusing on Thrift's (1996) and Massey's (1994) work on this matter since they are also

concerned with positionality, which provides more nuance on how mobility is not accessible for

all members of society.

      Thrift (1996) argues that it is reductive to see time-space compression to be part of some

distant global order when in fact the phenomenon relies on the existence of networks that are

articulated through everyday practices. 'Place' in his discussion of flows, are what he terms to

be 'stages of intensity' that trace movement, speed and circulation. He utilizes Donna's

Haraway's (1991) meditations on the 'cyborg' culture that consists of the codes and interactions

that allow for the boundaries between people and machines to be destabilized. Since the 1960s

the relationship between humans and machines have become linked, especially through travel,

mobility and lived experiences. These flows of increased mobility are regulated through

different networks that help to form the subject of the nomadic figure, which I will elaborate on

and problematize later, within these modes of movement. Thrift acknowledges that with this

increased potential for mobility there are still disadvantaged groups who are immobile, but he

argues that the dispossessed still do participate in travel but in more constrained and specific

ways.

Like Thrift, Massey (1994) agrees that one's gender and class identity influences one's access to these modes of mobility. It is not just the all-encompassing phenomenon of 'capital' that hinders the movements of certain groups of people but social actors and restrictions. These constraints are enacted through 'power-geometry' that ensures that people of different groups relate to flows and time-space compression in distinct and varied ways (Massey, 1994; 149). Her argument about the continuum of mobility goes beyond whether people are moving or staying rooted in place: "Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyways differentiated mobility: some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows of movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it" (Massey, 1994: 149). This means that a certain privileged few may utilize time-space compression to their advantage, whether to work, profit or explore landscapes, while other groups, such as migrants and refugees may be moving a great deal but have very little power to assert over their mobility. With regard to the role of place within the fluctuations of increased mobility, Massey argues that some are utilizing this opportunity to call for places to provide stability in this time of constant change. This offers the opportunity for reactionary movements that construct problematic concepts of 'authentic' sites that can be used to exclude others (ibid). Nationalist, religious or ethnic movements that try to gain recognition of their rights to sites often draw on a mythical or historical moment to justify their claims. She argues that since places are formed from social relations, places do not remain fixed or unchanged. Massey questions the assertion that time-space compression naturally destabilizes systems and instead suggests a middle-ground that recognizes that people do form attachments to place but still can participate in the more interconnected world. Thrift (1996) and Massey's (1994)

meditation of place within flows challenge humanistic notions that forms of movement can undermine the creation of place and instead calls for the acknowledgement of how these fluctuations help formulate the multiple meanings of these sites. This contributes to my examination of Karen refugee populations that have been displaced for several decades. When studying their long-standing situation, it is integral to remember how they are mobile in different ways, which in turn challenges common misconceptions of their immobility and subjectivity.

The third facet of the humanistic portrayal of place that is problematic is that their conceptualization of home is one of safety and comfort, when this is not a universal experience for all people. Within the field of humanistic geography, there is a tradition of centralizing 'home' as a site that facilitates the process of understanding the outside world. While applauding the efforts of Tuan, Relph and others of this school for emphasizing the importance of 'home' Rose (1993) finds issue with the masculinist nature of their definitions that do not discuss the gendered relationships, especially the role of women, in helping to create and sustain this domestic sphere. There is a specific history, of equating women with nature and a nostalgic reading of the past before the loss of innocence that lends itself to equating 'home' with the feminine. Problematically, the 'home' then becomes culturally formed to represent the contentment of being nurtured and healed from the traumas of the outside world (Massey, 1994). When writing of the connection between place and 'home,' Massey amongst others assert that it is a site that can be paradoxically both longed for and as a source of fear. This site can be a stifling environment where women may face unfulfilling work, abuse or cannot express their own identities (Domosh and Seager, 2001; Brickell, 2013). Alternatively, postcolonial and critical race theorists suggest that 'home' being a site of oppression often meet the agendas of

white, middle-class feminists but do not necessarily represent the lived experiences of all groups. bell hooks (1990) relates how her home provided her with the affection and liberty that she so lacked in a society that discriminates against racialized people. The home for her was an empowering place that gave her the strength and resolve to resist what awaited her outside of its walls. The 'home' in the past has been relegated to being the private realm but the power relations within the domestic space illustrate that the concept of the private and public are interdependent. These interventions challenge the humanistic concept of an idealized site of liberation and contentment to suggest 'home' as a more destabilized and contested site (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002; Brickell, 2012; Rapport and Dawson, 1998; Brun, 2015). The gender relations within Mae La camp are impacted by the histories of violence and precarity, which can in turn complicate the gender relations within the home.

Prior to further discussing the theoretical conceptions of home, how home is created across space relies first on defining mobility. Often the terms movement and mobility are used interchangeably but there is an important difference between the two. The concept of place stands in contrast to location, which is a site that has not been imbued with meaning:

> We can think of movement, then, as the dynamic equivalent of location in abstract space —contentless, apparently natural, and devoid of meaning, history and ideology. The critiques of abstract space and location are well known. Movement, as the dynamic equivalent of location, has not been given the same attention. If movement is the dynamic equivalent of location, then mobility is the dynamic equivalent of place (Cresswell, 2006, 3).

Mobility is defined as the movement from one location to another and has meaning; depicted as an illustration it is represented as A----B. Cresswell (2006, 3) asserts that while mobility studies have made great strides focusing on the push and pull factors that exist at

location A and location B, the journey or the ---- remains under-explored. Like other scholars, I

hope to mediate this gap through my study of the everyday practices of material cultures and

negotiations with food of a displaced population. Since mobility is an embodied practice that

alters both time and space (Thrift, 1996), it is already closely connected to the scale of the body.

Cresswell (2006) suggests that further scholarship can be refined by connecting mobility to other

scales of analysis.

Mobility and the concept of 'home' relate to one another through their roles in modernist

projects. Mobility's relationship to modernity is a dynamic one since flows and movement can

work to undo what modernist projects have built (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988; Cresswell, 2006).

One such example is found in Scott's (2010) work, which studies the attempts to organize ethnic

minority groups in Southeast Asia who live in a region he calls "Zomia." By continuing to live

their nomadic lives and by practicing their livelihoods, they have resisted state projects to

integrate them into mainstream society. Scott (1998) believes that these projects, that strive to

make the chaotic aspects of life more legible, requires a transition from a view from somewhere

(localized) where local knowledges are respected and taken into consideration, to a view from

nowhere (modernized). This tension between modernity and mobility exists because an integral

aspect of modernity involves trying to create ordered spaces while mobility challenges these

types of agendas (Cresswell, 2006). Appadurai (1996) also emphasizes the relationship between

mobility and modernity by examining how the proliferation of media technology, networks and

migration have furthered modernist projects. Since high modernist projects strive to create

structure, or their conceptualization of progress (Scott, 1998), certain definitions of home could

be used as examples of these types of rooted places. A 'home' defined within humanistic terms

would meet many of the requirements of a modernist place through its localized stability and constancy. However, other conceptualizations of home that emphasize its political nature, especially those created within the flux of displacement, challenge these designations of orderliness. Many of the respondents in my project may never be able to create a more fixed sensibility of home due to their precarious legal status, alienation within the host country and unresolved attachment to former places. Therefore, the meanings that they cultivate within this context can help create a type of place that not only challenges modernist ideals, but brings forth new ways of being. These negotiations demonstrate that what's at stake in the creation of home is neither linear nor definitive.

The main goal of this project is to further understand how mobility also becomes as meaningful and socially constructed as the formation of place. Rather than study them as disparate concepts I hope to examine how the fixity of 'home' and forced migration influence and work through each other. It is through the tensions between mobility and rootedness that I start to understand the theoretical underpinnings and complexities of making space for oneself within flows of movement. The tension between modernist and sedentarist metaphysical theories lies in how they conceptualize mobility (Malkki, 1992). Those who subscribe to 'sedentarist metaphysical' beliefs idealize rootedness and are suspicious of mobility, while those who rely on 'nomadic metaphysics' ranks the participation in movement above being attached to place (Malkki, 1992). The work of Malkki (1995) on the displacement experiences of Hutu refugees from Burundi living in Tanzania has furthered the consideration of what she terms to be 'sedentarist metaphysics.' When the world has been organized to promote rootedness, from the very organization of nation-states as territories that distribute rights through citizenship,

participating in certain types of mobility can be considered a pathological condition that must be treated. For modernists mobility is a positive indictor of progress due to its dynamic and ever-changing nature. They contrast this to the more static nature of investing in place, which they deem to be nostalgic and attached to the past (Cresswell, 2006). The interventions on these reductionist conclusions point to how the definitions of mobility or place are not simply dynamic or static respectively. Rather they suggest that they are not disparate phenomena and a more hybridized relationship exists between the two. Concerning refugee populations, there are institutional and political strategies that are utilized to mediate their displacement, but the moral geography of favouring rootedness over mobility also disadvantages other nomadic groups and migrants. There have been projects to return them back into 'place' often through settlements that encourage governance, hygiene and being stationary (Cresswell, 2006; Hyndman and Mountz, 2007; Hyndman 2004). This is especially salient in my case study of Thailand, where, in spite of the protracted situation, refugees are viewed as temporary inhabitants until they can be returned 'back home' to Burma.

In contrast to sedentary metaphysics those who believe in 'nomadic metaphysics' (Cresswell, 2006) value mobility, which they characterize to be progressive, above being attached to place. Through governance, power is located through territorialization that makes meaning from space through mapping and classification. The nomad in turn challenges the ordering of the world by strategically choosing their routes to subvert the controls that have been laid out spatially (de Certeau 1984; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). The behavior of the mobile is better understood through their use of flights or paths that are informed by points. Nomads resist the state that wishes to locate them within these nodes that are locations of power

used to manage mobility. It is not the state's intention to stop the flows of movement, but just to

direct them along paths established within their terms. However, the nomad often manages to

remain elusive and therefore is not easily controlled. Although the figure of the nomad is a

compelling figure that features strongly in the theories of sedentary and nomadic metaphysics,

one must remember its limitations. The nomadic figure, whether it is utilized to represent moral

degeneration or subversion, does not consider the class, gender and other facets that would

complicate an individual's mobility (Cresswell, 2006; Wolff, 1993). It is a romanticized reading

of those who have more control over their movement but does not necessarily address the

realities of individuals who experience forced migration. However, the discussion of the nomad

does bring attention to those undermining formalized management of populations. Rather than

developing a binary relationship between fixity and flow, one must recognize that as concepts,

both can shape and transform the other.

FEELING AT HOME

So what exactly is at stake when one's home is lost through forced displacement? The

conceptualization of mobility, which can run the risk of being masculinist, is better grounded by

further conceptualizing these transnational lived experiences. Jansen and Lofving (2009)

explores the aftermath of this process and asserts that "the home that has been lost has not simply

been left behind in another place. Rather . . . it has also been left behind in another time and is

therefore often experienced as a previous home, irrevocably lost both spatially and

temporally" (15). This reality involves both the expression of grief, to mourn the absence of

people we love and the forfeiture of such a meaningful place, but also the creation of new lives where we have landed. Brun and Fabos' (2015) conceptualization also speak to these losses but their conceptualization of the transnational meanings of home as that of a "constellation" provides fewer restrictions and relative freedom by offering a space of liminality. Since allegiance to nations or cultural identity can exist relationally, individuals can feel fondness, at varying strengths of course, for their former and current lives. These writers (Jansen and Lofving, 1999; Brun and Fabos, 2015) emphasize the importance of practice, effort and resilience, not just the affective meanings, that are required to make a home.

We have discussed the shortcomings of the humanistic view of place that would associate 'home' with certain positive characteristics that do not necessarily reflect the reality for some (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1974). Another spatial dimension to remember is that some spaces are considered not to be an ideal site to create 'home,' but it is still achieved there. How some sites are more conducive to creating meanings and place will now be further explored.

Duyvendak (2011) suggests that three aspects assist in the creation of a 'feeling at home' in a certain place. He believes that this requires a sense of familiarity (a sense of knowing the place over time), feeling that the site provides stability, security and comfort, and the reliance on the place to provide the freedom to express one's identity. Iris Marion Young's (2005) work on the 'critical value of home' also posits that the home must meet the following minimum standards: safety, individuation (a place to reflect one's tastes and preferences), privacy, and preservation (a site where we can safeguard what is valuable and substantial). We have already reviewed the different ways that feminist scholars, like Young herself, have complicated these assumptions. However, I appreciate that Young recognizes the diverse meanings and outcomes

that can result from the practice of creating a home; she posits that even if those practices are devalued socially, they still have inherent human value. Additionally, I am focusing more now on the role of affect in creating a sense of 'home,' which is also something that Young elaborates on. So why is it that certain sites can encourage the creation of a sense of belonging while others constrain these home-making strategies? In the same vein, how is the creation of 'home' achieved in certain spaces that would seem to be 'unhomely' (Cresswell, 1996)? Unhomely sites are deemed to be geographically deviant and undesirable because they disrupt the established order that helps to define who is 'in-place' or 'out-of-place.'

The categorization of certain sites as discouraging the creation of home relies on the ideological underpinnings of expected behavior in certain places (Cresswell, 1996). The behaviours are categorized into the socially acceptable and the inappropriate both of which bring forth certain repercussions. Cresswell (1996) offers an example of the political debates of homeless people using Grand Central Station in the early 1980s. The mayor at the time, Ed Koch, failed to achieve legal means to restrict homeless people from accessing the public space. In turn, he appealed to the public to recognize the deviant nature of how these groups of people were utilizing the space, one that was built to enable travel and mobility. Cresswell points to all the other uses that are not related to travel but are nonetheless deemed acceptable, such as using it as a social meeting point to converse, eat and shop. This demonstrates how an action is deemed respectable or not depending on the social standing of the individual who is performing it. Koch removes the site from the social context to focus only on how the behaviours of the homeless people are undermining spatial norms and this is when Cresswell states geography and ideology meet. A similar comparison can be made to the establishment of encampments along

the Thai-Burma border, which is one of the sites that I focus on in this project. They are located along a political border-line at the outskirts of the Thai nation-state. Being places impacted by continual political fluctuations, they are viewed and named to be temporary outposts for displaced people by the host-country's policies. Having been deemed as such, one would assume that they would not be ideal places to establish a sense of home. The camps are surrounded by protected lands that restrict certain agricultural and other uses of the natural environment and is made less welcoming through military surveillance of the population and the prevention of seeking formal employment outside of the site's boundaries (Dudley, 2010; Brees, 2010). Through these regulations, the proper behavior of the refugees are determined to involve mainly basic social reproduction, limited education and waiting for more long-term settlement solutions. In spite of all the restrictions, these transient places may still offer the chance to create semi-permanent shelters and develop feelings of attachment and belonging. Pratt and Hanson (1994) suggest that it is easier for those with stable lives and secure homes to construct a sense of belonging through their study of women's identities in Worcester, Massachusetts where they studied "the spatiality of the social construction of differences and the overwhelming importance of placement in the day-to-day of individuals' lives (12)." In their example, their respondents ground their modes of differentiation on their affiliation with a certain location and social standing. In the context that I work in, a refugee camp where there is a greater social fluidity, many would question if a sense of home can be established at all and this is the assumption I challenge with my research. Both of these examples suggest that with the creation of home, the categorization of what constitutes welcoming and unwelcoming sites for home do not remain

distinct concepts but are instead hybridized to reflect the context and identities of the actors involved (Blunt and Dowling, 2006).

THE MAKING OF HOME

A physical shelter does not become a 'home' without the affective facets that create a sense of belonging; the making of home is a process (Young, 1997). A key means through which this process occurs is when social relationships become attached to a shelter and the power negotiations and identity constructions that take place within its walls are displayed in a material way. 'Home' is continually made and recreated through everyday practices.

Bourdieu (1984) and de Certeau (1984) discuss the importance of everyday life and assert that our perception of reality is created through practice. The body has a central role within practice because it is utilized to make affective meanings and to also live within space (Vygotsky, 1987; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Though these two scholars were both similarly influenced by the work of Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty they theorize practice in different ways.

Bourdieu (1984) is interested in the relationship between the field and what he terms to be 'habitus.' He defines the field as a dynamic social order that is in a state of constant tension. This friction results from the relationship between the ordered system of practices and the behavior of the agents that live within it. The field is created through historical processes and the agents express their 'habitus' through unconscious embodied practices. Embodiment requires the accumulation of knowledge, cognition and perception to form an understanding of the world through lived experience. According to Bourdieu structure is inscribed onto 'habitus,' which

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externalizes achievements so that they can be read socially. For the refugees, the experience of living at the Thai-Burma border region in a camp or being resettled in Canada is continually influenced by their embodied acts of negotiating the social environment and the conflicts it may pose. They take on these setbacks with their own nuanced approaches according to their values and background.

While Bourdieu is attentive to the implications of practice, de Certeau (1984) seeks to understand practice as it develops in interaction with the spatial environment through engagement with the dwelling and cooking. de Certeau (1984) believes that those who are marginalized are characterized by not being able to produce 'culture.' Because of their positioning they make use of consumption techniques that in turn make them members of the 'consumer grid.' These types of subversive everyday practices are influenced by discourse and a dialectical relationship exists between the shared material contexts and the environment ('habitus'). Everyday practices are a part of home-making since these consumption strategies occur spatially and manipulate the constructed order. Both Bourdieu and de Certeau contribute to the theorization of how individuals are active agents within their social environment, with Bourdieu emphasizing both the accumulation of knowledge and social codes performed, and de Certeau grounding these behaviours spatially.

My conception of home relates to the insights of these scholars through their emphasis on the significance of practice and how these are reflected in very material ways. This adds another dimension to the creation of a place that is beyond the realm of the emotional and recognizes the cultural milieu that forms the homestead and allows for identity formation. This literature

acknowledges the work that is involved in fashioning these sites but also the continual effort required to preserve them.

SHELTER, FOOD, BORDERS

The home-making strategies I am focusing on in my research are both formed in simultaneously material and affective ways. They concern how 'home' is constructed through the creation and maintenance of shelter and the preparation and consumption of food. I study how gender relations, political borders and other types of boundaries influence these strategies. Each of these three are prominent themes in the literature on Diaspora since they bring forth issues of memory, citizenship, loss and at times, renewal.

a) Shelter

When examining the relationship that people have with the physical structure of their homes, I am drawing from theorists who are interested in the power of nonhuman entities such as objects and things. The two scholars I will focus on in this field of thought are Latour (1991) and Miller (2001). Latour discusses the human/nature divide and its role in modernity, which to him consisted of new ruptures and destabilizations. Time is a central component of defining modernity and the process of categorizing the phenomenon itself relies on considering the more stable premodern times. With modernity comes the two processes of 'translation' and 'purification' that rely on one another to exist. Translation is the process of creating hybrids

between nature and culture while purification strives to place a distinct line between human and non-human categories. He challenges the hard separation between nature and culture and asserts that one's body exists through its articulation with other objects. These theories contribute to the study of how material cultures play an integral role in home making. The objects that individuals use to fashion their homes speak to their identity projects and their engagement with societal perceptions of taste and status (Bourdieu, 1984). This means that the distinction between their humanity and the power of these non-human material goods is complicated and blurred.

Miller (2001) supports these claims through his work on the material cultures of the domestic realm. He argues that while it is recognized that human beings actively transform the physical environment of their homes, how the material entities themselves impact the relationships and identities of the inhabitants needs to be further explored. He achieves this through his comparative study of homes in several countries and the cultural markers that are conveyed within these shelters. These markers are the material maps that are used to enact social relationships and construct identities within the dwelling. Brickell (2013) grounds these theorizations by stressing how these home-scapes, and the meanings associated with them, are gendered and inherently fragile: "Meaningful possessions do not only embody different facets of self (Gorman-Murray, 2008), rather the actual dwelling—the physical architecture of the home and even its location—are also intimately bounded to personal and community projections of morality, dignity, identity (270)."

When examining the role of material cultures in the lives of refugees, they must utilize scarce resources to fashion shelter to protect them from the elements and for survival. As Bourdieu (1984) and de Certeau (1984) would posit, practice informs the creation of home and

these performances manifest themselves in material ways. One might think that ideals such as permanence or beauty would not exist in what are deemed to be transient places, but they are ever present. Once they have left the camp setting through resettlement, they make new meaning in a different country and context, which in turn changes their material cultures. However, both settings offer opportunities for the cultivation of current understandings of themselves.

b) Food

In my examination of the role of food in home-making strategies, I interrogate the material, social and symbolic meanings evoked by food preparation and consumption.

Food consumption is an integral cultural practice in most societies of the world. The historical development of their cuisine and socioeconomic limits often determine the types of food that people are able to access and enjoy (Yasmeen, 2000, Van Esterik, 1992, Goody, 1982). Levi-Strauss (1964) argues that the ability to cook and take part in food consumption is what defines humanity and distinguishes us from non-human entities. Although recognizing the anthropocentric slant of his statements, the value of his arguments lie in acknowledging the meanings associated with culinary practices and his call to look beyond the surface value of actions. Before considering the social and symbolic nature of consuming food, there is the important material reality that food must be gathered, cultivated, purchased and then through cooking, learned practices are repeated (Anderson, 2005). These dishes not only serve as economic and cultural markers but also provides nutrition and sustains the lives of the individuals; they become incorporated into the body in rather concrete ways. In the case of

Southeast Asia, rice is both a staple in the diet and symbolic of health and well-being. In many of the regional dialects the word for 'rice' translates to mean both the grains itself and the practice of eating (Yasmeen, 2000). For the Karen, rice and fish paste are mainstays in their diet; they complement this traditional pairing with vegetables, soup and curries depending on the occasion and access to resources.

Memory plays a key role in the consumption of food because it is a process that is dynamic and ever-changing. Lee's (2000) study of first generation resident Koreans living in Japan argues how their consumption of Korean cuisine, which is central to social gatherings, allows them to define their Diasporic selves. These first generation residents immigrated to Japan between the period of 1910-1945 when Japan had colonial rule over Korea. When describing their attachment to Korean cuisine, many of these individuals still drew on the harsh realities of being newcomers during this politically charged time and how food helped them to remain connected to their former lives. Additionally, with many of them being in their eighties and nineties, their advanced age has prevented them from participating fully in the Korean community. These feelings of isolation are compounded by the fact that they live away from their adult children. This is just one example of the depth of meaning associated with sharing food. Since the social gatherings that involve the communal consumption of food often happens in the home, it is important to consider how the spatial organization of these structures impact relationships. We have already established that the home is a contested site for power negotiations and the expression of identities. The fluidity of this place, which is expressed through the ever-present potential for social transactions, encourages the formation of class, gender and Diasporic identities through consumption practices (Bell and Valentine, 1997;

Marston, 2000). The transnational relationships associated with their Diasporic identities can be marked by their commitment to continue cooking certain dishes, with the use of the same or substituted ingredients, in order to maintain attachment to other places. These practices can also aid in the creation of home at their present location, with memory still playing a key role in these everyday rituals. My study demonstrates how new meanings can be constructed through these new dishes for the Karen refugees living in Canada. Though the results may not taste, look or smell the same because of these substituted ingredients, their willingness to try reflects a way to grapple with what they must contend with in their current reality.

Spatially there are also multiple meanings and uses with certain rooms, for example, the kitchen can be a meeting place for the household to take on different tasks during the cooking process or where other family members can complete work or school assignments. The dining room is a more formalized place for everyday meals or for marking special occasions, but the venue itself can reinforce the family identity through the fulfillment of familial duties. The associations are not always so positive, especially when the kitchen is designated as the 'women's' place where she may feel the pressure to provide sustenance for her family without reward or appreciation. The ways that these practices are hidden is even demonstrated spatially, in how the kitchen itself, when contrasted with the living room, is often located at the back of the house, while the central room for entertaining is centrally located at its front (Bell and Valentine, 1997). The dining room as the spatial location for consumption does not always hold fundamental value in all cultures. In the larger urban centers of Thailand, the practice of dining out is much more common and few individuals prepare their meals at home. With women playing an integral role in the workforce in this society, they will often purchase main dishes

from shops on their commute home to complement the steamed rice which they can easily prepare upon arrival (Yasmeen, 2000). These social practices still play out spatially since the Bangkok elite and middle class will mostly eat catered meals at home or in the cool comfort of food courts, while the more economically disadvantaged individuals will be the purveyors of these dishes and eat in more humble surroundings (Yasmeen, 2000). These examples illustrate how the social process of sharing food, and the lived experiences of it, are very much attached to place.

The meal itself can be viewed as a form of social performance with a certain structure that determines the amount of time that is invested and the order, if one exists, that the food is served. Both of these components satisfy the social expectation for many societies that a shared meal should be practiced with restraint and that the food should be enjoyed in moderation. Anthropologist Mary Douglas (1984) argues that the communal consumption of food is a practice that allows for the enactment of social networks, the construction of narratives and to mark important life stages and thus is a critical facet for my research into the construction of home. Although these are examples of performances within Western culture, I also examine similar issues in a non-Western context.

Class identity and political economic status are some of the symbolic meanings conveyed by the consumption of food. Bourdieu (1984) would argue that 'habitus', or the embodiment of what one has learned socially, influences the type of food we choose to consume, the manner with which we partake in the dishes and how we choose to present the materials when entertaining. He studied the concept of taste and formulated several different types of capital that allow people to negotiate the social world. Cultural capital requires the mastery and

embodiment of socially desired behavior, which takes both time and resources. This in turn differentiates society because people have varying degrees of cultural capital due to their circumstances.

c) *Borders and Boundaries*

Political borders and other types of boundaries are two concepts that I will work with in my project but both have specific meanings and are utilized differently within the field of geography. Therefore, it is important to discuss how they are defined and recognize the different interventions that have tried to theorize these concepts. Since I am studying how home is conceptualized by a displaced population, the ways in which borders and security influence home-making strategies is an intrinsic aspect of my research.

Since I have mainly spoken of the identity politics of the home and everyday practices, the shift in focus to more geopolitical concepts may seem jarring. In reality, many scholars support the argument that home can occur at other scales (community, nation) that are beyond the dwelling and that these scales are equally influenced by social relations (Marston, 2000; Massey, 1994; Capo, 2015). Political borders and other types of boundaries do not only matter at the larger scale of the nation but impact people's material realities, especially for the refugees who cross them. This work is based on the experience of Karen refugees from Burma so the relevance and importance of borders in the lives of the participants is clear.

The existence of political borders relies on the continued reaffirmation of a global scale that defines the world as one whole with distinct territorial states within (Agnew, 2003). From

this global political system comes other types of scales, such as the 'international' which involves the relationships between territories, the 'domestic' which involves the affairs within the territorial units and finally the 'regional' which are the localized issues within segments of an area. Territoriality has three fundamental principles: one, that sovereigns should be able to regulate and manage their territories without interference, two, that the limits of the territorial boundaries fully contain social and political actors and finally that domestic and foreign policies are disparate concepts. This state-centric model, or what Agnew (1994) terms the 'territorial trap' impacts global politics because the division of power privileges territorial states or states that are in the process of formation, while other forms of division along other types of politics are not as recognized (Agnew, 2003). The role of maintaining order within territorial units has traditionally been understood to be held by the state and its institutions but different actors all participate in the power dynamics of nation-states within time and space.

The demarcation and continued maintenance of political borders is a process. Although several scholars have offered definitions of the border, I will be relying on Anderson's (1996) suggestion that the ontology of the border is based on four characteristics: one, that the state depends on its existence for its geopolitical projects, two, that the porosity of the border cannot be fully regulated, three, that these frontiers help to define identity and four that they rely on geographic and historical processes for its maintenance. This understanding helps to illuminate the role of the border in the lives of Karen refugees who crossed the Thai-Burma demarcation and negotiated its porosity to gain protection. Additionally, their lives along this borderline influence their identity as former citizens of Burma and current status as refugees.

While one facet of a political border demarcates the limits of a nation-state, recent scholarship has asserted that borders are also multi-faceted and dialectical in nature (Bauder, 2011; Newman, 2006; Balibar, 2002). One way that borders are challenged is through the influence of the capitalist model whose cornerstones are mobile capital, goods and investment. Even when viewing power as more diffuse through Gramscian terms (1971), the state does have a stronghold on the ability to manage the concept of property rights. This ability places states in a central role in the corporate world by trying to attract foreign investment and the business of multi-national corporations (Agnew, 2003). Borders are being defined by different agents as demonstrated by Sundberg (2011) who challenges the clear distinction between nature and society (Latour, 1991) by considering how aspects of the ecological landscape such as the desert, animals, plants and rivers are actively impacting the effectiveness of surveillance along the U.S./ Mexico borderland. Non-human entities are also participating in the making of boundaries and its continued surveillance since markers in the physical landscape, such as rivers or mountain ranges can serve the dual purpose of demarcating the limits of a border, and like walls or fences, used to deter migrants with the rough terrain and difficult crossings (Sundberg, 2011).

Along with political borders, other types of boundaries also play a "social, personal and symbolic" role in our lives, as suggested by Newman and Paasi (1998: 200). There are several ways that the border can be represented and enforced away from the politically demarcated line, such as in airports (Salter, 2007; Silvey, 2008), regional checkpoints and institutional and public spaces.

The main purpose of this chapter has been to discuss key conceptual frameworks that inform my examination of how Karen refugees frame the creation of home at multiple sites of

displacement. Humanistic geographers (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977) offer useful insights into the importance of place and other scholars (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Young, 1997; Brickell, 2012; Harker, 2009; Brun and Fabos, 2015) have augmented their theories by emphasizing that home is a part of the social world and that it is more open and dynamic, which suggests that flows and mobility can be a facet of the creation of place and not be a degrading force. The home is also political in nature and is not a safe haven due to the potential of violence, disempowerment and stagnation. The creation of home requires effort and these practices reveal themselves in material ways through food preparation and consumption and the fashioning of shelters. An integral part of feeling at home is the cultivation of attachment and belonging, which are continually negotiated with emotions and everyday practices.   Through transnational connections and mobility, political borders and boundaries are tested, with immobility sometimes being the outcome. Within the social-political space of the home, gender and power relations are ever-present and part of the investment in the construction of these sites at the scale of the body and beyond.

Chapter Three: The body and the field—Access, trust, identity

INTRODUCTION

One of the major contributions of feminist geography is a methodological framework that

challenges the process of creating knowledge and endorses the practice of reflexivity. After

being influenced by and citing the theories of many elite male theorists in Chapter 2, I practice

feminist methods because it helped to bring forth knowledge that intervened in this masculinist

realm. It is not difficult to be inspired by guidelines for research that not only remembers ethical

considerations while conducing research but also endorses the fact that women are whole and

complete human beings.

In this chapter I consider how I tried to practice feminist geographical methods and

reflect on the successes and setbacks I faced in trying to achieve this goal. By utilizing the

foundations of feminist methodology, I examine how my access, interactions and own

subjectivity influenced the research outcomes. Narratives are central to many of our

examinations as feminist geographers and as Richa Nagar (2013) heeds us, it is only responsible

to tell our own stories. In my case, the political context that my respondents contend with does

not reflect my own personal history. Though I am displaced, in that I no longer live in my

country of origin, it was my family's choice to migrate and my Canadian citizenship allows me

to apply for a visa to visit the place where I was born. At the Thai-Burma border though, my

physicality can be interpreted to be that of a migrant worker, Thai citizen, or a refugee with a

Thai identification card. These perceptions influenced the interactions and possibilities that

existed in the social field. There are advantages and disadvantages associated with bearing

resemblance to the populations you study and these are the tensions I will presently tease out now. Throughout this dissertation, I articulate more fragments of my own story. They are intentionally presented as glimpses because I question if I could provide a whole picture of being displaced and defining where my home is even if I tried.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of feminist epistemology and methodology, then is followed by a description of my research design and then finally a discussion about my attempts to reconcile the practice of feminist methods with the actual social context while conducting fieldwork.

a) Objectivity/Subjectivity

Feminists have critically engaged with issues surrounding the production of knowledge and representation by arguing that certain ways of knowing and groups have been excluded: "the mind/body, private/public, culture/nature, reason/emotion, abstract/concrete dichotomies are mapped onto gender differences so that the inferior of the two attributes is in each case, assumed to be feminine and as such 'natural' and so excluded from theoretical investigation" (McDowell, 1992a: 409). The omission can occur in a myriad of ways from interviewing only men as experts, neglecting to ask research questions that are of interest to women, using statistics that did not differentiate women from the category of the "household" or deciding to not utilize the data from both genders since it complicates the analysis of the results (Monk and Hanson, 1982). These choices in research design have theoretical and empirical consequences. The gender bias in the production of knowledge has resulted in poor empirical documentation of certain social

groups and issues. This lack in turn inhibits the robust theorization of the human condition and experience. Feminists want to destabilize dichotomies and assert that aspects of identity, such as gender, race, sexuality amongst others, plays a role in both the research process and the discourses that are constructed by them (Di Stefano, 1990; Bordo, 1990; Bondi, 2002). In the completion of this research project I study how the intersection of these characteristics inform the lived experience of being displaced.

Epistemology explores the process of creating knowledge and feminist epistemology specifically calls into question scientific objectivity. The scientific method suggests that the researcher forms a hypothesis of expected outcomes and then seek to prove the validity of these assertions through systematic testing; the results are then validated when they are reproducible (Harding, 1991). Feminist scholars suggest however that knowledge production is influenced by subjectivities that are contested and embodied. Haraway (1991) terms these ways of knowing to be 'situated knowledges.' Her conceptualization offers a framework for a feminist form of objectivity that does not rely on the creation of universal or essentialist knowledges, but instead suggests that knowledge is partial and subjective: "so, not so perversely, objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment, and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility. The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision" (Haraway, 1991: 190). The theme of vision is central to this version of objective knowledges and Haraway (1991) argues that even the biological function of seeing through our eyes is mediated by certain physiological functions. By recognizing that there is power involved in looking and the violent ramifications that can result from it, research itself becomes embodied and not from a site of nowhere. This is a significant argument to consider

when utilizing qualitative research methods, like ethnography, which relies strongly on participant observation (Rose, 1993).

A key facet of feminist epistemology is the promotion and adoption of methodology that acknowledges the subjectivity of the scholar who is embedded in the research process (Rose, 2002; Gibson-Graham, 1994). This means that the individual who is taking part in the production of knowledge is implicated and held accountable for the outcomes of the project and the meanings made from the empirical data. There are difficulties associated with representation while conducting research since the results themselves are influenced by the social context within which these meditations take place along with the identities of the researcher and participants. These types of methods are rooted in challenges to certain types of epistemology, specifically ones that endorse universality (Bondi, 2002). In the analysis of the empirical findings I tried to continually consider the subjectivities of those involved in the research process and to represent them to the best of my ability.

b) Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a central component of feminist methodological practice since it acknowledges that (inter)subjectivities (Bondi, 2002) are a part of conducting research. The term (inter)subjectivities refers to how knowledge production involves the identities, which are constituted by the background, social position and other forms of subjectivity, of both the researcher and the participant and the relationships that are formed from these encounters (Rose, 2002). These identities are not stable expressions of self and are instead produced relationally

and within social contexts (Bondi, 1999; Valentine, 1998). Acknowledging the contingencies

involved in these relationships allowed me to better understand how I utilized many aspects of

my identity to negotiate the encounters in the field at times advantageously.

c) Positionality

The practice of reflexivity is foundational to considering one's positionality, not just

while conducting research but within society as a whole. This is no easy task given that the very

boundaries we need to use to position ourselves are constantly maintained and transgressed

through social relations:

> ...If we imagine ourselves through a topography of boundaries, multiple, leaky, persistent,
> necessary, in what terms can we describe our 'situation'? What is our position? That is,
> in relation to what boundaries do we chart our location and interpret those of others?
> (Rose, 2002: 257).

The boundaries themselves are unstable and complex and that is why it is challenging to situate

oneself within this milieu.

Another type of boundary that is often established during the research is one involving

defining the 'field' and what is not the 'field.' Although this may allow scholars to set limits on

when they are in the mode of collecting data and observing the cultural and social workings of

the site, Katz (1994) also warns that this has the ability to damage the context and subjectivities

that are a part of our boundary-making. This means that rather than being a part of the social

dynamics that are taking place, we can try to focus on only certain processes and subject

positions. Positionality plays a large role in the ability of researchers to gain access to field sites

and the ability to speak to people who live out their everyday lives there.

All three of these facets of feminist methodology informed my research and continually

allowed me to assess both my strategies for data collection and behavior in the social context.

THE "FIELD"

My research focuses on the 'home' creation practices of Karen refugees from Burma who

are living in camps along the Thai-Burma border and those who have been resettled in Canada.

This multi-sited project seeks to better understand the construction of 'home' as a type of place,

in that meaning is derived from its existence through identity creation (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 1976)

and as the politicized locus of power relationships (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; hooks, 1990). My

research questions ask: how do Karen refugees create 'home' across multiple sites of

displacement and how do the governance and settlement programs at both sites shape these

home-making practices? These questions carry theoretical and policy relevance. Place has been

theorized in the past to be more static in nature, but in the context that I, and others interested in

protracted refugee situations, study, this is challenged through the types of places that are

successfully created within flows of movement. There is also a tension between mobility and

immobility in these settings where subjects are often able to take on aspects of both these states

through their liminal practices.

With Thailand not being a signatory member of the 1951 UN Convention Relating to

Refugees, displaced Karen persons from Burma face certain challenges. They are not recognized

as refugees, have their mobility severely limited within the periphery of the nation in encampments and are restricted from taking on formal employment. Being one of the longest protracted refugee situations in the world, individuals will often spend more than a decade living along the Thai-Burma border in camps. Even within this precarious situation, there is every indication, through my study of their relationship to food and material cultures, that they are successfully creating 'home' in places that would be commonly deemed to be undesirable (Cresswell, 1996). A select few are able to be sponsored by governments to resettle in North America, Europe and Australia. Consequently I explore all of these queries in Mae La Camp in Thailand along the Thai-Burma border, which is the international border that they cross in their initial stage of displacement and also in the Canadian locations of Toronto and Thunder Bay. It is through resettlement that the home-making practices of these communities are once again altered, challenged and renewed with the everyday realities of substandard housing, climate, culture shock, difficulties interacting with host communities and navigating the more urban environment. The findings can also inform policies regarding how the refugee populations are managed within Thailand, and the settlement programs that provide assistance upon arrival.

In order to address my research questions I spoke to members of the Karen community in all three research sites and key informants involved in camp management and settlement. Additionally I conducted a literature search through policy documents to better understand the policies and laws in the encampments and for resettlement in Canada. The participants at the Thai-Burma border were recruited randomly through my contacts at the "women's organization"[7], which provides employment and training programs for women, and in Canada by

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[7] I am calling the NGO I volunteered with "women's organization" throughout this dissertation to protect their identity.

contacts within the settlement agency community. One of the outcomes of using this

snowballing method for meeting respondents was that I mainly spoke to women. Since gender

relations involves considering the social construction of both masculinity and femininity, I do

wish that I had had the opportunity to connect with more men. Other factors that contributed to

this result include my affiliation with a women's organization that mainly interacts and provide

services for women, the fact that I was permitted to conduct my research during daylight hours

which is when many men work outside of the camp as labourers and perhaps that in both the

Thai and Canadian contexts, more women were interested in speaking to me due to my own

positionality. After completing the informed consent portion, which was obtained through verbal

confirmation, the participants spoke to me for at least an hour about their experiences. I chose to

not use written consent forms for the participants in Thailand due to issues with literacy and a

history of distrust of signed documents. For the interviewees in Canada and for all key

informant interviews, they read and signed the written consent forms. I also conducted 7 key

informant interviews with representatives of non-governmental organizations who work in Mae

La camp and government officials based in Thailand (see Table 3.1.). Several of my respondents

in Canada are settlement workers and provide assistance within the community, but we mainly

discussed their personal histories since they did not want to represent their agencies in this

project. My use of participant observation was utilized for the organizational setting within a

non-governmental agency that works with refugees along the Thai-Burma border. As a volunteer

within this organization I was able to witness some of the power struggles and the work-place

politics that ensued. I was unable to realize my goal of observing a household within the camp,

the reasons of which I expand on in my discussion below, but did witness some of the day-to-day

activities within the Mae La community.

Organization	Date	Mandate
Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees (COERR)	February 23, 2011	Provide seeds and livelihood options to residents in Mae La camp
International Organization for Migration (IOM)	January 17, 2011	Implement cultural training to refugees prior to resettlement to Canada and various other countries
International Rescue Committee (IRC)	February 22, 2011	Implement cultural training to refugees prior to resettlement to the United States and other countries
Karen Women Organization (KWO)	February 26, 2011	Offer women employment to produce handicrafts and manage the safe-house within the camp for victims of domestic violence and rape
Shanti Volunteer Association from Japan (SVA)	January 19, 2011	Manage the library and learning resources centre in Mae La camp
Thai-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC)	January 31, 2011	Provide food and material aid to refugees living in Mae La camp
Canadian Embassy in Bangkok (Luc Le Francois)	February 8, 2011	Collaborate with the UNHCR to select refugees for resettlement to Canada

Table 3.1. Non-governmental organizations and key informant interviews conducted in Thailand from

2010-2011.

I utilized mainly semi-structured interviews with refugees of Karen ethnicity in the three

sites of Mae La camp along the Thai-Burma border and in the cities of Toronto and Thunder Bay

Canada. When the interviews required the use of the Karen language I would ask the questions in English which the interpreter then communicated to the participants. The translator would inform me of their answers and again assist with the follow-up questions. Though I am so grateful for the assistance in language translation and the objectives for the project could not have been met otherwise, I did feel distanced from the respondents during these discussions. When I completed the interviews that used the English and Burmese language myself, I felt fully immersed in the process and found the experience to be infinitely more enjoyable. The recorded material was then translated and/or transcribed by myself or my research assistant. Thankfully, I found that when I was analyzing the data and reading through the transcription, I regained my sense of involvement and passion for the study as a whole.

Gender	Age	Number of individuals
Female	18-30 years	5
Female	30-50 years	39
Female	50-70 years	3
Male	18-30 years	1
Male	30-50 years	2
Male	50-70 years	0

Table 3.2. The gender, age and number of individuals who participated in focus groups and semi-structured interviews in Thailand from 2010-2011 (n=50).

Gender	Age	Number of individuals
Female	18-30 years	2
Female	30-50 years	4
Female	50-70 years	1
Male	18-30 years	2
Male	30-50 years	4
Male	50-70 years	0

Table 3.3. The gender, age and number of individuals who participated in semi-structured interviews in Canada in 2011 (n=13).

The term for 'home' in the Burmese (*Aine)* and Karen (*Hee)* language refer literally to the physical structure itself. However, depending on how the word is phrased, it can also refer to the social context within the home, such as family or a religious home. With this in mind, I was careful to be very clear about when I was asking about the material structure of their homes versus when I wanted to know more about the emotional aspects of being home. Judging by the respondents' answers, these two connotations were not a source of confusion throughout the interviewing process. I completed 20 semi-structured interviews that were on a one-to-one basis and also organized two focus groups with around 15 women present at each session. Therefore, in total I spoke to 50 individuals in the camp context (see Table 3.2.). In the Canadian context I met with 13 community members of Karen descent and informally spoke to 3 settlement workers who assist the government-sponsored refugees adapt to life in Canada (see Table 3.3.). I became acquainted with them through existing contacts in Toronto and Thunder Bay.

The same questions were asked in both the semi-structured interviews and focus group formats to ensure consistency throughout the research process. However, the one-on-one discussions were more successful at discussing deeper motivations for departure from Burma and the very personal ways of living in the camp. The focus groups had the tendency to hinder the participation of the more reserved participants, though they were encouraged, but had a more joyful atmosphere with jokes and happier memories because of the presence of gregarious community leaders. Even with the diverging outcomes, I believe both results added richness to the data. All of the participants in Mae La were women or men associated with the "women's organization," either as employees or close friends of the manager of the camp office. I did not use focus groups in Canada because all of the participants preferred to meet at their place of residence or local cafes for the interviews. This may be attributed to their busy schedules and commitments but I did not want to impose too greatly on them. Therefore, all of the interviews I conducted in Toronto and Thunder Bay were one-on-one discussions. I spoke to both women and men but the majority of my respondents are females. The names of the participants have been changed to ensure their anonymity. Most of the pseudonyms suggest their ethnicity and all of the names indicate their gender which prevents them from becoming nameless, faceless people in the text. In order to protect the identity of the non-governmental organization that facilitated my access to Mae La camp I refer to them as "women's organization" throughout this document. This ensures that their permission to conduct work in the camp setting, which is granted by the Ministry of the Interior of Thailand, is in no way compromised. I have taken care to remain as faithful to the original manner in which these stories were shared with me.

OBJECTIVITY/SUBJECTIVITY: ACCESS

The issue of access was of utmost consideration when I conducted preliminary fieldwork

in 2009 and while creating my methodological framework for the months that I would be in

Thailand in 2010. Although there are informal practices that allow one to visit Mae La camp,

both my supervisor and I were determined to obtain legal permission to be there, which is

granted by the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) in Thailand. The ability to apply for such a

document is made easier if you are affiliated with a non-governmental organization that is

recognized to conduct work in the refugee camp and that is why I tried to align myself with two

organizations. Although I tried to contact several different non-governmental organizations, I

was lucky enough to meet with the Thai-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) and a "women's

organization" who assisted me in different ways. Both organizations knew in the summer of

2009 that I would be returning a year later, was interested in volunteering with them and would

appreciate obtaining formal permission.

My relationship with the human resources manager at the Bangkok office of TBBC was

positive and he was very helpful with writing letters for funding applications and for my visa

application. He then introduced me to the field officer in Mae Sot who I would mainly be

working with throughout my time at the border and this is when I learnt about the contingencies

in fieldwork that are very difficult to control since they shift with the context. While trying to

make plans about collaborating with an organization in Mae Sot, a misunderstanding between the

two of us led to a few emails being exchanged where he 'educated' me about life at the border

and the 'field.' Being a Caucasian male who had committed to working in the camp setting for a

lengthy period of time, perhaps he interpreted my requests as being those of an entitled

university student. Clearly that was not my intent, though in hindsight perhaps I should have

been less straight-forward with my desired results. He was happy to articulate that from his

perspective there was a lot that I did not 'understand.' Wanting to maintain professionalism I

maintained my composure with my replies and tried to move forward, when in reality I

experienced anger and frustration at his condescending and paternalistic tone. In the end, it

became clear that this collaboration was not going to move forward and I began to look at my

other options.

I had met with two representatives at a "women's organization" while conducting

preliminary fieldwork and the response had been mainly positive. They understood my interest

in volunteering with the organization and although they did not offer any concrete agreements,

asked me to keep in touch with them throughout the year and to meet again with them when I

returned. I emailed with the volunteer coordinator at the beginning of 2010 to submit an

application form and we planned to meet when I returned to Thailand in July of that year. The

initial meeting was encouraging and the timing was convenient because an organizational

meeting was scheduled for later that week and she was going to propose my volunteer placement

in Mae Sot during that discussion. I was then asked to return to the office and meet with Mae

Sot's field officer to discuss the possible assignment. At this meeting there were indications that

negotiating a volunteer placement was going to require some work on my part, which I inferred

from the tense and, often times, confrontational moments during the discussion. They were very

concerned that my conducting research, which is prohibited in the camp, would jeopardize the

delicate relationship they maintain with the Thai government. They were unsettled by the

concept of conducting research within the camp and requested that I try to conduct the interviews in a discrete manner as possible, which ultimately impacted the method I utilized. I will elaborate on this in the next section of this paper. Additionally, they were worried that I would be too critical of the Thai State and did not want their ability to work in the camps with the women to be compromised because of it. To this end, I was honest and said that engaging with the policy issues associated with the management of refugees from Burma in the nation-state was a part of my work, but that I would try to be as diplomatic as possible. They did not offer a firm commitment to assist me with the logistical aspects of my research but I agreed to volunteer full-time at their office in Mae Sot in October and to continue assisting the members of the Chiang Mai team on a part-time basis until then. As a researcher, I was aware that these types of obstacles are just a part of negotiating the field, but this is not to say that it was not stressful or challenging to deal with at the time. I had planned to be in Thailand for eight months in total and I was concerned that I would not be able to meet my research goals before returning to Canada.

My relationship with the members of the Mae Sot field office shifted when I was invited to assist with a one-week training workshop in the middle of September. This session worked with women from several refugee camps and within the town to teach them the basics of being entrepreneurs and managing a business. There was also instruction on gender issues, leadership and marketing to help them negotiate these contexts. I was asked to take notes during the training session, which was going to be conducted in both Burmese and Karen. It was here that I not only got to meet some of the women that the "women's organization" employed and worked with, but to also bond with members of the Mae Sot office, especially the team leader and training coordinator. It is through informal conversations and interactions with them that I

believe I perhaps allayed some of their fears and gained a bit of trust. This reinforces the embodied nature of research, which is a key concept in feminist methodology, since trust and relationship building are of paramount importance. After I returned to begin my volunteer placement in Mae Sot, I was assigned to work with the training coordinator, who also became a friend and served as a translator for many of my interviews. The team leader also helped me coordinate the camp pass, a legal document that grants me permission to visit the refugee camp, and in time also became a friend. At this time I believe that my identity of being a 'Canadian' of Burmese-descent allowed me to integrate more easily amongst both the foreigner and 'local' communities. Being an expat, I was asked to sit at the front of the truck with the other managers when traveling to the workshop location and they related their struggles to create programming that was not too 'advanced' for the refugee women. This was while the employees of the "women's organization," who are of Karen descent, sat at the back of the truck. At the time I understood why as a foreigner I was allowed to be in the more comfortable place and I did question this positioning. But this being the first instance of meeting both these coordinators again after our tense meeting in Chiang Mai, I did not want to create anymore distance between us, though this action did socially differentiate me from the other workers at the camp. When I officially became a volunteer, I sat at the back of the truck. I believe that my Burmese heritage allowed both the employees and participants of the workshop to feel more at ease with me, which allowed for more social interaction and the formation of bonds. Though I may be Burmese, the ethnicity of the members of the armed forces and government officials that caused them such harm, I am also a woman of shorter height and a younger complexion. The women also teased me about my 'sing-song' voice and asked if I naturally spoke this way. Perhaps due

to the disconnect between my body and those of soldiers, I was more relatable and approachable. Regardless of how I was perceived, and although I could operate in both groups, I never felt that I fully belonged in either one of them.

The organizational structure that was in place at the time I was there is something that I feel that I should also comment on. Most of the managerial positions were occupied by a close-knit team of non-governmental workers who were of Filipino descent. From the outset it was clear that they shared a strong connection with each other and spent a great deal of personal time together. I initially bonded with one of the managers because I was helping him edit website materials. After the training session in Mae Sot, I also got a chance to build rapport with two of the other managers. I do believe that forming stronger professional relationships with these members of the organization helped to eventually cement my volunteer placement and all of the subsequent support I received for my research project. Since I volunteered full-time with the organization and it did inform how I conducted fieldwork in Thailand, I believe that it is relevant to discuss the tensions that I observed and were told of by members of the staff. This data is collected from my participant observation of the political nature of operating a non-governmental organization that manages support in the camp. I also feel that these conflicts were based ultimately on issues of inclusion and identity, which feminist methodology would further examine.

Several members of the staff complained that they could not relate to their managers because of their style of leadership and felt that as employees they were not afforded enough respect. Examples of such treatment mainly came in the way that demands were requested and how managers would berate them when their performance did not meet their expectations. Due

to my personal history of being raised in North America, I can understand how feedback and constructive criticism are both present in many leadership styles, though perhaps the methods in this context could have been more culturally sensitive. For example, the Karen employees wished that the managers would not raise their voice and wanted a calmer work environment. Although there was a veneer of professional politeness, the staff members would speak about the managers in private, in the Burmese language when they wanted to include me in the conversation and in Karen when they did not because they knew that I would not be able to understand them. I was trusted enough to be privy to some information due to my Burmese heritage. I could feel for the members of the management team also because it was pretty blatant that they were left out of discussions when the language spoken shifted from English to Karen. Having not heard the version of events from the managers I cannot judge the situation fairly, but it is clear that tensions within the organization were far from being discussed openly throughout my time there and the differences in power and responsibilities between the players involved are not in any way helpful.

The difficulties I had with negotiating access, not just physical access to a research site, but also to an organizational one that would make the completion of my goals possible, came as a surprise to me. It encouraged me to reflect on what my own expectations were prior to beginning the fieldwork portion of the doctoral program. In my mind, my own politics and training in gender issues would be compatible with an organization such as the "women's organization". With my personal history of leaving Burma and the passion I feel towards assisting with matters relating to the country, surely I would come across as a positive candidate in my interview. Additionally, I viewed my fluency in both the English and Burmese languages

and my educational training in Canada to be practical skill sets that they would seek out in a volunteer. Since I understood that I would be covering the costs of hiring a van to the camp and for food for the volunteers it was difficult for me to see why they would have such strong concerns about my placement. But looking back at the situation now with a perspective that only comes after being through it, I can understand why my offers to volunteer were not necessarily as special or as essential to them as I thought. They have a team of full-time staff members who have experience working in the context and have lived along the border for many years, most of them as displaced persons from Burma. They have knowledge that I would never be able to learn or embody, no matter how much time I devoted to being in the field or spent trying to obtain in a university setting. Additionally, they never have a shortage of interested volunteers from around the world who want to be involved with the organization. My skills as a doctoral student and the credibility that I thought it would afford me was not marketable to the extent that I expected, and I believe that other factors, like trying to relate to people and to see things from their perspective are what got me much further in this situation. I was not able to perform the identity of a knowledgeable and educated graduate student in control of the situation and instead relied solely on their desire to work with me. This experience taught me important lessons in humility and was a time when my social abilities were valued above my credentials. Therefore, I now feel blessed not only from having such a positive volunteer experience but grateful that I received so much assistance and support from the organization. The reassurance did not only come in the form of logistical backing but through that of friendship. Their affection and occasional teasing ultimately defined my time at the border, which at times was a lonely and isolating experience.

Meeting and recruiting participants in Canada did not pose as much of a challenge mainly because I was able to use a mixture of an institutional and organizational approach. I met most of my participants in Toronto by being introduced to key leaders within the Karen community through contacts at the Centre for Refugee Studies at York University. After completing interviews with these individuals, who are looked upon very highly within their ethnic community and also serve as representatives within the larger Toronto realm, they in turn introduced me to other members of their network and my recruitment grew from there. When I conducted fieldwork in Thunder Bay I was also introduced to key representatives through a member of my extended family who had worked in the settlement sector for most of her career, and my networks were extended in a similar manner. In fact, one of the community leaders in Thunder Bay kept commenting on how nice my Aunt Mary is. Even in Canada where I relied heavily on gaining access through my association with key individuals, the success of the interviews themselves depended on my ability to be personable and perform certain cultural codes that I knew only through a shared similar heritage. This again demonstrates the embodied nature of knowledge production and how at times I was able to take on the position, and the all the benefits it bestows, of being an 'insider' (McDowell, 1992b; Nagar, 1997).

REFLEXIVITY: INTERACTION

The main facet of trying to conduct research in the setting of a refugee camp in Thailand that affected my research method stemmed from issues of security. The ever-present Thai

soldiers and the system of monitoring the flow of mobility, all impacted how and when I was

able to meet with the participants to record their narratives.

Each visit to the camp required the practice of certain rituals. In order to enter the camp,

you must first pass silently through the three manned gates that are managed my members of the

Thai military. One of the key strategies of working at the camp is that you hire a driver who

knows the guards or who have developed informal relationships with them through the offering

of gifts. Several NGO workers lamented that some of the guards were intoxicated for the

entirety of the day, which can ultimately impact the official interactions you have with them. At

the first two gates your driver does all of the talking, making small talk and telling them the

purpose of the trip into Mae La. You remain in the car at the second gate because this when the

driver leaves to go speak to the guards and to register their license plate number. It is at the third

gate when you enter an administration building, quickly search for the registration booklet that is

assigned to your organization, place your name and information within the lines and try your best

to not to interact with the guards so as to avoid their questions. This administration building is

usually surrounded by inhabitants of the camp who have issues to settle with the security

personnel but most of the non-governmental agencies approach this part of the ritual within

vehicles and try to conduct the business of registration in the least disruptive manner as possible.

This is the type of formality that we faced each time we entered the camp and it set the tone for

how the observance of regulations is paramount within this context.

My first impressions of Mae La were that of surprise at its sheer size and its layout.

Having passed through some small villages while traveling up to Mandalay in Burma, the

buildings and feel of the place seemed somewhat familiar, like I was in Burma itself. There were

several small restaurants and an extensive market, but the majority of the time that I spent in Mae La was at the main "women's organization" office which was located in section B, the section where most of the non-governmental organizations have set up base. There are two reasons why my meetings and interviews took place in the office: we did not want bring attention to the fact that I was conducting research in the camp and to ensure the safety and anonymity of the respondents, who were mainly women. Being interested in the conceptualization of home and the gender relations that take place within this realm, there are advantages to relying so heavily on the "women's organization" for the recruitment of respondents. I was able to become acquainted with so many women and their stories. In the same vein, I did not have access to as many men who do not typically practice weaving, which is a very gendered-task.

Additionally, there are both positive and negative aspects to having to conduct research mainly at the "women's organization" office. The positives lie in the fact that I was not compromising the "women's organization's" ability to continue their work in the camp by blatantly practicing something that is prohibited and that my participants felt safe in the setting where the interviews were taking place because it was familiar and associated with an organization that they are affiliated with. The unfortunate part of this arrangement is that although I am interested in their relationship to home and food, I could never actually visit a single one of them within this setting, and I had to mainly rely on what they relayed to me through their narratives. Although their stories and perspectives are striking and profound, the data would have been strengthened with my participant observation of their day-to-day practices within the home. An examination of their lives away from the formality of an interview could have contributed more nuance and depth to the study, but I believe that they would have only

allowed me to access their homes if we had a greater friendship. The further development of these relationships would have required more than what my limited time in the camp would have allowed and this was one setback that I did not overcome. Also related to issues of security, it is a fair distance between section A, which is where most of the participants lived and section B, which is where the office is located. This is why they would meet us by the gate and we would offer them a ride to and from the office. Leaving the section did not seem to pose a problem but bringing the women in required more delicacy. To avoid them having to go through the checkpoints, we would drop them off at a small market before the gate post and they would make their way on foot to the office, to avoid having to face the security personnel.

Luckily, conducting the interviews in the office did not seem to impact the rapport I had with the women I met with because of several factors that I believe were related to our (inter)subjectivities. The women I interviewed varied from age to being in their twenties to those entering their sixties, yet when we were in the same room and my translator would introduce me as someone who had been born in Burma but had lived in Canada as a young child, there didn't seem to be a large barrier between us. I am not sure if it was our shared history of being from Burma, a country that we have complicated associations with, or my identity of being a female in her twenties that put them more at ease. One of my participants in Canada once joked that he had expected an older academic after emailing with me and I show up being someone who looks like an eighteen year old. There was also the issue of my ethnicity. Prior to beginning my fieldwork in 2010, I knew that being 'Burmese' could pose some problems since the majority of the participants would have had traumatic histories with 'Burmese' soldiers. There were aspects of my identity that were and were not 'Burmese.' Since I had lived in Yangon and only spoke

the Burmese language, these are all indicators that would categorize me as being different from other ethnic minorities. However, both my parents have always emphasized their Mon and Rakhine heritage, even though they could no longer speak the languages. Therefore, I would explain this to the participants when they would question me about my ethnic heritage. Interestingly enough, most would comment that I do not 'look' Burmese and instead that they would have guessed that I was of the Shan heritage.

I believe the more significant factor that helped me build affinity with the research participants was the fact that the training coordinator was my translator for many of the interviews. There are political implications associated with using a translator because I gained creditability by knowing her and how she translated the respondents' answers informed a large portion of my project. Being a very able leader, she was an excellent research assistant by asking for clarification and further elaboration on questions and making jokes throughout the interview to keep it interesting. The majority of my interviews (42 participants) were conducted with her. Her skill is even more apparent when I think of the difference in the quality of the interviews I conducted in early 2011 after I had to hire another research assistant. Due to an increase in her workload the training coordinator could no longer accompany me to the camp. Therefore, I utilized a young teacher who lived in the camp and he completed the job professionally. However, I could not help but notice the change in the atmosphere of the interviews when he, a man, was now asking the mainly women participants questions about their relationship to 'home.' The discussions became much more formal and did not have the same air of openness. I completed 8 one-on-one interviews with the second research assistant.

I am positive that I gained most of my credibility by being associated with the training coordinator from the "women's organization" which not only was essential during the interviews but also during the recruitment process. Having already spoken of the securitized nature of the camp and how all of the women did not want me to conduct the interviews within their homes, the challenge of recruitment was overcome mainly through my research assistant's networks. There are two main reasons why I could never have approached people at their homes and requested an interview: firstly, Mae La is a space where it matters a great deal who you know and there are major trust issues that need to be overcome for them to even consider participating in a research study. Without my research assistant's affiliation with the "women's organization," a reputable and well-regarded organization, and years of work on the organization's part of building up this network of women, it would have been extremely difficult for me to meet members of this community.

When my research assistant took on the role of translating from Karen to English, she was put to the task of interacting with both the participant and keeping me involved in the process. Although she did a fine job and I was able to take extensive notes during the telling of their narratives, I did feel a sense of detachment. This was the case in both the Thai and Canadian contexts when I had to utilize a translator to conduct interviews and is a frustration that I still have to come to terms with. Although I fully acknowledge my own limitations for not being fluent in the language required for my field site, I felt much more at ease when I could conduct interviews in English and Burmese in Canada. The sense of control once again returned and I felt that I could connect with the participants without a mediator. Additionally, some of the interviews in Canada were within the informant's homes, which also made asking the questions

feel more relevant. I do feel that this setting generated richer answers since the place made them feel more at ease and they could draw on their surroundings to trigger certain memories or reflections. The circumstances of the interviewees in Canada were far less precarious than in the camp, though they still face their challenges. Therefore, with their sense of safety and stability more intact, they might have been able to reflect on their past and present experiences with less of a sense of urgency. In hindsight, offering the respondents disposable cameras to document their meanings of home would have been a fruitful exercise to allow them to tell their story with a different approach. I hope to incorporate this method in further examinations of home-make strategies.

POSITIONALITY: SENSE OF SELF

While understanding that the purpose of this chapter is to integrate the feminist methodology practices of reflexivity and relate how they impacted the research outcomes, this portion will also consider the role that my own subjectivity and positionality played in completing fieldwork. The issues I will focus on are that of mobility, safety and identity, which are kept as distinct categories for clarity sake but are interrelated.

The limitations that are set on the mobility of the camp inhabitants I met and interviewed has been a key focus in my research, related to themes of power and boundaries. But experiencing firsthand the differential ways that I could cross these securitized limits each time I entered and left Mae La camp, compared to the realities of the people who were willing to share their stories with me was a difficult process. Although there are momentary tests on my own

mobility, on which I will expand on later in this section, they can be overcome with the legal documents that grant me more freedom with my movement. This is in contrast to what is at stake for the refugees when they try to test the camp's securitized borders, with or without legal permission. For each visit, I would enter their context, get to know and share in aspects of their lives and would then leave again, since I am required to exit by nightfall. The process of leaving was challenging, even if in all honesty I could not imagine myself wanting to stay since the confined nature of encampment never put me at ease. What was difficult was knowing that I had the choice of practicing certain types of mobility, which was not afforded to most members of this community. Additionally, if I could have remained I believe that my research would have been much richer because the place would have become more familiar with time and I could have perhaps worked towards building stronger bonds with my participants.

Since I am not permitted to reside full-time in the camp, I mainly lived in the nearby town of Mae Sot, which was approximately a one-hour car ride from Mae La camp. Being a border town, there is a great diversity of ethnicities, non-governmental workers and volunteers living in one place. There are a fair number of services offered at this site that caters to the population such as international grocery stores like Tesco Lotus, WIFI service and fast-food chains like Kentucky Fried Chicken. Having developed a network with other expats working on political and health issues, the social aspect of living there was never trying. What was of more concern to me was maintaining my safety, since the character of the town changes a great deal at night. This is when instances of crime from petty theft to more serious gendered violence is more prevalent. While completing my preliminary fieldwork in 2009, my friend who regularly conducts work in Mae Sot warned me to travel with someone at night because as a white female,

they may rob her, but because of my Asian identity, they may mistake me for a migrant worker and could rape me. Although the statement is simplistic and blunt, I believe that there are good intensions behind it and is based partly in truth. I used a second-hand bicycle as transportation while living there, not only to get me from place to place more comfortably in the heat, but to also keep me safer from people and the territorial stray dogs. The street dogs tend to travel in large packs and become more aggressive at night when their vision is compromised. An attack by a dog would have had severe medical consequences and could have compromised my ability to complete my research. As researchers, we place our bodies in precarious situations to meet our professional objectives; it is critical to protect our health and wellbeing and doing so becomes part of the research process.

Our identities shape our social interactions and this doesn't change while in the field. There were instances when my mobility was tested momentarily and they were always related to my subjectivity. I would leave Mae Sot every other weekend since I was still sharing a house with friends in Chiang Mai and these trips were my short respites from the field site. Each time I would enter and leave the checkpoints I knew to offer my passport, because the soldiers never check the documents of the non-Asian expats in the bus and instead spend the majority of the search scrutinizing the Asian bodies. In almost all of the instances they return my passport after checking that my Thai visa is up to date, but there was the one time that the guard actually proceeded to ask me questions in Burmese. Not knowing whether to answer in Burmese or English I paused and he stated "weren't you born in Burma?" With this I knew the type of answer he would want so I answered back in Burmese that I left when I was very young. Satisfied, he returned my document, but this incident made me reflect on the types of identity

performances we put on to negotiate these power dynamics. Would it have been different if I had answered in English with my Canadian accent to express a different version of my subjectivity? Why did I have a desire to? During my last morning in Mae Sot, I was making my way to the bus station with a colleague from the "women's organization". Our motor taxi was stopped by the Thai police and he asked to see our papers. Since my colleague was speaking to him in Thai and I was trying to get clarification in English, I did not know the topic of the conversation until after we had been allowed to leave. My colleague told me that the police officer had asked if I had gotten my citizenship through resettlement. Although this is my research interest, this was the first time that I, for a brief moment, got placed in the same subject position as the interviewees I would meet with in Canada, through the officer's perception. In part, I was annoyed that he reduced my identity and the experience of my family's migration with his assumption. However, his question was a relevant issue in the region and this was in a context where people were negotiating their statelessness. At that moment I very much felt that I was in a liminal identity space that was both based on truth and untruth.

While living in Mae Sot, I was not only concerned with my safety but also trying to avoid the hassle of having to deal with members of the Thai police. Having heard of how they can demand 'gifts' from certain types of bodies in Mae Sot, I always dressed in such a way that reflected that I was not from 'there.' Examples of said items include sunglasses, blouses, skirts and shorts that were a contrast to sarongs or styles from the region. I now question whether I would have always adorned such markers of identity because it reflects having been acculturated within a North American context from a young age or whether I actually performed a hyper-obvious form of this to differentiate myself? Is my performance any different from the expats

who want to look more 'local'? Are they both equally problematic? I dressed in equally the same way when I had to start going to the camp alone at the beginning of 2011. It was during these trips that I had my passport in hand, along with the camp pass, so that any questions of leaving the premises could be dealt with swiftly. I also knew that my fluency in English and Canadian citizenship were there to overcome any initial questions that were posed because of my body. My friend in Chiang Mai said that if I'm ever in a situation with the police, I just need to speak (my fluent English in my Canadian accent) to gain some authority. But what does this type of authority demonstrate about relations between the Global North and South? I understand that these are issues that come with accessing such a site, but my own anxieties were complex and something I am sure I will always deal with. These types of negotiations are equally performed by members of the camp with their own embodiments. Those with access to greater material wealth present themselves with more Western fashions and goods to demonstrate their ability to practice consumption. The fields of social differentiation are ever-present.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have sought to discuss my goals of trying to practice feminist geographical methodology while completing the fieldwork portion of my research. Through the elaboration of knowledge formation and reflexivity in my project I have considered how I have met some of the objectives of feminist methods as a result of the specific circumstances surrounding my time in the field. By reflecting on my own positionality throughout this process I have come to terms with how I negotiated different issues of access, power and identity

performances to make connections with people and address some of my scholarly questions. How one's body is perceived along with the identity we choose to show the world influence the practice of conducting research, the questions we ask and the analysis we produce. These considerations will assist me in the planning and execution of research in the future, along with the more important goal of ethical behavior in everyday life.

POSITIONING

It is often said that one cannot always see clearly while fully embedded in the day to day workings of life. It is only after those heightened moments have passed that one can try to make sense of what has transpired and theorize how these events fit into one's history and identity. It is likely that these memories are distorted in some form, since I wrote each positioning reflection near the end of the dissertation writing process, at a time when I've had considerable distance from my time in the 'field.' The title 'Positioning[8]' refers to the concept of positionality, which is how the various aspects of my subjectivity like gender, race and social standing intersect to influence how I am able to exist and negotiate the social realm (Katz, 1994). I am actively trying to 'position' myself in the research through each reflection, but am still entrenched in working through the politics of how others perceive and put me in my place. This act of holding myself accountable for the time in the 'field' and its outcomes is a form of deference to the role of

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[8] Positionality is how the various aspects of one's subjectivity like gender, race and social standing intersect to influence how one is able to negotiate the social realm (Katz, 1994; Rose, 1993). I play on this definition by remembering how each personal reflection is an attempt to "position" myself in the research and the role of representation in the creation of knowledge.

representation in each personal statement and throughout this entire dissertation. I am mindful that ultimately this work is a limited, though careful, recollection and analysis of events.

Composing this chapter has been a fruitful exercise in allowing me to see how I negotiated a place and a context that I found so fascinating, inspiring and challenging all at the same time. Though I am mindful that these sentiments are partly about someone else's lived reality and not my own, my biases and opinions are inextricably linked to this project. Therefore, in extension of this exercise to recognize and reflect on my part in this research process, I will begin each empirical chapter by suggesting how my analysis of the material was very much influenced by my past and present. It is, after all, what we can't leave behind.

In the introduction I explained why I am interested in the conceptualization of home and how it is tied to my own personal history of being an immigrant from Burma. When people ask why I chose to ground my examination of home-making strategies with the two very specific facets of material cultures and food, the honest answer is that they are a part of who I am. I have always believed that I would only be able to successfully complete the doctoral degree if I studied aspects that are an integral part of my own values and sense of self. If that is the case then, I love fashion (my closest relationship to material cultures), food and feminist politics. The feminist approach to the material world and its attention to how normative performances of gender and femininity (Butler, 1990; de Beauvoir, 1953) are privileged, cautions us to see these conventions as political and with social consequence. The warning also provides this category of fashion with more substance and depth through its role in the greater social negotiations with taste, class and status (Bourdieu, 1988). Therefore, I take these sensibilities about how material cultures and our relationship to cuisine ultimately make us feel and act and apply it the process

of making home when displaced. My objective is to not simply show that the creation of home

is possible in the most trying of circumstances, but that these practices themselves allow for the

cultivation of purpose and often provide the potential for so much more.

Chapter Four: Flows—The journey across multiple borders and the construction of home

POSITIONING

Concerning borders and boundaries, I mostly associate them with the process of leaving and the bureaucratic measures involved with seeking permission to stay where I landed. For the majority of my respondents, the process is not so straightforward and easy. Their journeys are far more perilous and the context they have to negotiate after the crossing is insecure. But what these borders offer us is the potential of change. We are commonly driven by the yearning for different conditions and what results is a combination of pleasure and dissatisfaction with the outcomes of our circumstances. Mostly though, these borders represent the distance, large or small, from places of significance. That first visit after migration, the one for which my parents saved for months and months, was slightly unbearable. It was at this point that I had mostly dulled my desire to be within the warmth of my extended family but had not built up enough reserves to actually like my new 'home.' So in this state I went and enjoyed the time and their company and my defenses were slowly diminished. I was then left bare and vulnerable for the goodbyes at the airport; when the entire family packed themselves into cars to see us off. I knew that it would be years before I would be back there again. Many of my respondents may never get such pilgrimages and their desires may be constant. That is a form of silent pain. Of course borders do not entrap us, but sometimes, when you are living through these stories, they might as well confine us. When your former home is so unattainable, it feels like you will never make up the distance, no matter how hard you try. You just don't live there anymore, even if you take traces of the past with you.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will explore how borders and other types of boundaries influence the

creation of home for Karen refugees at multiple sites of displacement. The home making

practices are influenced by the lived experience of negotiating with a political border through the

crossing, the management of the refugee camp and the immobility that results from seeking

refuge in Thailand. Though borders are theorized to be fluid, historically contingent

demarcations that are worked on by various players (Newman, 2003; Paasi, 2009), the process of

negotiating with one is influenced by your body and positionality. Additionally, the experience

of actually bypassing these political lines may indeed be very palpable and blatant. The ease

with which you are able to negotiate them speaks to your own privilege and the perception of

others. Similarly, the intersection of race, gender, ability and social status in your identity comes

into play when negotiating with other types of boundaries that exist within society to

differentiate and classify. Because of this, these borders and boundaries and the distinctions

between them, will impact you in distinct ways. I will draw out these nuanced experiences in

this chapter, with specifically the case of Karen refugees from Burma and their instances of

making home after forced migration.

With an increased securitization of borders (Huysman, 2006) and greater civilian

surveillance after 9/11, refugees are often utilized as a scapegoat for moral panic and the fearing

of "alien" others (Mountz, 2011; Squire, 2010). As a result, the movement of refugees and their

bodies are carefully regulated (Fitzgerald, 2011). This is further complicated when countries,

like in the case of Thailand, do not sign the 1967 UN Convention Relating to Refugees but still

must manage displaced persons within their national boundaries. While not providing them with status or citizenship, individuals fleeing Burma are able to live in temporary encampments along the Thai-Burma border, in Thailand, where their social reproduction is supported by food and material aid from international and non-governmental organizations. They are not legally permitted to work and must remain within the camp's limits or risk the punishment of fines or deportation back to Burma. Having given up legal protection from a certain government also changes their positioning in an international order that places value on this status:

> Historically and conceptually there has been a strong connection between the idea of humanness and of membership of a society. Society here means that ordered through a nation-state, with clear territorial and citizenship boundaries and a system of governance over its particular citizens (Urry, 2000: 9).

Urry (2000) critiques these principles by examining how, due to the increasing mobility of people and goods across political borders, there are alternative forms of citizenships emerging that take on different guises and with varying levels of rights afforded to them. Although this form of cosmopolitan citizenship can challenge more traditional models of membership to society, it is often the very privileged who are a part of this highly mobile class. They use their economic resources and status to traverse borders without the precariousness that stems from lack of legal status or statelessness. When individuals disrupt the order of things through their movements, steps are taken to find, assess and manage them. However, there are many different ways of destabilizing existing systems; this troubling of distinct categories of the citizen, refugee and the powerful are what I'm interested in addressing in the analysis of my findings.

The safeguarding of territory is the objective when increasing security measures. There are social, political, cultural and cognitive elements that constitute a territory. The social aspect

of territory is upheld by the different communities that reside within national boundaries; they are established and reinforced formally through recognition within the political realm and/or with the threat of violence. The cultural and cognitive aspects of territory are both derived from the role that territories play in identity formation projects and the creation of collective memories (Delaney, 2005). It is through these nationalistic sentiments that individuals build ties with some and can exclude others. State power plays a key role in maintaining this form of conceptualization of space but since the state is not a homogeneous entity, this power is not expressed uniformly and must be continually enacted to exist (Berezin, 2003). This more heterogeneous model of territory challenges the formerly accepted notion of territories being static containers for sovereign relations (Sparke, 2005; Cowen and Gilbert, 2007), or what Agnew (1994) would call the "territorial trap." Conceptually, this description of territory may hold true but how they are experienced in reality have physical and emotional consequences, as demonstrated by the border crossings of many residents at Mae La Camp.

I do not suggest that borders and boundaries are the same, nor should they be studied in the same way. However, the common link between them is how our lived experience with them impact our sense of self and quality of life (Wastl-Walter and Staeheli, 2004). Additionally, they are both strategically used to manage and create docile bodies (Amoore, 2006). An example of other types of boundaries that are included in my study mainly involve police check points that control the mobility of the refugee population. Other common examples in our everyday lives include the security screening process at airports, personal identification cards and passports (Mongia, 2003) that record our travel. It is through these checks and balances that systems attempt to make individuals and their actions more legible and therefore easier to manage (Salter,

2007; Adey, 2004; Silvey, 2008). With the rights that our citizenship grants, we also make ourselves accessible to the powers that would like us to be accounted for.

Citizenship, which provides rights and responsibilities but also protection, is a component that is renegotiated when displaced. Bestowing citizenship is linked to the state precisely because it is a strategy to govern members within its territorial boundaries. The freedoms and regulations associated with citizenship encourage individuals to engage with political issues and pledge allegiance to their nation-state (Agnew, 2005). This traditional conceptualization of citizenship is destabilized when these rights are granted unevenly within a country and/or when individuals, due to experiences of violence and persecution, no longer believe that their country of origin is able to protect them from harm. This is when some will cross international borders, seek refuge in another nation and give up membership to any state to seek recognition through international laws. To gain refugee status, individuals must prove that due to risk of death or harm they must flee their country of birth. Most refugees also gain temporary or group determination status, which is called *Prima Facie* (Hyndman and Nylund, 1998). A significant aspect of their displacement, the crossing of political borders, is an action fraught with consequences.

OBJECTIVE

Home-making strategies are often transnational in nature when individuals are confronted with forced migration (Brun and Fabos, 2015; Van Hear, 2006). The border crossing strategies and the creation of home involve engagement and attachment to more than one nation-state

(Barrett et al., 2009; Brickell, 2012b; Capo, 2015). These negotiations in turn complicate the cultivation of a sense of belonging through the longing for a place from their past (Fabos, 2015; Trapp, 2015). The empirical findings in this chapter will speak to not only the socio-legal implications of national borders but the other types of boundaries that are imposed and generated in the everyday lives of the individuals living in encampments along the Thai-Burma border and for those who migrated to Canada. I argue that through the crossing of political borders, negotiating with management systems at the camp and living with immobility that Karen refugees better define their meaning of home. I seek to better understand how these borders are transgressed and reinforced as part of the power negotiations in case of the Karen refugee community. These engagement with borders and boundaries serve as fertile ground for discussion on the centrality of home-making practices within the geopolitical implications associated with being displaced.

HISTORICAL DEMARCATION

To provide more historical context to this borderland region between Burma and Thailand, it is important to consider how the relationship between mobile groups in Southeast Asia and the 'state,' has often been a tenuous one (Scott, 2010). Many sovereigns throughout this region's history desired to encourage more rooted practices, which was part of a larger project of control. The movements of these individuals prevent the foundational methods of governance such as the counting and monitoring of populations. This in turn undermines the efficiency of state management through biopolitical processes. Though Scott (1998) may assert that the attempt to

make people's lives more legible will continue but will remain incomplete and unattainable, the access to rights and freedoms are often contingent on being registered in the state apparatus. These state projects are compelling for the bureaucrats and politicians who take part in them. With both Thailand and more recently Burma trying to uphold or form democratic modes of governance, the roles, wellbeing and future place of residence of refugees, as actors in this network, will come into question. Although it can be appealing to describe the governments of these two countries as the principle administrators of these political negotiations, the power rests in members of different and often competing interest groups within the territories and beyond through extensive networks.

The development and continued recognition of this particular border is historically contingent and Thongchai's (1994) exploration of the different political negotiations that were involved in the demarcation of the Thai-Burma border provides a salient example of these processes (Thongchai, 1994). The foundation of the Western border of Thailand with Burma assisted the interests of the British who wanted clear boundaries to extract, export and trade teak. Additionally, a clear drawing of their Eastern frontier in Thailand with Cambodia allowed French forces to better govern. These geopolitical strategies not only allowed Thailand to avoid colonial rule but also helped to establish a strong nationalist identity of what constitutes "Thai" identity, which is influenced by Buddhist precepts and respect for the monarchy. These meditations had material consequences for the people living within renegotiated areas, since the formal demarcation of a political border altered livelihood practices and freedom of travel. These were not simply the abstract dealings of a handful of political elites but altered the geographical

location of their homes. The policies also placed pressure on how these groups within the liminal border space could define themselves and which identities would be recognized by law.

Historically and with current policies, the Royal Thai government has indicated that integration into Thai society is not an option and that leaves repatriation and resettlement as possible solutions for the refugee populations (CIC, 2009; Dona, 2015). It is estimated that two-thirds of the 30 million individuals who are under the care of the UNHCR are not granted refugee status. This means that living in a temporary and protracted setting is very much the norm for many displaced persons (Dona, 2015). It is also understandable that the Thai State is wary of offering such promises when recognizing the citizenship of ethnic groups within Thailand is also a work in progress, however, the remaining strategies are not particularly safe or sustainable either. The different stakeholders involved in the bordering projects along the Thai-Burma boundary, which is fragmented and stretched with the movement of people, goods and information, further complicate these matters.

THE CROSSING

The creation of borders is a process and they are representative of being more than cartographic lines of division (Rumford, 2006, 2012; Newman and Paasi, 1998). I seek to understand how the meanings gleaned from these limits in the everyday lives of refugees are embodied, significant and ever-present. I will focus on how two political boundaries that several of the respondents have traversed, the Thai-Burma and Thai-Canadian borders exist relationally,

are continually reinforced and negotiated by the refugees in material and affective terms through their conceptualization of home.

In political terms, it is often easy for the participants to differentiate between the Burmese and Thai sides of the border because of the presence of violence, injustice and forced labour, which are all things that they are trying to flee. But political relations are contingent on many different factors, which means that these demarcations exist relationally (Paasi, 2009) and are socially constructed (Ley, 2004). For many of those displaced in this context there are insecurities on both sides of the border. Rights and freedoms are still limited in Thailand and it's very much about scale. They decide which conditions they can and cannot endure. *Chit* relates how her family didn't have time to grab their belongings when Burmese soldiers began to shoot rounds to warn of their impending approach; upon hearing the gun shots the community gathered their children, ran and witnessed the armed men set fire to their village. Some hid in the surrounding jungle for days or weeks planning how to make it to the Thai-side and then take on the journey to cross the boundary, which is territorially marked by the Salween River. *Chit* faced several challenges, both physical and emotional when she made such a journey (November 12, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

> Ei Phyu: Can you explain to me, step by step, how you came from your village to arrive here?
>
> Chit: Yes I can. But it's been almost 10 to 20 years. We came with a boat. Then, we climbed the mountains and slept in the forest. We came by way of Mae Ta Rae Mae Bee and we experienced a land slight while resting in a hut. We could not find the hut's owner inside of the grounds. We came through a route that is very dangerous and passed lots of enemies.

Although she qualifies her statements by saying that her memories may be fragmented with the passage of time, she can still recall aspects of the landscape, the geography and the actual fear associated with the migration. Spatially she marks this process through landmarks, modes of transportation and movement. Since borders are constantly formed and reconstituted, there are also moments when they are unstable, porous and fluid. In her case, both these conditions were part of her journey. For *Chit*, she experienced direct violence in her nation of birth and moved to the border regions of a neighbouring Southeast Asian country where her definition of home is destabilized. This is a very basic and technical way to view her path but this would obscure the personal sacrifice, trauma and safety provided at her intended destination. *Chit's* very personal choices and actions help form the politics that transpire on both sides of this political boundary.

The border region in the Karen State of Eastern Burma is heavily policed to prevent the further displacement of people since the central military government wants to manage their populations by encouraging immobility and keeping them in place (Burma Ethnic Research Group, 2000; TBBC, 2008b; KHRG, 2009). Additionally, the Royal Thai government does not offer citizenship to 'alien' bodies from Burma and signifies the encampments as being temporary outposts. These policies are adopted to ensure that communities cannot be integrated into Thai society (UNHCR, 2015; Brees, 2010). These are all strategic ways to demonstrate that these bodies do not belong, nor are they desired. However, both nations are theoretically within their rights as sovereign powers to put such rules and regulations in place to manage their territorial holdings. After all, in theory the concept of territory has both legal and political connotations and involves the three aspects of populations, space and the practice of sovereignty (Elden, 2009; Berezin, 2003). However, for *Chit* and others, after crossing the Thai-Burma border they must

now negotiate with a different and often challenging socio-political terrain in order to safeguard their well-being.

There are so many actors involved in the maintenance of political power systems, both through structural and informal methods. Not only are these practices significant at the frontier regions where demarcated lines meet but also in communities living in these places, such as at a refugee settlement. Seeking shelter at Mae La camp is a negotiation in itself (see Figure 4.1.). The crossings are often made with very few belongings or resources since the conflict in the region is unpredictable; therefore, they were provided with few opportunities to plan for their escape. *Thida* reflects on not only the emotional toll of her volatile past, but also the strain of having to live with material lack in the present (February 11, 2011; Mae La, Thailand):

> Being happy or sad, I don't know how to explain...there were many things that we needed when I first arrived and my children had to attend school. Back then, we did not have any clothes, I don't know how to explain how difficult it was at the time. No shoes to attend the school. We ran away with nothing because they came and burned and shot the village. How do I say this...so sad...no more words.

Insecurity is a state that does not necessarily retreat with the shifting of perspective, time or place. Though her personal safety and that of her children are more protected, she still must negotiate with making a life for herself on the other side of the political divide in Thailand. The representation of the boundary as a finish line to safety is tested with the grounded experience of *Thida* and other refugees like her. No, the story is not finished and may never find a satisfactory resolution.

The political border's porosity has the potential to undermine the ability of displaced Karen people to feel safe in Thailand and in turn their feeling of being at home. However, the liminality of the line is not surprising since geopolitical processes are rarely enclosed fully by political borders (Agnew, 1994). This permeable demarcation creates the potential for different relationships, communities and encounters but can also allow for other, more erratic occurrences. *Gay* described how her safety was not necessarily guaranteed at the camp when she first arrived due to conflict between armed groups in Burma (November 12, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

Ei Phyu: Do you think you need to be afraid when you live here?

Gay: I don't know. At the beginning, we did need to be afraid.

Ei Phyu: How about now?

Gay: I don't know about now. I heard that it's peaceful. Nothing more. I don't know about the future and whether I need to be afraid or not.

Ei Phyu: Is the borderline far?

Gay: Not very far.

Ei Phyu: How many kilometers?

Gay: I don't know. But it may reach here if they shoot. The first time we arrived they shot and it reached here.

Ei Phyu: DKBA? [Democratic Karen Benevolent Army]

Gay: Both of them. Burmese soldiers and DKBA.

Ei Phyu: Do they come here?

Gay: Yes, they came last year. But not in this area. They came to another area, the next section of the bible school. DKBA and Burmese soldiers came and burned our house at Kwe Bone and there's nothing left. They burned here [Mae La] also but it's the lower side and they didn't burn a lot.

The permeable border can also be a conduit for more undesirable realities, since skirmishes cannot always be contained between strict outposts. Another respondent who was born in Thailand also had to flee torture at the hands of Burmese soldiers when she lived at Kwe Baw camp, which is located in very close proximity to the border (November 19, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). The Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) that *Gay* speaks of has a history of collaborating with the central Burmese army in the governance of the Karen State. In contrast, the Karen National Union (KNU) is the group that represents the political interests of the Karen population who seek independence from Burma or autonomy within the union. Though a feeling of security is not necessarily mandatory when creating a place for oneself, in the case of refugees, threats to their personal safety can diminish what they sacrificed and worked for through their border crossing: stability.

The economic relations between Thailand and Burma can also benefit from this porous border, which is why people are policed while goods or products do not need to adhere to such strict inspections (Hyndman, 2001). The flexibility of the Thai-Burma border itself depending on whether it is framed through the humanitarian lens of creating refugees or for the economic integration of the Thai and Burmese states for neoliberal projects. With nation-states becoming more interconnected through economic relationships and the formation of diverse networks, with the European Union being a good example, there is a continued debate within political geography of whether we have indeed reached a borderless world. The life histories of

respondents in my project further illustrate that for those without legal recognition, the borderless world is more often a reality for the elite.

This political border is also tested and transcended mainly through communication, which is how most of the camp inhabitants maintain their transnational connections with Burma and other nations. Several of the individuals I interviewed came to live in Mae La with most of their immediate family members and therefore maintain weaker ties with extended family members, like aunts, uncles and cousins who still live in Burma. In fact, the group Karen Internal and External Network Group (KIENG) in Mae La helps to facilitate these connections with Skype or other means of communication (Key informant at TBBC; January 31, 2011; man; Mae Sot, Thailand). Utilizing cellphones or satellite phones within the camp, refugees will phone the Karen State occasionally to keep abreast of conditions on the Burmese side of the border, to arrange for family members to come visit the camp and to update friends on recent news. At the price of One Thai Baht per minute (3 cents US), the conversations are usually short and happen infrequently. Connections in Thailand are also maintained through these conversations and *Mae* described how much she looked forward to these short exchanges. Being the mother of five children, she relates how two of them are living in the surrounding Thai towns and she waits for their correspondence each month (November 19, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

Ei Phyu: How do you contact them?

Mae: I don't know how to contact them if they don't contact me. They contact me by phone.

Ei Phyu: How often do they call you?

Mae: I don't know, sometimes every one or two months. When I speak to them they ask me, 'Do you need money?' and I say no, I would just like to talk with you.

Clearly, she uses the limited time she can secure with her loved ones to reconnect and help maintain ties that can become frayed with time and infrequent meetings. They worry for her comfort and quality of life, but financial support is not what she seeks. She wants to make new meanings in her current state of having to live apart from those she cares about. These short moments of communion mean a great deal to her and have dual outcomes. Firstly, it helps to define her current situation as one of greater loneliness and alienation. Secondly, these conversations maintain and rejuvenate memories of a past that is in contrast to the reality of living apart from her relatives. These conditions further obscure her definition of home because her present-day does not necessarily reflect her ideals for family, support or community.

Other inhabitants will also send letters to their former villages with Karen soldiers who are traveling between the camp and Karen State. These individuals not only serve the political purpose of continuing the negotiations for autonomy and rights in this political region of Burma, but also as active participants in transnational projects and vessels for continued contact. These practices help to reinforce the boundary through the mobility of people, material goods and information. Even with procedures to securitize this border, it is still provoked with these flows of movement and reinforces the system for the management of these national demarcations. The limits exist relationally to these agents that reinforce the ideology of desirable and undesirable bodies and entities.

There are those who cross several international borders through the resettlement program but they are a rare minority. The government-sponsored refugees (GARs) who are able to

resettle in Canada negotiate with another political border, the Canadian one, but much of the

preparations take place within Thailand. Resettlement as an option is not available to everyone

since applicants must have been registered with the UN prior to 2005 (Luc LeFrancois, Canadian

Embassy in Bangkok; February 8, 2011, Bangkok, Thailand). Therefore, many of the new

inhabitants I spoke to who arrived after this date will not be able to utilize this policy agreement

to migrate to another nation, which therefore limits their options. Luc LeFrancois, who is an

immigration counsellor and program manager from the Canadian embassy in Bangkok, also

indicated that in 2011 the Canadian government had started to shift their policy focus from

sponsoring refugees in this region to assisting those in Sudan and parts of the Middle East

(February 8, 2011, Bangkok, Thailand).

From the respondents I spoke to, the application process is a fairly straight-forward one

involving a written portion, interviews with UN and Canadian officials and then a health

examination where they provide biometric information. Once approved through this process

they attend a week of cultural orientation classes that prepare them for the journey on the plane

and for adapting to the first weeks of living in a new nation (Key informant from IRC, February

22, 2011; Resettlement advisor; Mae Sot, Thailand; Key informant from IOM, January 17, 2011;

head of Mae Sot office; Mae Sot, Thailand). The strengths of the training sessions lie mainly in

the interactions between the participants. By encouraging discussions and role-playing

scenarios, the refugees gain a limited glimpse into what they may face while traveling and upon

arrival in their new country of residence. When resettlement is framed in this manner, it can be

represented as a linear and transparent experience. However, the grounded realities and

testimonies of the participants add texture to the story and provide insight into both the

difficulties and triumphs of both being selected and ultimately choosing to go. *Sai* has lived in

Canada for several years now with a stable and fulfilling job, thriving family and position as an

active and well-respected leader within his community. His is a story of overcoming hardships

and complications to build up his life in a new nation. But when I asked him to reflect on his

decisions to cross that political border between Thailand and Canada, he was able to articulate

the nuances of the risks and rewards (September 13, 2011; Toronto, Canada):

> Well, the negatives are that I was placed in area arrest, had no status or higher education [in Thailand at the camp]. There were no jobs or conferences. But I learned to realize that I had the potential and deserved to get more. It's easier if you accept your situation and just stay within the confines but I wanted more. In Canada, with my past experience and education I did not find resettlement difficult. I was able to hold my wife's hand in public for the first time and walk around Toronto together.

He could well serve as a figure-head for what governments hope for when they sponsor groups:

refugees who become well-adjusted and 'ideal' members of society who are proud to call Canada

home. Obviously his narrative does not speak for everyone, nor does it represent the structural

obstacles that many continue to struggle with. *Teresa* attributes this current elation to the

novelty of living a life that they never had before, but she is weary to think that this mainly

idealized version of events will last: "This is the first time they experience freedom in their entire

life so they're enjoying it but I don't know maybe 5 years from now, 10 years from now gradually

they will experience the systemic oppression here and probably that will be the time they will

start to enter depression" (October 5, 2011, Toronto, Canada). Other members of their

community also 'wanted more' and therefore chose to apply for resettlement and paid the dues to

cross borders. Of course the Canadian government ultimately approved their appeals and

managed their migration, but they themselves decided to leave. Many Karen community

members in Toronto are still negotiating with how best to seek out new ways of being, through seeking employment, higher education and language acquisition, but ultimately did not stay within the limits imposed within the refugee camps. Though difficulties can complicate their decision to form attachments with where they have resettled, the members of the Karen community have taken on this endeavor and the risks associated with being far from what may be more familiar.

POWER IN CONFINEMENT

A discussion of power has been interwoven throughout the discussion of the crossing and porosity of political borders, but these modes of control are most blatant in the management of the refugee camp itself (see Figure 4.2.). The material and social conditions in Mae La are influenced and structured by the presence of international aid and non-governmental organizations that work with the inhabitants. Once resettled in Canada, a different set of challenges is presented to the refugees and they must negotiate a new terrain of social transactions with settlement workers and institutional players. These power negotiations demonstrate flexible relationships that are augmented by the formation of strong network connections between community members, ties that were also feasible in the camp setting.

The first few weeks of living in Mae La are difficult for those who do not have extended family members or friends already residing there. The inner workings of camp life can take time to untangle and this is made all the easier when you can rely on the knowledge of experienced members, or 'insiders.' There are certain routines and practices that everyone must follow, such

as how to be officially recognized by the United Nations representatives to access food and

material aid, to be assigned a place to live by the camp committee and where to seek educational

and health assistance. This is why several of the women I interviewed settled this process by

visiting the homes of strangers to seek acquaintance and tried to make connections while

collecting water or worshiping together each week at church. The relationships they formed

were often founded on similar histories of being displaced and commitment to their faith. The

value of these friendships lie not only in the support they offer but also in how these social

relations offer the opportunity to form different types of bonds. While these affiliations provide

greater understanding, *Mar* is also aware of the pitfalls associated with them (October 14, 2010;

Mae La, Thailand):

> Ei Phyu: Do you think it is useful to find friends, one after the other?
>
> Mar: Yes...useful
>
> Ei Phyu: Why?
>
> Mar: Because friends, they can help each other when dealing with the
> difficulties...but, there are many kinds of friends...good and bad...there are also bad
> friends who make trouble.

She recognizes that one cannot be indiscriminate of who one socializes with, because even in a

place where they may be trying to work through similar issues, the community is still diverse

with many different social backgrounds and variant approaches. The dynamic nature of these

relationships help to demonstrate how society is a collection of connections between disparate

facets that do not, on their own, have a social dimension (Latour, 2005). The relationships

between them create the 'social' element. Therefore, there is no stable terrain at the camp, or in

society in general, on which connections are formed, but instead the actions themselves that create the lattice for these affiliations. Like interactions that involve distinct temperaments, these associations are continually constructed and disassembled due to the agency of the actors. The formation of networks is often cited as an integral part of becoming more familiar with an environment and cultivating a sense of affiliation with a place (Fabos, 2015; Capo, 2015). Though one may invest in these friendships for the comfort and support that can result, positive outcomes are not necessarily guaranteed. This is why some relationships are still problematic and create 'trouble' for *Mar* because they are inherently ever-changing and precarious. Similarly for *Khine*, when she first arrived at the camp, there was conflict within her family and that is why she relied more on the organizations and on herself to continue her social reproduction (October 29, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). She reached out to structural aids, like the Karen Women Organization (KWO) and the church, because more informal supports were not there at the time, though she has made attempts to repair the emotional fissures with her relatives and reformulate the foundations she depends on, because in her mind they were far more stable. *Khine* and *Mar* utilized different strategies to cope with their realities, which again reiterates the fluid nature of how social bonds are formed and broken in the camp. Who they depend on is contingent on their emotional realities and life context.

The diversity within the camp is also a new experience for the refugees which can offer the chance for the formation of distinct affiliations. As *Khine* shared, she was not exposed to such markers of difference in her village, which was both a surprise and source of interest to her (October 29, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

During the first year, the UN took my photo and I studied [at school]. I saw lots of people when I arrived and it looked like a city. Many ethnicities, many kinds of organizations. It was a new experience for us. Before that, we had to be afraid when we lived in Burma and there was no need to be afraid here. I was not afraid after I arrived at the camp.

This is not to stay to former tensions or biases are resolved because of the opportunity for richer social interaction. Preferences, alliances and distrust are still rampant, which I don't only attribute to the history of civil warfare or violence. Like how *Khine* states that the camp "looks like a city," any larger environment leaves room for both transformative and unfavourable encounters. The significance lies in the chance for these engagements. Even with this potential it is clear that religious organizations play a central role in the social milieu of the camp since both the Christian and Buddhist faiths serve as a source of identity for the inhabitants. The weekly church service or ceremonies at the monastery are a constant for the households since they not only provide the venue for worship but for the creation of networks. *Chit* who has worked extensively with her church to fundraise and recruit members explained the ideological importance of her work when I questioned her on the benefits of being so committed to the religious organizations: "It's good for the unbelievers when we went to their house for worship. They came to understand a God and they change their ways. That's good for them. We helped them by donating to those who are in trouble and they also know more" (November 12, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). She has indicated that the church groups also provide material support for families in need while encouraging them to adopt Christian values. Although one can always be critical of ideological projects and the harm of extremist tendencies, the assistance, both materially and emotionally that these organizations provide within the community should not be

underestimated. Using faith to cope with trying circumstances is not a new phenomenon (Horstmann, 2011; Parsitau, 2011).

An established scheme exists within Mae La to assist those seeking refuge that is funded by several different nations and services. For more formalized support international aid and non-governmental organizations offer food and material assistance. Although the inhabitants have interacted with them on several occasions and they are a presence in their daily lives, an awareness of the exact role that they play differs amongst the individuals I interviewed. For example, when asked to identify some organizations that she was familiar with, **Htwe** (November 19, 2010; Mae La, Thailand) stated that Solidarities handled sanitation issues in the camp, the UNHCR is who you approach for food rations which are granted after they take your photograph and that the Karen Women Organization (KWO) is responsible for looking after people, although she was not aware of its specific mandates. This response differed greatly from several other interviewees who could not name the specific organizations but recognized that they provided services. When **Gay** (November 10, 2010; Mae La, Thailand) was asked to name the agency that distributes her food aid, she could recall several organizations (Solidarities, KRC) until she arrived at the correct one (TBBC). A key informant at TBBC (January 31, 2011; man; Mae Sot, Thailand) was reflexive about the distance that is often present in the relationships between the providers and beneficiaries of the services:

> The average beneficiary, the typical household doesn't really know very much about TBBC, doesn't know why we make decisions, doesn't know how to make a complaint if they wanted to, doesn't know how to give their opinion. And even if they did they wouldn't probably get a response and so I think this sort of accountability, TBBC's accountability to refugees is one area that needs improving.

Most of the respondents stated that they did not come into contact with aid organizations when they lived in the Karen State in Burma since they mainly interacted with fellow villagers and occasionally with Karen soldiers. There were some exceptions, with those who attended training provided by the KWO and others who had received healthcare from the Backpack medic teams but the majority of the population had to acculturate to these types of formalized social transactions.

While recognizing the value and importance of their work, these organizations and their practices are still a means to manage the camp setting through the distribution of power. Through governmentality (Foucault, 2007), social discourses are guided by strategic power initiatives that strive to encourage populations to abide by normative social practices. By locating the objective of these tactics in the management of individuals, this framework allows us to connect the application of power, which can be abstract and difficult to define, to the practices of everyday life (Ettlinger, 2011). The finesse of governmentality as a system of power lies in the fact that its subtle workings are exercised indirectly and can be integrated into the workings of daily life relatively easily. This ensures that the subjects are ruled even at the level of the unconscious and are not aware of the web of influence they are a part of and help to reproduce.

To further support how these disciplinary strategies become incorporated into the everyday life at the camp, the refugees in Mae La may not be able to name them, but they do know that the organizations provide assistance and services they need to rely on. They negotiate the system by following protocol and going to a certain location and speaking to those in charge to gain such aid. This system also shifts the locus of power from a sovereign or figure-head

because its diffuse and pervasive nature ensures its continued productivity in managing subjects. Though in the case of the refugees, there are also clear administrators of these regulations through state control. The mandates of these organizations and the programs seek to support the community development at Mae La. By encouraging a cleaner environment, the maintenance of houses and the provision of health and education, they do ensure the welfare of the inhabitants. However, for the residents, following the rules and regulations put in place by management teams are non-negotiable and obtaining help relies on this. The agency of the subjects is not diminished and the actors negotiate with the myriad of possibilities within a social context (Foucault, 2004). The refugees challenge these affiliations through resistance and subversion of systems which I will now elaborate on.

The exact nature of the relationships between the service providers and the camp inhabitants remains an obscured and murky one from the narratives I received while conducting my research, but the power negotiations that are involved were apparent. When I asked *Mon* how long she and her family planned to live in Mae La, her response indicated that this choice was not entirely under her control (October 29, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

> I alone can't decide that. There are some organizations that have supported us. That's why we can live here. If not we will die because there would be no food. For example, a kid stays alive with the mother feeding milk and if not they would die. We have to follow their order because we live under control of them. If they ask us to live here, we need to live here and if they send us away, we will go.

At face value, this statement could attest to the full and complete subject formation of *Mon* through Foucauldian terms of control. One can already focus on certain words that drive this framing home such as "their order" or "we will go." Her comparison to the importance of

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nursing in a baby's well-being can be framed to support the infantilization of refugee formations by authority figures, but I think this is an easy angle to take. Rather, I see resistance in **_Mon's_** complete honesty of her situation. I don't see utter and complete gratitude but instead recognition of the conditions she lives with and resignation that the maintenance of "order" can decide her fate. Additionally, this awareness that they can, technically, be asked to leave can undermine more permanent conceptualization of being at home in the camp.

But there are limits to who practices this form of reflexivity. When asked to critically assess how service provision could be improved the majority of the participants either stated that they couldn't offer specific suggestions or that they didn't know because they were 'ordinary people.' Although reductionist, the designation of themselves as 'ordinary' ones or common folk can be a way to differentiate themselves from policy makers and service providers or it can also signify that their concerns can mirror those of many others who are displaced and living in such a context. **_Phyo_** was one of the exceptions in that she was very vocal and offered specific suggestions that would make a difference in their daily lives: "For example, there is not enough charcoal and that's why we collect pieces of wood. However, we cannot not cut down trees because we live in another country. That's why, we face a difficult situation (October 29, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). She is referring to how the surrounding forests near Mae La are designated as conservation land. Therefore, members of the camp community are prohibited from using these resources for firewood to cook with or as building material. There are also issues with the accessibility of water. Water is measured prior to distribution and allocated according to family size. Each family is assigned a number of bottles and given time in the early morning and evening to collect their share. Those with larger households may have to make several trips in a

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day, which becomes increasingly difficult for those located long distances from the stations and during the extreme temperatures or weather fluctuations of the summer and rainy seasons. Therefore, the implementation of programs to support social reproduction cannot always address all of the concerns of the residents. How individuals fill the gaps in the service provision speak to the effort and practices involved in the preservation of their domestic realm.

Socio-political transactions continue once resettled in Canada, life for the first few weeks involves multiple encounters with settlement providers at the Reception House. This is also the time when the cultural orientation programs will assist them with the initial adjustment to Canada and it is through these relationships that they begin interacting with landlords, health and educational personnel. Once the basics of housing, banking and enrollment in school have been settled, they will have to continue these types of affiliations in the healthcare and language education classes. This is when the networks between Karen community members are relied upon to serve as translators for medical appointments, to help navigate the urban setting by accompanying them on public transport and to fully understand documents, like the lease rental agreements that they are signing. Many interviewees indicated that after their time in the Reception Centre they already knew that they wanted to move to the Jane and Steeles or Bloor and Lansdowne neighbourhoods surrounding these street intersections in Toronto, Canada, where fellow Karen had also settled. They felt that they could overcome the barriers of language and feelings of being alienated in a new environment if they could count on the types of community support that were already informally established. *Teresa* provides insight into the motivations for being in close proximity with other members of their ethnic community (October 5, 2011; Toronto, Canada):

In terms of emotional, Karen people because in their entire life they have gone through lots of persecution in their entire lives so when they came here even though they have real barriers for them that really, the barriers don't really bother them that much compared to their previous life. And now they live in Jane and Finch area, it is quite infamous but for them they said that no, it's like heaven compared to their previous life.

These types of social bonds can be witnessed in the practice of rituals, such as the celebration of Karen New Year at a local venue, where both the Karen and Canadian national anthems are sung, cultural dances and songs are performed and speeches are made by respected elders of the communities on the importance of maintaining Karen values. The anxiety of these practices being lost on a generation growing up abroad is evident in the words spoken and the pleas made for the prevention of such a transformation. These interventions may not be accepted so easily as *Sai* describes the cultural shifts in the community (September 13, 2011; Toronto, Canada):

Young people in Canada, especially those who have been there for over 15 years are not as prominent in Church. I believe that they would benefit from what they learn in church such as learning to love one another. It would give them a feeling of security--for example, if they lost their job they would have emotional support. I feel secure not because of my work or what I have but because of my faith.

Perhaps these desires stem from years of relying on one another in both the camp setting and during resettlement. There is great fear that the breaking of such networks would also alter their ability to transcend challenges to come.

OTHER BOUNDARIES

Although crossing political borders can grant individuals the ability to seek refuge, other types of boundaries are enacted. These limits are a response to the refugee's defiant action of

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pursuing safety in another nation-state, which can ultimately limit their freedoms. I will now

discuss the bordering activities that take place beyond national lines, such as the securitized

periphery of the camp and government checkpoints that are fraught with anxiety, identity

performances and the creation of immobilities. Securitization, in theory, refers to the measures

put in place to manage the actions and movements of populations to endorse orderly conduct and

safety. In practice, these means have the potential to subjugate and target certain individuals due

to their physical attributes or other markers of social standing (Hyndman, 2012; Huysman,

2006). The policies that limit the mobility of refugees influence the creation of home at Mae La

camp by establishing distinct restrictions to where they are allowed to create a place to live.

With these tangible boundaries come the reification of former lives that offered danger but

liberation in other ways. It is through this meeting of the past and present in the minds of the

respondents that new meanings of home are constructed.

Crossing the border itself involved different tactics, costly modes of transport and time

but once they were in Thailand, they still have to live and survive in the refugee camp. Although

many feel relief at having escaped the fear and trauma of what they left behind in the Karen

State, they must now work through the implications associated with being a refugee, such as

limited freedom of movement. For those born within the camp, they may not have had to cross

an international boundary, but have always known that they are not free to leave the camp at their

will.

This is not to say that these restrictions have imprisoned them in a continual state of

dissatisfaction. Several expressed different reasons for why they are happy to live in Thailand,

most of them stemming from their access to high school education and the opportunity to learn

English. *Htwe*, an eighteen year old who had lived all of her life in Thailand, had first stated that there was nothing that she disliked about living there. However, when we broached the subject of mobility within the country, she described how this issue was indeed a source of unhappiness since they "shut the way" (November 19, 2010; female; Mae La, Thailand). How they maintain these limits can also be problematic. *Teresa* recalls how her interactions with the Thai military personnel shaped her perception of them (October 5, 2011; Toronto, Canada):

> For me personally it is really degrading and humiliating and that they really look down on the refugee people and they don't see your value, they don't see human being. This is my personal opinion. For me I feel that way because they guard us, they assume that we are some kind of animal something like that so they can treat us. They have this kind of superiority and especially they don't treat women well. Oh this woman, they have no paper, they have no money, they have no opportunity so they really want to get us, something like that. And from time to time they impregnated refugee women, they don't respect them, they just left them, they just give a few Bahts of money so when I encounter that I didn't talk to them. When they came to my house I didn't see them, I didn't welcome them.

The periphery of Mae La camp is a highly-securitized location with the presence of several armed guards and gate-posts but this system reaches far beyond the camp's region. Several check-points also dot the landscape when one is trying to leave the town of Mae Sot or the province of Tak (see Figure 4.3.). They are operated by armed police officers and scent dogs that check the luggage on board. *Phyu* echoes *Htwe's* sentiments when she laments that she struggles with her state of immobility: "The difficulties…that it's not easy to go out while I live here. Sometimes, I would like to visit my parents or sibling but I cannot." Yet, she states that she has to be happy to live in Mae La because "if I do not live here, I can't get support," (October 29, 2010; Mae La, Thailand) although she still feels that if she, and others, were granted status in Thailand their lives would improve. She recognizes that the assistance she

receives at the camp is provisional on following the modes of governance but legal status would provide more than security. Many of the camp's residents wish to be formally recognized as individuals in a country that they have lived in for most or all of their lives; they would like to be able to undertake steps to support themselves and travel at their will. These are all actions that many of us take for granted but they can be integral to providing self-worth, motivation and purpose. This is why respondents also name the inability to work legally in Thailand as such a burden since there are difficulties associated with taking part in the informal sector as day labourers, where they have few rights or privileges. Also as a population who can suffer from ailments from years of malnutrition or years without treatment, it is challenging to seek healthcare outside of the camp.

Htwe and *Phyu's* lived experiences, like those of many others, support why there is growing interest in the study of different types of boundaries, not only those defined as political borders. The concepts of deterritorialization (Newman and Paasi, 1998; Newman, 2003), socio-spatial identities (Nolin, 2006), and narratives of border-formation (Rumford, 2006) all point to the importance of scale and the body. The inhabitants of Mae La camp negotiate with different boundaries all of the time, not all of which they can transcend or pass. These interventions bring attention to the power negotiations involved in the setting of limits and provides the opportunity to further develop theorization of how boundaries are formed and maintained. It is clear that through the propagation of discourse and societal norms, other types of borders are produced. This means that bordering practices no longer just occur at the margins of territories through the creation and maintenance of political borders, but throughout the entire spatial terrain of a territory. The rituals of nation-building processes and presence of national iconography are two

ways that these tactics take hold. Different institutional representatives that uphold security

measures and maintain order provide the grounds for why boundary formation is a pervasive

aspect of society and different types of borders are creating subjects as sites of power (Paasi,

2009; Rumford 2006; Balibar 1998). They achieve this by ensuring that rules are enforced and

discursive acts are managed. One's positioning within these structural systems illustrate

differing levels of privilege and access to resources.

The desire for mobility for residents at Mae La not only stems from wanting to gain

rights, freedoms or employment but also from the longing to maintain transnational ties. The

study of transnationalism has two components: examining the different integration projects of

newcomers and the continued links that they maintain with their country of origin (Glick Schiller

et al., 1992). The intricacies of these projects with other places speak to issues of desire

(Grabska, 2010), familial and cultural obligations (Al-Sharmani, 2010), and the cultivation of

belonging (Hopkins, 2010). Although many of my respondents are trying to make new lives in

Thailand, this does not weaken their ties to the Karen State or to other places. The Karen village

'out there' cannot exist without the camp in Thailand since both exist relationally. But since

these multi-national affiliations occur across political borders, the social contexts of these

individuals also connect them to more than one nation-state. With individuals undertaking

different forms of transnationalism, one can look to airports and other sites that govern mobility

to explore how their surveillance mechanisms are creating subjects. Silvey's (2007) examination

of how the Indonesian government isolates migrant workers returning from abroad, a tactic that

was enforced to protect them from harassment, illustrates how these locations can still be places

of disempowerment and scrutiny. By explicitly keeping their bodies away from the 'regular'

travelers, these individuals are reminded of their state of vulnerability though these modes of differentiation. In the case of the context I studied, these systems are performed similarly though check-points and gate-posts.

For some, when they do decide to occasionally leave the camp's limits, the conditionality of their ability to reside in Thailand becomes blatantly clear. They have to either make a covert trip or ensure that they have a valid authorization letter. *Thiri's* fear will always prevent her from leaving the boundaries of the camp without permission: "Because I do not have the chance to go anywhere. I would like to visit my children and grandchildren but I cannot. We have to be afraid all the time. They shut the ways and arrest all the time" (November 19, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). She has never made an attempt to leave the premises, but hearing what others have struggled with at the hands of Thai authorities has deterred her from testing the boundaries and challenging the rule of law. Locating the check-points far away from the camp ensures that the migrants feel isolated as targeted individuals before they are exposed to the subject-formation practices of the government personnel. Traveling by coach bus is a common and popular way to connect with other cities in this region since the service is fairly regular and the fares are reasonably priced. All vehicles entering and leaving the town of Mae Sot and Tak province are subject to a careful inspection. Within the space of the bus, the gender and class positions of the refugees are reinforced by the disciplinary techniques that differentiates the mobility of people. From frequently taking the bus (4-6 times a month), I've observed that it is common practice to only check the identification documents of non-white passengers or those who cannot pass as foreigners. The distinctions of the passengers, who are mostly Asian, are scrutinized and the social standing that results from their bodies are put on display. While some travel is encouraged

and care is taken to ensure that it is conducted smoothly, other forms of movement are hindered through surveillance (Salter, 2007).

Mobility involves both geographical and social facets, which is why it can be more productive to frame study away from being bounded social groups to the exploration of their participation in flows of movement and the role that borders play in these negotiations (Urry, 2000; Wallerstein, 1991). It is clear that social markers such as gender, class and ethnicity influence one's reception during displacement (Fitzgerald, 2011). Unlike *Thiri* who does not dare to leave, *Lin* has had a traumatic experience of traveling with an expired document of consent, which marginalized her body and identity. After the three checkpoints to leave the encampment, there are two more of these security outposts to travel outside of Tak province. These gatekeepers work to ensure that desirable individuals, with legal status to a nation, can travel onwards while those without permission are screened and captured. These memories in turn, prevent her from seeking work outside of the camp (November 19, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

Ei Phyu: Are you going to work?

Lin: It's not easy to go out and get a job because they arrest people. They arrest when the authorization letter is expired. I'm so afraid.

Ei Phyu: So you've had an experience with that?

Lin: Yes, I went to see my mother and the authorization letter was expired when I came back and I can't read Thai. The Thai authorities arrested me and said that I needed to pay a fine. That's why I had difficulties.

Ei Phyu: How many days did they arrest you for? How much is the fine?

Lin: One for 500 Baht and two for 1000 Baht.

Ei Phyu: Two for a couple? [indicated that she travelled with husband]

Lin: They check at the gate and it was expired when they checked mine. If no one comes to take you out within 6 hours, we will send you to Myawaddy (Burma), they said.

Ei Phyu: Did you give that 500 Baht by yourself?

Lin: We ordered it from people and they took care of us. We had no money because we had traveled back from afar.

Ei Phyu: Who helped you? Friends or leaders?

Lin: Friends.

Living at Mae La camp clearly does not nurture the practice of mobility. There is a risk if you test the limits like *Lin* and they are punitive. The price for her transgressions consisted of her body being held in place until she could provide financial incentives for the officials to let her out. She was in a site of vulnerability since her well-being is threatened by either being confined at a security check-point in Thailand or possibly facing an even graver fate in her former nation-state. *Teresa* had been caught in a similar situation while living in Thailand and mostly remembers the trauma and fear of being held at the station (October 5, 2011; Toronto, Canada):

> I really prayed at that time, I was really desperate I pray, because I heard that if a girl gets caught by the Thai police since they have no identity sometimes they got raped by the police and then nobody charged the police…Even though I am in kind of gratitude, thanks to them they allowed me to stay on their land, but at the same time I cannot be thankful, I had a bad feeling too.

The security apparatus in place at these gates are rooted in the objective of minimizing risk, which involves judging the identities of passengers and classifying them into 'low-risk' or 'high-risk' categories (Salter, 2007), with the mobility of the first group being facilitated and the latter

being monitored. This surveillance system utilizes a confessionary complex, where passengers

to smoothly access other territories in Thailand must show precisely where they stand and must

answer to an authority who will scrutinize their past actions and present state of being. This in

turn disciplines the subjects to practice certain types of mobility that will result in acceptable

forms of travel narratives. As soon as **Lin's** and **Teresa's** key to safe passage was no longer

valid, the mobility instantly became more risky. But they tested the boundaries anyways because

their emotional well-beings were at stake. The feelings of being trapped within the camp

boundaries is very much embodied in these types of experiences, whether from the fear

paralyzing them to dare not venture outside in Thai territory or having to negotiate one's

'freedom' again through informal bribes that are often beyond the reach of many inhabitants.

The process of being arrested is a frightening ordeal in itself but they also understand that threats

to return them to Burma is a fate they cannot imagine facing.

Upon landing in Canada as government-sponsored refugees, the rights and freedoms that

they now possess changes the shape that these other types of boundaries take on but they still

play a role in their lives. While their mobility is no longer limited some must still come to terms

with the realities of living in subsidized housing and the social context of living in urban clusters

that may be experiencing economic stagnation and lack of investment in social programming.

The presence of crime and other types of law enforcement officials in their daily lives are issues

that they must negotiate within the new cultural canvas of living in Canada.

Other barriers involve a cultural shift. **Sai** jokes that he and other community members

have had to learn to shift their strategies for living within the demands of North American

society. Such pressures include having to plan ahead, keeping commitments and maintaining

schedules. He especially cites this when they are trying to organize a large celebration or

meeting: "In the community there's Guerrilla mentality (laughs). There's no need to plan ahead

for life in the jungle. Really, things happen when soldiers shoot at them. I tell them, here you

need to plan two to three months ahead; they will then call two weeks before event and say they

need a venue" (September, 13, 2011; Toronto, Canada). These types of expectations are one of

the nuances that are not always addressed during cultural training at either site of displacement

but can well prove to be a constraint on one gaining employment and succeeding within

institutional structures. This is not to say that they cannot still be political. Their transnational

alliances mainly rest with the Karen National Union (KNU). *Sai* was initially reticent about his

involvement with this organization but wants to emphasize the stronghold they have on many

Karen individuals (September, 13, 2011; Toronto, Canada):

> We don't want the Canadian government to think that we support armed groups; but
> recently the US government recognized KNU as a non-terrorist group. KNU, they are
> well-organized but not recognized by Burma or UN. They fight against human rights
> abuses; each ethnic group in Canada has own representative in ENC [Ethnic national
> community]. We don't support day to day activities or military campaigns but they also
> provide social welfare and we support that. At celebrations here in Canada we read
> statements from them; they are transparent as an organization. We consider ourselves
> blessed to be here so we fundraise and send money to the KNU.

These are the new types of confines that they must withstand and they themselves ultimately

decide their approach to these realities. But it is clear that their life at the border does not

disappear even after the camp or the Karen State have shifted from view.

CONCLUSION

I have examined how the relationship to border and boundaries of Karen refugees at different junctures of their displacement have influenced home-making practices, firstly through the political meanings made from crossing a political border, their negotiation with the stakeholders within the camp and then the other types of boundaries that limit their mobility. Through the formation of networks in both the camp and in the home, they serve as agents undertaking different power negotiations with different players in their everyday lives that shift with the cultural context. These musings highlight the importance of different practices within the larger geopolitical context of displacement that influence the creation of home. These practices take on particular significance through the lived experiences of crossing the Thai-Burma border, the sacrifices involved with seeking protection in Mae La camp and the new social terrain involved with negotiating the humanitarian projects in this setting. Their engagement with mobility and immobility ultimately influences feelings of longing and attachment; these engagements with the conceptualization of home are often when their sacrifices and gains are more apparent.

Subjectivity is a term that is often tied to the experience of being a refugee because individuals give up their membership to a certain nation-state, through fear of persecution, to be recognized internationally. Due to the state-centric mode of governance that is privileged within geopolitics, these acts are seen to be defiant and reserved for extreme cases of mistreatment and trauma. For those who are born as stateless individuals within the camp, they similarly gain a

right to refuge but they come with the conditions that limit their freedom of movement through

the deployment of types of boundaries, beyond those of the political variety.

Figure 4.1. A neighbourhood of houses in Section B at Mae La Camp.

Figure 4.2. Houses constructed of wood, bamboo and leaves near the highway in Mae La camp.

Figure 4.3. Just as you pass the first check-point on the road into Mae La camp.

Chapter Five: Shelter from—the material and affective creation of home

POSITIONING

A shelter is not only where we eat and sleep each day, but is also the site of friendship and second families. Though they may not be blood relatives, these affiliations manage to soften the loneliness of migration that takes a great deal of time to diminish. We save and budget many years for those homes and the people who have witnessed the struggles are the first ones invited in. It's the place we help our friends move into, their years in this new country stowed away in boxes or left behind for good. But it's also that family home we see every couple of years, in our nation of birth, with its warmth radiating through the people housed inside. Though it's not the truth, the place remains the same, at least in our minds because our memories have protected them, even from the process of becoming older, Canadian and a foreigner. Those recollections become even more salient through the mementos we display on the shelves and walls, like the lacquered vase that your aunt sent as a gift or the wood carving you purchased 'back home.' Though often dust-ridden these artifacts represent the identity you've created in a new social milieu, by placing the objects from afar firmly on Canadian soil. That is the meaning of shelter.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores how Karen refugees construct meanings of home through their material cultural practices and assignment of affective value to place. Since my research draws

from three locations, the influence of mobility on all these types of home-making strategies considers how participating or not participating in flows of movement have implications on their relationship to place. Through the analysis of my empirical findings I suggest that rather than hinder the conceptualization of home, the different phases in their displacement encourage the establishment of dwellings, even in sites that normative notions would deem to be less than ideal. This examination is supported by theoretical engagements in the fields of post-humanist, post-modern and non-representational theory. Their interventions sustain the current discussions on the importance of studying the relationships that we have with the material world and the agency of the objects themselves to influence our sense of self and the role that affect plays in our negotiation of places.

The development of theory about the home has been fraught with contested approaches in part because the structure and meanings of the home have developed and changed with time. Rybczynski's (1986) historical overview of the home asserts that, within the European context, it was only in the 17th and 18th century that dwellings were characterized to be the centre of domestic practices. Fourteenth century homes accommodated both household and commercial interests, with the lower floor serving as the workshop while the upper floor housed the living quarters for the family. In the 1600s more affluent families were able to assign spaces that provided privacy away from other members of the household. This evolution from a hybrid space of work and rest to one of refuge took place with the increasing variety of consumer products that made life at home more comfortable and convenient (Rybczynski, 1986). Maintaining the image of the home as a secure site of care requires work, and these duties were mainly assigned to women. Prior to the 1940s many middle-class American women were trained

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in the domestic arts whose practices perpetuated the perception that the home was a reflection of moral standing and that certain standards needed to be met to ensure the happiness and success of the entire family. The roles and responsibilities of women within the home have been challenged by different political movements, have shifted throughout time, and are also context and culturally-specific.

My examination utilizes the definition of place as an unbounded site whose creation is contingent on social contexts (Massey, 2005). There are both affective and material components to the creation of home, which is a type of place through the multi-scalar meanings that can be formed from the site. This ever-political space is the venue for identity creation and the performance of power negotiations (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Brickell, 2013, Brickell, 2011). Although the uses and cultural symbols of the home have changed over time, it is apparent that the structural frame, inner core and relations within are all of political significance.

For this chapter I will mainly be utilizing the 'critical geography of home framework' that has been proposed by Blunt and Dowling (2006) and further contributions from scholars whose work with non-western communities (Brickell, 2012a; Harker, 2009) defines home as a type of multi-scalar place made up of the material and imaginative components that are impacted on by modes of power and identity. A sense of belonging, or lack thereof, is a central component of creating 'home' but these feelings intrinsically rely on spatial conditions. The home can be a site of contradictions, one of estrangement as well as belonging. The concept of 'home' can also be a set of emotions, both positive and negative, that get assigned to a physical shelter. As a result, the creation of these places are fluid in that feelings and sense of self can move across space and can be reinstated at new locations (Duyvendak, 2011). Therefore, individuals can feel at home in

multiple places simultaneously, whether or not they can physically access these sites. While these affective associations influence the imagined home, managing the material home in the present day is an intrinsic aspect of many lives. The desire for a former home or the struggle to come to terms with the current one are renegotiated in these everyday practices by caring for the structure and interior aesthetics of a shelter. These engagements are works in progress and often reflect the identity and history of the individual.

OBJECTIVE

The material conditions of a home, such as the walls, windows and roof are often reduced to being mundane aspects in the definition of dwellings. After all, it is intuitive that one needs all of these aspects to shelter oneself. But by focusing on the nuanced ways that my respondents interacted with the physical structure of the home, I seek to demonstrate how the meanings cultivated within their families and the implications for the greater community go very much beyond the ordinary. What is hidden from view within the rooms illustrate the cultivation of their material cultures that reflect sentiments gleaned from their current circumstances and is a version of their sense of self. Both the endeavors to shelter their bodies and to make these dwellings beautiful serve the purpose of finding a place for themselves under tenuous circumstances. What is at stake is much more than the material.

The material cultures that the participants in my study constructed are tied closely to the context they live in. At the refugee camp, they were directly involved in the building of their living shelters and shaped the framework and inner core of their homes. These practices involved engaging with the natural environment and utilizing tools to manipulate these resources to construct the walls that house their social reproduction.

In my dissertation, I ground the significance of their encounters with the material realm in concepts that locates the home as the site where human beings come to terms with what they face in the social world and where they continue their ongoing identity projects. The centrality of the material is even reflected in the Burmese and Karen languages, where the same word, *aine* and *hee* respectively, denotes both the structure of a house and emotions associated with being 'home.' This is why the material objects that they choose to house within these walls and how they structure their lived environment has symbolic significance. There is much at stake when engaging with the material sphere. Practices, which are the contingent and strategic actions located in time, creates symbolic meanings that form the core of how people see the world; these beliefs are then constituted in the material world (Bourdieu, 1990 [1970]). The symbolic order is facilitated by consumption practices that allow individuals to express their sense of self materially within their dwellings (Miller, 2001). Creating 'home' is thus a dynamic process that is influenced by the identities and histories of the inhabitants and the social context they are situated in. It is not just a backdrop from which symbolic meanings of practice can be read but serves as a venue for active power relations. Similarly in my study, the active nature of forming

home is reflected in how once the refugees had resettled to the safe-third-country of Canada, they shifted their focus to creating the symbolic meanings within the walls of the built environment. Although they are no longer required to create and maintain the structural frame of their homes, the practices of furnishing and adorning their spheres still reflect their histories and what they grapple with in their current circumstances.

The stories that follow were chosen from my empirical data because they illustrate the manner in which the material cultural practices of Karen refugees allow them to create a sense of home in two distinct social conditions. The two national settings are bound together by traces of the paths they have traversed with their movement and the value they have assigned to places during moments of both mobility and immobility. There are material consequences to their participation in flows of movement, with former homes being rebuilt, reused or left empty as vestiges of former lives and the new projects that come with trying to make meaning in a foreign nation.

Survival Material

Aye's narrative helps us understand the immediacy of having to confront the physical environment and endure it to thrive in the camp. After the truck drivers crossed the borderline into Thailand in 2005 and left her near the highway, she didn't know what to do. Like several of the other women I spoke to who had weathered a history of violence, she ran from the Burmese soldiers who were firing rounds and attacking her village. She didn't have time to gather her things so she held onto her children and went: "Sometimes we have to run away without our

clothes. During the summer, we sometimes do not wear very much clothing while in the house and we have to run out without our clothes when the Burmese came" (October 14, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). Having lost most of her material belongings she began her life as a displaced person with few possessions or the financial means to help her perform the basic needs of her social reproduction; one such challenge was finding shelter.

What she lacked in resources she made up for in her ability to network and make connections. Since *Aye* did not have any extended family who lived in the camp, she started to introduce herself to other people and one of her new friends agreed to house her temporarily. It is only through her relationship with this household that she learnt of the formal measures to secure more permanent housing. She began the process of getting registered with the UNHCR to obtain food aid and approached the camp council to be assigned a plot of land. Administering these requests still takes time and she waited for bureaucratic steps to be conducted. Although she had found shelter, the hut was already crowded with a spouse, children and elderly parents, so for several months her family slept underneath the house until she could find a home of her own. Her precarious situation was not only embodied by her, which led her to perform any tactic to survive, but also materially through her lack of possessions and spatially since she was without a home. Working within the limited means of her social network, her accommodations signified that she was at the periphery of what was available in the encampment at the time due to her lack of security.

At this stage in her life when she did not have a country or a home to call her own, there was very little space for her. Acknowledging the work of feminist scholars who have astutely suggested the multitude of ways that homes can be sites of violence or instability, compels me to

inquire why, in *Aye's* case, did seeking a place to call home mean so much? Why did this desire

have such a hold over her? After the trauma of being driven from a village she had known all of

her life she needed to feel more secure again, however difficult the living conditions were and at

whatever cost to her comfort or health. The walls that her friends provided had meaning for her

and it is from this meaning that the material objects garner their significance. The integral role

that material conditions plays in *Aye's* sense of self and will to thrive is understandable because

in order for her to live she passed the nights on the ground beneath the structure of a hut with

little privacy and no more than a straw mat and blanket. She slept amongst vermin and insects

and was barely protected from the heat, wind, rain or cold. This example illustrates how the

force of these non-human entities shaped her experience and compelled her to protect herself

from the hardships that most refugees are exposed to. The structure of a home not only houses

individuals but also can shelter them, however briefly, from the stressors of life and threats to

their wellbeing. Therefore, the material cultures that play a role in *Aye's* and our existence are

not unconscious tools to be manipulated at our will since they influence our lives and sense of

self. The straw, mat and walls do not have power without the value she places on them. For a

time, these few possessions were her home.

Politics of survival

Whatever liminal shelter, in both the material and affective sense *Aye* was able to obtain

upon arrival, is a direct result of the spatial constraints of Mae La camp. With Mae La camp

swelling with over 40,000 inhabitants, there is a limit to the space available for the refugees'

residences. The Cartesian concept of space matters to the creation of home because structures cannot take hold without the land on which to build. Refugees from Burma do not gain legal status when they cross the political boundary and therefore are prohibited from living outside of the bounded camp area. Although *Aye* was eventually allocated a house for her family by the camp committee, she, like others, was arbitrarily assigned a plot of land that differed in size and appeal: "[the plots are] different...one and one is not the same...I saw that some have a huge space because they arrived a long time ago...we just get a small space because we arrived after them" (October 14, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). This statement reflects the existing hierarchy that dictates the type of land individuals can access to build a home and is supported by an NGO coordinator who has worked in this region for 18 years (Key informant from TBBC; January 31, 2011; man; Mae Sot, Thailand):

> Traditionally it's been very much self-arranged...what would typically happen is when a family comes into a refugee camp they would report to the security and the security would interview them. They would then be sent to the section leader where the section leader would arrange these things for them...there would be an agreed solution to how to do this. I mean years ago, when there was still room in the camp, the camps were less enclosed where people were able to basically come in, put their bags down, and sleep in someone's house for a day or two, find some material from the surrounding forest in the meantime and start building their own house, and on their own plot. In the larger camps which are more urbanized shall we say, and you know Mae La quite well, it's very different and shelter really has to be negotiated now.

Those who were displaced during the early years of the conflict had the choice of prime areas of land compared to recent arrivals. The attractiveness of the space mainly relates to issues of accessibility and the ease with which to build the dwelling. *Thida,* who arrived to Mae La in the mid to late 1980s, had a much different experience (November 12, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

When we first reached the camp, everyone built the house by themselves and there was wood and bamboo available here. The camp's location was an uncleared forest. They distributed rice but initially they did not distribute bamboo or wood. We have to cut it by ourselves and we collected the leaves also. We cut it ourselves and this place was a forest before and many animals lived here...We can choose by ourselves, which means that the place is lovely because it was a large space and we chose it ourselves.

For the more established members of the Mae La community who have resided there for several decades, there was a plentitude of resources to construct their dwellings, without the more stringent regulations that now prohibit the use of the surrounding forests. By being able to select their plot of land, the residents had the freedom to assess the livability of potential locations and decide which area was most conducive for their establishment. Some of the areas are on a very steep incline, which provides the potential for the structure to become unsound during seasons with harsh weather conditions. Also, households placed in certain sections are a fair distance from where organizations distribute food rations or offer health or educational services. Therefore, all residents, new or old, negotiate with a varied set of challenges in order to create a shelter. The ease with which they can make and safeguard their dwelling relies, in part, on the spatial conditions.

Their first homes are usually in the form of tents made out of tarpaulin, and it is within these tents that families await the distribution of bamboo and wood to begin construction. This temporary material not only shields them from the elements and provides privacy but also assures them of the assistance that is still to come. When *Aye* started to build up her house within her plot of land she used materials from different sources. Pointing to the ground of the hut that we are speaking in, she says that her base began like this, bamboo poles that are tied together with twine, and a plastic covering for her roof (see Figure 5.1.). Organizations then

began to distribute wood and bamboo on a first come, first served basis, but there was not enough to build her house, so she asked for extra materials from the hospital and ventured out into the forest. The jungles around the camp are protected land and it is illegal to gather resources from these conservation areas. If caught, individuals face fines and potential imprisonment but many inhabitants still choose to take this risk. The opportunity to gain more materials to construct shelter appears worth the risk, even when their status in the country is so precarious. Shelter matters and for reasons beyond safety and wellbeing.

The merits of these materials lie in the advantages they will provide beyond the initial danger. Firstly, for those who have to grapple with the fight to create a place for themselves in the midst of the political and stringent regulative forces, the act of accessing a plot of land or the materials to build with are symbols of achievement. For many of the refugees, the sheet of tarpaulin matters, bamboo and wood have value and they are willing to put their own safety at risk to accumulate them. They will hide from the authorities and then transport the materials back by floating them down a river. Any extra materials that they do not need for their homes they will sell to other members of the community. It is also a way to assert their agency and gain control in a context where much of their lives, from the food they eat to how they can mend their dwelling, is often decided by others. The methods used to assemble their structures also create combinations of different resources that are fashioned to serve a new purpose, or a sum of various parts. For example, pieces of bamboo, rope and palm leaves themselves could not shield them from exposure, but fastened together, they provide housing in which to practice their everyday lives and await some sort of resolution. *Aye* built her house piece by piece, saving and collecting the resources when she could: "It was not finished in one day...it took one week and I

built it...they distributed the wood and bamboo, but there was not enough so we have to cut down more in the forest...we went to the forest and cut them down and came back to build. It took a month. There was no one to help and we have to do by ourselves" (October 14, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). With the twenty pieces of bamboo she gets each year from the organization, she hopes to repair the damage to her house, caused by the Monsoon rains and general wear and tear, section by section. *Phyo* was luckier and had a network to make the process of building a home easier. She also sought out assistance from other sources: "Some people helped. Friends helped us. Organizations helped. Some have to do it by themselves. We tried to find some [materials] in the Thai forest. Woods and bamboo [were] dried out at the time" (October 29, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). The temporal aspect of these lived experiences demonstrate the commitment and investment involved in ensuring the successful building of a structural home. The aesthetic and practical expectations may never get met while others are at varying levels of completion. But there is a history and there are outcomes.

The organization that *Aye* and the other respondents are referring to is the Thai-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) that officially distributes the food and material aid that the refugees subsist on within the camp. Each year, a representative from this non-profit organization will inspect each house and determine the amount of materials that each family should receive. This evaluation process exists because TBBC also has to work within funding constraints with the increasing population in the camp and in 2011 was forced to reduce the amount of building provided by 50% and not support the construction of new structures (Key informant from TBBC, January 31, 2011; man; Mae Sot, Thailand). Having worked with refugee populations in the area since the early 1990s, they are generally well-respected and are well-regarded not just by the

groups they assist but also the network of aid agencies in the region. But when informants are

stating that they do not have enough to maintain their structures and are willing to undertake

illegal means to ensure the repair of the homes, there is an obvious disconnect between what the

organization is deeming to be sufficient and the material reality that the refugees have to contend

with. Perhaps TBBC also recognizes these issues but cannot easily resolve them because of

financial limitations. These shelters can be categorized as just a means to the ends of survival. If

this were the entirety of their value, it would perhaps not matter if certain sections were in a state

of disrepair. It is evident that shelter plays a central role in many lives, and *Shwe* indicated how

her hopes for the future were closely tied with her everyday realities and the challenges they pose

(November 19, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

> Ei Phyu: What do you hope for your future?
>
> Shwe: I have no idea. Just live like this.
>
> Ei Phyu: You have no expectations then?
>
> Shwe: Give me some advice.
>
> Ei Phyu: I do not know how to advise you.
>
> Shwe: I cannot think of the future and I have no money. I cannot expect anything.
>
> Ei Phyu: Why? Don't you have any idea what you want in the future?
>
> Shwe: What can I expect? Right now you see, my house is broken and if I need to build a house, I have to go and get bamboo and think of how I will build. But, half of my house is finished and the other half is broken. Then, I was thinking that I want to build more but I have no bamboo. After that, the house became broken again. Each time we only get 25 pieces of bamboo.

It is difficult for her to imagine a different sort of future because her current state of poverty is so

crippling. However, the state of her material world is closely tied to her dreams of an alternate

reality. She wants to repair her house and these desires are supported by plans and attempts to

fulfill these wishes. However, the difficulties associated with obtaining resources burden her,

although she does manage to rebuild part of her home. By the time she has realized her

objective, there are new sections that are in disrepair and will require similar effort and attention.

But why put in all this effort at all if she might only reside there momentarily? After all, building

a home does not just consist of assembling rows of bamboos. Similar to *Aye's* experience, the

process of maintaining their shelter is an ongoing venture for many households within the Mae

La community. Many recognize that they will not be given enough materials and overcome this

setback with their own strategies. When families need other resources, they purchase them their

own income: "With wood, bamboo, leaves...nails...you can't do anything if you have no

money...after all they distributed 200 leaves [for the roof], and if it's a big family, it's very

difficult" (October 14, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). The houses must also contend with the

elements and during the rainy season, which lasts from May until October, families will buy

plastic sheets to cover their roof or newspapers or 'comic papers' to serve the same purpose. At

the end of the year, they also try to conserve as much of the materials as possible by reusing parts

of the house that has not been eaten by insects or other pests. *Kyi* states that the process of trying

to salvage the physical structure of the house is a constant battle: "You collect the things little by

little. The house can become bigger with that. Some of the things are new and some are old

(October 29, 2010; Mae La, Thailand)." Over time the homes begin to resemble a palimpsest,

where previous elements are washed away but their indentations cannot be erased. A home is the

sum of former attempts at restorations and current erosions. The cycle will continue in a

patchwork fashion with ruptures being mended time and time again.

Although most of the households use a combination of wood and bamboo, many do not

feel that these are the ideal components. If she had the financial resources, *Kyi* would like to go

beyond what is distributed each year for more sturdy and permanent options (October 29, 2010;

Mae La, Thailand):

> I would like to build with wood only and want to use a brick tile for the roof if I have the
> money. I don't want to build with bamboo or leaves because insects eat them. We have
> to collect the leaves for the roof because we had to pay 200 baht for 100 leaves before
> and now it costs 300 Baht.

Cement is also another option but at over 100 Baht per bag, it is out of the financial reach for

many of the families (November 19, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

> Ei Phyu: How do you want to prepare your house in the future?
>
> Shwe: I will make it better and strong if I have the money.
>
> Ei Phyu: How will it change?
>
> Shwe: Fix it to be better. Make it with cement?
>
> Ei Phyu: How would you like to make it? It's up to you. Would you like to live with
> wood?
>
> Shwe: That's enough. I have to use lots of money if I live with cement. I cannot
> have a house without spending money.

There is symbolic value in owning a larger home or one that is fashioned from more expensive

materials such as wood or cement. When much of their neighbourhoods consist of rows of

bamboo huts, these structures would differentiate the households from the larger population and

clearly display their wealth and access to greater resources. These projects demonstrate how

individuals are trying to create fixtures within a system that does not necessarily support such

aspirations. After all, the community that contains these houses are named 'temporary' sites, the

laws do not recognize them as members of Thai society and even the way with which the aid is

distributed provides short-term maintenance of huts, not for the creation of larger, more

permanent homes or more structurally sound ones. For those passing each day within Mae La,

however, there are yearnings to create a more stable living environment and they seek to meet

these goals with patience and intentional actions. They may also be pushed by what motivates

many of us in life, which is to exist with a basic level of dignity. These desires are often met by

having a place, a structure, to pass each day with some sense of protection.

We have discussed strategies utilized to construct the outer foundations but within the

interior of the homes similar meditations still take place. The rooms within the home are

assigned to promote a communal existence for the formation of collective bonds. The small

plots of land assigned dictate the size of the shelter that can be built and the families must work

with the spatial confines of their home. There are a variety of arrangements that occur within

different families. For some, while the parents will share a bedroom the children will sleep

separately. Older men are assigned their own rooms but 'virgins' will share quarters with

children who are 4 to 5 year olds. For others, the rooms are divided according to sex, with only

the younger children sharing rooms. Some children remain in the same room as their parents till

the age of 10. The way that the living space is ordered reflects how the encounters within the

home are political and laden with emotion. Issues of gender, sexuality and the definition of

family and childhood are negotiated in a myriad of ways, which can express a diverse set of value systems.

When it comes to the interior design many of the participants choose to leave their walls empty, because there are other necessities, such as food and clothing, that are far more pressing. But when they can, they also fashion their homes with objects that serve as sources of pleasure. *Phyo* engages with these material cultures when she can: "I have a calendar...I put a piece of newspaper...I buy these things if I have the money to see the nice pictures" (October 29, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). In solely material terms, such pictures do not have high monetary value because the calendar and other decorations are mass-produced posters depicting animals, landscapes, Christian or Buddhist religious figures. Their relatively low cost does not diminish their symbolic value. When residents have the means, they might buy the more expensive calendar and resort to newspapers or bare walls in times of need. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, many families will use 'comic papers' or newsprint to weather the effects of rain and water damage. But the commonality is that both these objects showcase images that appeal to her sensibility and taste. She could deem that they represent beauty, her sense of self or future aspirations (Bourdieu, 1987). The religious models could serve as reminders of her faith that is a source of solace during difficult times or what forms her moral fibre and influences her conduct within society. Even at a time when she has more financial resources, she could choose the newspaper image over the calendar but either way, these depictions are meaningful to her. It also demonstrates to visitors that she has the financial resources to decorate her house, which is a form of social differentiation. The posters and calendars for sale are printed on hardier paper so they are more durable while the newsprint will only provide her with the meaning for a limited

amount of time. But since the newspapers are more accessible perhaps she chooses to

accumulate their depictions more frequently and allows her to change her decorations according

to her desires because she has not allocated a large portion of her income to obtain them.

Landscapes are a frequent theme on the walls of the dwellings. Perhaps they look similar to the

physical surroundings of former villages, whether it is a familiar type of forest cover, altitude or

colour of sky. And for others they may be of places that they aspire to reach.

The significance of these aesthetic items are even more clear when they are personal

items such as photographs of family members. Are the individuals captured in the photographs

living or dead? Where do they reside and how often do the respondents get to see them? Do

they still have strong relationships with these loved ones or is it to remember former ties that

have been weakened by circumstance? I do qualify the statements above by noting that this is

my analysis of the respondents' descriptions of these objects. I ask many questions not to

speculate but to demonstrate that a guest in their home may read these symbols in a multitude of

ways. That is the material point. All of these objects are meaningful because they are

expressions of the different identity projects taking place within the home (Miller, 2010). If the

shelters were considered to be basic modes of protecting oneself from the physical environment,

such care would not be placed on making the space more livable and beautiful. The images they

choose reflect their preferences and are obtained according to the financial capital available to

them. Photographs of friends and family can often represent their attachment to the past and

connections they hope to preserve. Lastly, with faith being a prominent aspect of their lives,

with the church or monastery offering the site to form networks, images to remind themselves of

their source of stability is significant. These nuances and meditations are what is not captured by

the official assessment conducted by the TBBC on the structural state of their homes. Those

symbols and aspirations for more are not always considered when concluding if a family is

allocated the means to repair their shelter and in turn can be reductive and problematic.

Sometimes the more sentimental and substantial parts of our identities are privately stowed

behind closed doors.

Surviving elsewhere

There are several ways that the material meanings of the home change through

resettlement and others that remain the same. When families are approved to migrate to another

country their shelters—the ones they have carefully rebuilt and cared for over several years—

will not remain empty for very long (see Figure 5.2.). Extended family members may still be

residing there and will recruit others to fill the rooms within the walls but there is usually some

sort of financial exchange to demonstrate gratitude: "Usually there's some financial payment but

more out of respect or appreciation...especially if that family's resettling and probably needs a

pair of shoes or a pair of trousers before they get on the airplane. Or often the money's used for a

farewell party or a farewell meal (Key informant from TBBC; January 31, 2011; man, Mae Sot,

Thailand). The huts swiftly become lived spaces again with the smell of cooking and new

mementos on display. If an entire family does leave their home, which is a rare occurrence, there

is a real estate business that will negotiate with potential buyers. A key informant at TBBC

(January, 31, 2011; man; Thailand) indicated that a home close to the road that connects the

different sections of Mae La camp can be sold for 50,000-100,000 Baht which is approximately

1500-3000 US dollars. Though the average price of homes fall between 30,000-50,000 Baht (900-1500 USD), there has been an instance of a dwelling in Mae La being sold for 500,000 Baht (15,000 USD). Within these plots of land, the spatial configurations of the houses may be altered drastically or just be gradually restored each year, piece by piece, with older vestiges living alongside newer renovations.

As with most instances with international migration through official channels there is a formal process consisting of many steps. Careful planning prior to departure consists of both the assessment of the body through health examinations and psychological preparation, however limited, with cultural classes. Although the intention behind such programming is clear, the reality that a brief overview of the cultural differences between life at the camp compared to large urban centers in a new country is clearly insufficient. The process of acculturation is so visceral and there is only so much that descriptions of people and places, even with the use of images and DVDs, can accomplish. But awareness of the need and the attempt to make the transition easier, on the part of the Canadian government, does warrant credit. It's just apparent that continued vigilance to improve the practice is key, perhaps through a more involved and lengthy curriculum.

After the flight and being welcomed at the arrivals terminal, all families will live in state-supported reception houses where they undertake orientation and language programs and receive assistance on how to find housing. With a large Karen community living in the Jane and Steeles region of Toronto, many are drawn to reside in this neighbourhood and the extensive network it offers. Small enclaves of Karen people also exist in the Bloor and Lansdowne and Scarborough neighbourhoods. Even when it is within their means to move to another area with less crime and

more amenities, many will choose to remain. Greater access to material wealth cannot compensate for the continued care provided by other members of the Karen circle. The challenges of not being able to communicate in English or difficulties finding work are somewhat made easier with the ever-present interactions with people of similar backgrounds and histories of trauma. These interactions demonstrate how personal negotiations support the tangible practices of home making materially.

Since they now live in the built environment of an apartment or townhouse, they no longer worry about protecting themselves against elements or the structure of their homes being worn down by weather and insects. The problems that remain include substandard conditions such as the presence of vermin and bedbugs. The endeavors shift from constructing modes of shelter to socio-economic considerations, but the urgency associated with housing oneself remains quite the same. Other and often more stressful issues are now a part of their lives such as being able to make the rental payments each month and interacting with landlords who don't always understand how long the acculturation process can take. Additionally, this may be the first exposure that these households have to more formalized modes of banking that requires both literacy and depositing cheques in a timely manner. The families balance the income from employment and government assistance to attempt to meet their financial needs. This is when priorities are evaluated, when temporary jobs can outweigh higher education and the desire to find meaningful work can be compromised. These concessions are considered more desirable than the fallout of losing a home to live in.

As the landscape changes some cultural practices persist and remain. The communal living that was practiced at the camp as discussed earlier in the chapter is also carried forward to

life in Canada with larger families sharing living quarters and the resources within them. The

downside to this include the dangers of overcrowding and lack of privacy for all individuals

involved which can lead to family conflict. However, for some, Canada affords them

opportunities that they could not have obtained elsewhere, such as the pride and sense of stability

that comes with owning property. Being the very representation of a newcomer who has

successfully integrated in many ways, *Sai* was able to purchase a home for him and his extended

family within the first year of residing in Toronto and they have most recently obtained their

third house. In North America and most other societies the ability to purchase a home illustrates

the social standing of the individual and provides the buyer with a sense of prestige. Being in

escrow is a privilege that so many strive for and will labour to make the monthly mortgage

payments, because that sense of self is well worth it. When I asked him to reflect on why he

likes living in this country he responds (September 13, 2011; Toronto, Canada):

> I was able to hold my wife's hand in public and we were able to walk around Toronto.
> We have permanence compared to our prior life. Ownership means it's a good
> investment. I appreciate Canada and how they support immigrants. If you can earn, you
> can raise a family and help members of your community. You have freedom and
> obviously you need a good work ethic but things are possible.

With his level of education and prior employment experience in Thailand it's not surprising that

the adjustment to life in a new environment with its societal pressures was not especially trying.

The concept of hard work is not foreign to *Sai*, who after being displaced from Burma with his

politically active father and large family, enjoyed gaining an education in the camp. He then

lived in the Philippines without status where he feared being caught and deported to Burma.

This is a man who returned to the Mae Hong Song province at the conclusion of his studies to

live and work with his ethnic community at a camp-based not-for-profit. For *Sai,* this might be the most stable his life has ever been, at least with regard to his citizenship. However, there are limitations to this greater sense of security and for *Kidd*, she cannot fully rely on these new circumstances to stay the same: "Now I have a permanent house where before it changed all the time. I find it hard to accept the permanence because I've never had anything permanent in my life before. I don't know my future and I don't even know if what I have now will be permanent" (September, 11, 2011; Toronto, Canada). It is clear that prior struggles for freedom have taken their toll and that there is a price to pay psychologically in seeking refuge. *Kidd* may have a home to call her own and the legal status to live permanently in Canada, but it does not change the struggle she has had to endure to arrive here, nor does it change her distrust of life forever staying constant. But this does not have to be framed negatively. There are advantages of not being complacent to the future and the opportunities or hindrances it might provide.

With the built environment already being established, the resettled Karen refugees have more opportunity to consider how they are going to create a sense of 'home' with the objects they choose to display within the home. There is agency involved in how individuals choose to furnish their dwellings, but the objects themselves also transform the agents, resulting in a material culture. Scholars in the field of material culture strive to bring light to things that have been deemed to be mundane aspects of social reproduction. They make a clear distinction that their studies locate the material objects with the social contexts so as not fetishize them. Their theories also appreciate the diverse ways that material objects influence social relationships but maintain that the specific meanings of the things should also be gleaned (Miller, 1998).

The role of action is central to the study of material cultures since these scholars strive to go beyond what people articulate about why goods matter to them and focus on the specific practices that allow them to create a social fabric. For many of my respondents, their aesthetic choices remain similar to those practiced within the camp with some continuing to have posters of landscapes, animals and religious figures, while others line their walls with the photographs of family members from different parts of the world. Images of individuals in Thailand are placed beside those in Europe or the United States, these other individuals having chosen a similar path of living abroad. These journeys and the sacrifices associated with them are housed within frames and hung to remember others who have taken on such endeavors. These photographs may evoke feelings of love, longing or nostalgia which are all different forms of affect. The succeeding section will examine the role of emotions during the exercise of constructing a home. The concepts of memory and nostalgia are often associated with Diasporic factions but the two terms have distinct definitions. Nostalgia is an emotional state that links directly to the concept of home since the Greek origins of the word describes it as a form of homesickness. While the concept of memory has been viewed to be more productive, nostalgia has been mostly framed as a regressive way of being, a longing for a way of life that has already been transformed and obliterated (Lowenthal, 1989). The context that is desired is unattainable because it is a remembered moment within time and space, which cannot be recreated in the present. This is because while the site may be accessible spatially, recapturing a temporal moment is not possible. Blunt (2005) reframes that conceptualization by suggesting that nostalgia can also be the productive search for a home and this is a project that takes place in material and affective ways. This is the framework that I will utilize for my analysis of affect and dwelling.

Material culturalists argue that the ways that individuals interact with their physical

environment are significant for two reasons: people play an active role in forming the cultural

fabric within space and the objects in this area also have the agency and power to impact the

lives of others (Miller, 2001). The cultural landscape that results from these practices enable the

performance of identity projects and the assignment of affective meanings. Many of the refugees

I spoke with were able to successfully construct and maintain a shelter in material ways, but the

emotional aspects of 'feeling at home' was a much more complicated aspiration to undertake. A

sense of belonging and security are what is at stake for many of the participants, even if they had

struggled and achieved the ability to survive and adapt to life at the refugee camp or in a new

country. The next section interrogates how the refugees I interviewed negotiate the venture of

creating meaningful places throughout the arc of their displacement in affective ways. The

question of whether they ever make a home is difficult to answer, but it is clear that the attempt

to make home is an ongoing process that is unstable and one of contradictions.

Punctuated stops

When I spoke to *Naw* about the journey that she took to get to Mae La camp, she said

that it was one of many starts and stops. She was born in division 3 Phar Pu district in Karen

State where her fondest memories are those of the landscape punctuated by the rivers and

streams. She left this place when Burmese soldiers had taken over her village and made it

impossible for her family to live there. Other informants have also related how Burmese soldiers were demanding high taxes that they could not afford or forcing villagers to be porters on structural projects. After hiding in the forest for some time she started to make her way towards the border and to the camp. She recounts her journey and the difficulties she faced along the way (October 29, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

> The place where we lived, you can search for it on the internet. Soldiers came very often and they established the camp all over the village. Initially, we were told to live in a limited area. After that, we lived in a small hut. We came because of all the difficulties. We spent many days on the journey. We took a boat at Mae Sa River. We were afraid while we were on the boat and there were plenty of gates [check points] along the way. We were on a boat for a whole day. We have to wait when we changed boats and if there is no boat available, we need to sleep there and wait until the next day. Then, we took a car for a whole day. My friends [sister who lives in Mae Sot] arranged for the car and this took a whole day of traveling.

Naw's setbacks were very spatial in nature. Increased confinement and immobility in the Karen State catalyzed her need to flee. At first she was assigned to a plot of land and this progressed to being confined within her home. Then, she speaks at length of how much territory she needed to traverse in order to seek protection in Thailand. She needed to invest the time and use several modes of transportation to reach her destination. The journey was not always on her terms since she had to wait for the availability of a boat and driver to navigate the way. The punctuated stops were also sources of anxiety since the security checkpoints were all moments when there was the potential for her journey to end and be forced to return to her village to face the consequences of fleeing from the ruling military presence. These moments were especially trying because they were instances when her fate was not within her control. In this time of heightened fear, she was also coming to terms with losing her homeland.

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Her affective response of being in and out of place can be contextualized by the link between emotions and locations. Affect is central to the creation of place mainly through practice and the body. Bodies, as vessels of everyday life, produce knowledge, meanings and identities (Thrift, 2008; Katz, 2000; Ekman, 2003). The impact of having her land taken away hits *Naw's* body the hardest because she can feel the confinement on her limbs. It is also her body that she relies on most when making her way to the borderline; she feels the exhaustion, experiences the fear, and hides herself, literally making her body smaller at checkpoints. Even with the punctuated stops, no matter how short the duration, they are all meaningful sites to her because they were part of her journey towards a different way of living.

Even after her difficult experience, *Naw* would return to Karen State if she could, which she believes is a better place to live than Thailand. Due to political conflict her desire to relocate is not feasible but is ever-present. These longings are augmented by how places exist relationally (Brun and Fabos, 2015). The feelings about the camp cannot be produced without the Karen State for comparison and vice versa. Individuals assign meaning to places through an evaluation process that determines their level of satisfaction, a sense of familiarity over time and whether the site provides the necessary setting for identity development (Giuliani and Feldman, 1993; Feldman, 1990). Her village is still a place that she holds dear, even if this was the site of her trauma. Perhaps it is because before the conflict the Karen State was where she felt the happiest, was the source of many memories and represents her ethnic heritage. Having lived in Mae La for 5 years, she is grateful for the support she receives at the camp. She has been able to obtain an education and employment but she is separated from some of her family members, and is only living there because she has no choice.

To go away

       The question of whether the refugees wish to remain in Thailand or go is something that is considered by many of the individuals I spoke to. Those who wanted to remain were happy living at the border region and wanted to stay there for the rest of their lives, because of the security that the camp provides. Comparing her life at the camp to the one she had led in Burma, **Thet** reflected on the ease of her daily responsibilities: "It's different. I do not have hard work here and there is no need to farm. I do not need to work in the rain. I can live here happily with my children. I do not have to do heavy work here" (November 12, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). Her emotional attachment to this place is strongly linked to the ease and security with which her body is allowed to exist in the camp setting compared to her previous life. Through the affection she feels for the camp, she has re-conceptualized her home from a specific site, the Karen State, to her current setting and circumstances.

       Wanting to go has two meanings: returning to the Karen State and Burma or applying to be resettled in a third country and going to live abroad. Some had positive associations with migrating to a foreign nation because of all the advantages in education and health it promised. Many of my informants asked me about life in Canada, and when I stated that it was cold, one of them joked and said that if it was that cold, she would never want to shower. I told **Khin** not to worry because there are heating systems that make the home and water both comfortable, to which she replied: "It's perfect in other countries. You can make it hot if it's cold and you can make it cold if it's hot...for us, we can't do anything...even to boil water...I mean for my house to be warm at night time...there would be so much smoke if I made a fire under the house" (October

14, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). She recognizes that there are more resources available abroad and she relates this to an aspect of her everyday life. For her, she wishes that her family does not have to feel uncomfortable while they sleep but even if she tried to mitigate this with something that is within her abilities, it is a threat to their safety. She feels that there are specific conditions abroad that would improve her quality of life.

Others are more hesitant about committing to moving such a distance because they have heard about all of the challenges, mainly issues with language and communication, associated with living abroad from family members or friends who had migrated. Some feared that their children would be negatively influenced by the cultural practices in these nations and would therefore lose aspects of their ethnic Karen identity. This was one concern that *Kyi* found especially troubling (October 29, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

> One of my daughters would like to go, but other people have said that if a lady goes to there alone, they get married within three months. Opportunities are so different. I don't dare to tell them [about resettlement] if they're 18 or 20. It's difficult to tell them about it. The second thing is opportunities, it's not the same with Karen culture. That's why, I am worried that I won't be able to control to them. If that happens like that, our ethnic traditions will be lost.

She believes that there are temptations abroad that her daughters may fall prey to if they are not under the protection of their family. One must recognize the gendered nature of her fears that does not trust her daughter's judgement or grant her the autonomy to make her own life choices. Values that are favored by many societies like individualism and having relationships outside of marriage may not hold as great importance within Karen circles, nor should they have to. But with changing life circumstances and societal norms there is potential for generational conflicts. Additionally, perhaps as a mother she would like more for her child, such as an education or a

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career and does not want these to be compromised by starting a family at too young an age. These anxieties are fluid and can change with time. For example, when the Finnish government initially offered resettlement there was a great deal of gossip around the camp amongst the refugee population that it would not be a good experience to live in this European country. Community leaders who have also worked to build the collectives were afraid of losing members and their talents. This created tension in the camp, which is recounted by a member of the TBBC team (Key informant from TBBC; January 31, 2011; man; Mae Sot, Thailand):

> It is very difficult at a time when since 2005 resettlement has opened up, the opportunity for resettlement. The prospects for being able to return in any sort of sense of peace or dignity is as distant as always was, if not more and these camps are sort of caught in this limbo of seeing friends and colleagues and family leaving for resettlement, no opportunity for repatriating, going back to their homelands and in the meantime they see that NGOs are starting to reduce funding or reduce services and this is obviously very concerning for the refugees.

However, after one family applied and gave a good report, a large contingent followed suit.

Although there is the option of sending their children alone to resettle, most of the participants feel that though they do not necessarily want to undertake the journey, they will go for the welfare of their children and for the sake of keeping their family together. *Shwe* expressed the conflicting emotions that are involved with making the decision to leave and resettling elsewhere (November 19, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

> Ei Phyu: Many people have gone to foreign countries, don't you want to go there?
>
> Shwe: At first, many people went there and I also want to be there. But now, I do not.
>
> Ei Phyu: Why?

Shwe: I have become old and I can't work to support my life. My son told me to apply for resettlement and I replied 'It's easy to apply. But not easy to leave.'

Already in her personal history she has made several places a home. She was born into her experiences in the Karen State and then created a life for herself within Mae La. It is understandable why after forming connections with these locations she is weary to begin the process anew. The path for many refugees can be likened to points within flows. Their steps create an arc of dislocation, within time and space, with punctuated sites to house the conditions for experiences (Kwon, 2004; Spinoza, 1997). Therefore, the meanings that she has made in these various sites do not disappear emotionally because of new realities. Rather, the affective associations co-exist within her mind and influence her perceptions of her present state, just as the camp and Karen State, Burma and Thailand, exist relationally (Brun and Fabos, 2015). The potential for change within these networks of movement does not diminish place's importance as the venue for the everyday activities that we live in and through. The contingencies in the physical environment are what set the stage for these emotional attachments within: "a *material schematism* in which the world is made up of all kinds of things brought in to relation with one another by many and various spaces through a continuous and largely involuntary process of encounter, and the violent training that such encounter forces" (Thrift, 2008: 8). Everyday practices occur within these material fabrics that are performed, transformed and re-performed to gain stabilization before being destabilized once more. The practices are not only determined by actors but have their own functionality (Schatzki, 2002; Sedgwick, 2003). The fluidity of the social environment ensures that there is the potential for new forms and meanings to take shape (Schwenger, 2006). Therefore, for my respondent the practices that occur within her daily life

within the camp evokes certain attachments that cannot be easily diminished. These feelings

may actually tether her to the camp and make it challenging to leave. But these meanings are

constantly renegotiated and may change with time and context. Due to their fluid nature,

attachments are stabilized and destabilized which in turn influence their ultimate choices of

where home can lie.

Several of the participants showed strong emotional reactions when discussing the

possibility of returning to Burma. Their answers ranged from perhaps returning there if it's safe,

wanting to live in Karen State but not believing that this would happen in their lifetime to never

wanting to go back because of the traumatic experience of being displaced. Some answers were

a combination of the three, like in *Kyi's* case: "If I tell you the truth, I don't want to live here

[Thailand]...I would like to go back [to Karen State] and live...I can't go back because of the

situation. We live here because it is better than living in our country where the situation is so

complicated" (October 29, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). For *Yee*, the longing that she feels for her

former home offsets the conflicts that displaced her and the dangerous journey she took to get

her where she is today (November 12, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

> Yee: I will tell you the truth, that my father worked for the [Karen] revolution.
> That's why we do not dare to stay there anymore. I was 14 or 15 years old when I left
> and I do not remember much of my childhood. It's not easy to stay because of my
> father's political role. People talked about him in many ways and they came to start
> arresting people. I don't know how to explain what they said. That's why we have to run
> out because they were looking for the people who are working in the political field.
>
> Ei Phyu: Your father fled first?
>
> Yee: No, we all fled together. They burned our house after we were away from
> the village. They could not follow us and arrest us because of God.

Ei Phyu: Will you return and live there if you can?

Yee: If it's possible, I would like to stay back [in Karen State] because that's my homeland.

Ei Phyu: Why?

Yee: If I compare it with other countries, I do want to live in my homeland.

Having lived in the camp since 1985, it is challenging for her to sometimes even remember the life she had led in Burma, one that she was uprooted from when she was a teenager. And yet, the concept of a 'homeland' still holds significance after all of this time because this is where she believes she belongs. This concept of the 'homeland' gains even more traction because of her reality of being exiled. When I asked her if she was happy she stated that her time of almost twenty-five years in Mae La influenced her feelings of contentment: "I have to say I am happy because the time I've spent here is getting longer and longer. If I think back about my homeland, it is full of difficulties and trouble. That's why, I do not want to go back. But, I would like to go back if there is peace" (November 12, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). These memories are constant ruptures to revisit and the concept of the homeland has such strong hold on her that cannot be weakened even with the passage of time. In her case it is not a matter of 5-10 years but over 20 years that she reinforces this longing for a place. Although, we have established that place impacts affective responses (Davidson and Bondi, 2004), to define the concept of affect is a challenge in itself. Amongst the scholarly debate and distinct approaches, it is clear that human agency places a role in forming attachment to place. Therefore, my informant *Kyi* takes an active part in ensuring that the desire for the Karen State, and all it represents, is maintained and perhaps even intensified over time.

One of the last questions that I always asked the resettled interviewees is to locate where their 'home' lies, is it in Canada, Thailand at the camp, Burma or elsewhere? Most of the individuals stated that the exact nation does not matter but it is any place where they can live with their families. Others are more specific and will state that their ultimate home will always be in Karen State. The first answer calls to attention how their 'home' is strongly influenced by the individuals they have strong emotional ties with. ***Kidd****, who lives in Canada,* recalls how much she relies on these relationships for her sense of contentment (September 13, 2011; Toronto, Canada):

> We all live together with my family in a house now. It feels like it did at the camp. I lived by myself for 3 years [when she was attending university in Canada] and when my family was set to arrive I was so excited. People were saying, 'aren't you afraid of losing your independence?' but it's what I longed for--a sense of community--to not feel emotionally lonely.

Perhaps where these relationships occur hold lesser value than the fact that they can rely and nurture each other while living within the social sphere. The answer of other participants locating their 'home' in their villages in the Karen State may indicate that their definitions depend more on the affective meanings they associate with this place. Even if the village no longer physically exists due to civil conflict, the memories of their history in this location remains. In some instances the village still stands but much of the population has been displaced. However, the importance is the sense of belonging that they only feel when they are in Burma and for others who left at a young age, it is the hope that they will finally feel that sense of being at home when they return to their 'homeland.' The centrality of affective associations with place is even present when considering their attachments to the camp, the site

where they sought protection. *Sai* still look back to his time at the camp with fondness

(September 13, 2011; Toronto, Canada):

> Life in the camp, I wouldn't say it was hard but that it is strange. There was no electricity but you were with nature and there was a sense of community. There was no sign of permanence. We had a portable house that need to be fixed or rebuilt every year. But as refugee I had freedom of expression and was truly happy. Because all of us had no status we could not look up or down on each other either.

Although his statement is beautiful in so many ways there are certain aspects that I would

question. Although I don't challenge the validity of *Sai's* feelings, I wonder if his time as a

stateless person in Thailand is now being viewed in a more idealistic way because of the

citizenship he possesses. Additionally, through discussions with other participants and personal

observation, I would suggest that there are still variations in social standing within the camp.

There are distinct levels of wealth, depending on employment level, education and remittances

from abroad, that stratifies the camp by class. Those with more capital can access more

resources for shelter, food and materials for social reproduction. Similarly, *Kidd* reiterates how

meaningful her years at the camp were but does recognize her more privileged position due to

her social and cultural capital (September 13, 2011; Toronto, Canada):

> Daily life at the camp is my most memorable and sweet memory, not because of social position but how it makes me feel. When I arrived to Canada I was surprised at the number of people who suffered depression or low self-esteem. The standard of life was less back there but somehow seemed happier. There was no electricity, grade 8 was the highest level of education available. There was only hope for higher education and you learned to live in the moment. You read, studied hard and go to bed early and wake up early.

Later on in our conversation she reiterates that life there was labour intensive but it impacted her

sense of self and developed her strong work ethic, which ultimately served her well.

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How they view the concept of living in Canada permanently also differs greatly and is very much influenced by the ease with which they were able to acculturate. For those who face immense challenges with communication, literacy and poverty, they do not feel that Canada will ever become 'home' to them, and when asked why it was difficult for them to put these emotions into words. As a community member who also works as a settlement counsellor, *Sai* articulates the different sentiments amongst the population: "Older people feel that they have lost a sense of home. They feel that they want to die in Thailand or Burma while younger people are finding it much easier to adapt" (September 13, 2011; female; Toronto). Canada provides for them so much of what they had lacked for most of their lives: security, political freedom and justice. But these facets are often not enough to actually make them feel that they have found a place to belong.

CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of the empirical data presented in this chapter on the material cultures and affective meanings that are part of the conceptualization of home for the informants, it is clear that home-making projects are a part of their displacement. Since the creation of dwellings as a built and an illusive form is an ongoing process, the incomplete projects are transformed by the cultural milieu of the participants.

Materially, my informants have to deal with a vast set of challenges. Refugees in Thailand are assigned a plot of land and must contend with the environment that they have been placed within. Whether it is the limited space, the slope of the mountain that makes building

difficult or how far they are from aid distribution, health or educational resources, the families

construct a structure and make changes year by year. If the 20 pieces of bamboo from TBBC is

not enough, some will utilize their wages to buy more wood, plastic sheeting and covertly collect

resources from the surrounding conservation areas. To actually build, they need to invest in

some nails and tools to create a sum of the parts, or materials, that they have pieced together.

Mae La camp is called a 'temporary encampment' within Thai policies since allowing refugees

to reside within the Thai nation-state is not considered to be, by any means, a permanent

solution. Politically, encouraging the refugees to return to the Karen State in Burma when it is

safe to do so or for a select number to be resettled in third countries are supported initiatives but

allowing them to remain in Thailand through integration is not. All of these factors would

indicate that this area is not conducive to home-making processes, but there are indications that

these very practices are taking place and showing themselves in material ways. For some of the

inhabitants who have lived in the camp for over twenty years and others who were born there,

the situation whether it is deemed to be politically sound or not, very much feels like a

permanent one. Each year they undertake the ritual of repairing their homes to shelter them for

another twelve months and there are dreams to save up for materials, such as wood and brick tile,

to make the homes more permanent. For some, it may save them from having to repair every

year and for others it represents all of the years and effort that they have invested. This type of

devotion to their dwelling endures even after resettling in Canada but the practices are expressed

differently. Whether it's collectively saving to own a home of their own or to meet the monthly

rental payments, they are ensuring the continuation of their social reproduction and emotional

welfare. Though there may face difficulties in the form of substandard conditions or

overcrowding, these rooms also allow them to connect with relatives and other members of the community. The interiors of the homes are just as meaningful through the intentional decoration of the walls with posters of religious figures, landscapes and photographs of loved ones. These attempts to both express their identity through their personal style and beautify the place illustrates the longing for permanent structures that challenge the notion of refugee sites in Thailand being deemed "temporary" ones and is a way to make sense of what lies ahead in Canada.

The affective associations of 'home' relate in two ways to the concepts of places that are normatively considered to be undesirable. For some of the refugees who are residing in the camp and others who have resettled in Canada, 'home' is to put plainly 'where the heart is.' Their contentment relies solely on being able to live somewhere with their families because the challenges that the places afford them can be negotiated within these emotionally supportive circles. Some of the other informants know that they would rather live in their village in the Karen State in Burma because this site will grant them a sense of belonging. Whether these expectations will be fully met in reality, or if it is even possible in their lifetime, is something that I believe requires less focus. Rather, the fact that these dreams are continually engaged with in the minds of the individuals is far more interesting. Whether they are in the precarious site of the Thai-Burma border or negotiating the urban landscape, their 'home' is achieved through the everyday practices of maintaining their household and the lives of members within it. For others, their site of belonging exists somewhere else entirely and is not within their reach. Their home-making project may be fraught with desires that are unfulfilled and will never be complete, but that doesn't make it any less real for them. While some might consider Canada to embody

all the traits, like liberty and political stability, to encourage the creation of 'home,' a sense of

security through citizenship is not necessarily enough. Many of the refugees feel out of place in

Canada and do not know if this feeling will be resolved. More official programs through

resettlement, language instruction or political freedom cannot always replace family members

and friends who remain in Southeast Asia, that hut where your children were born, or that feeling

of contentment that only comes when one fully believes that one belongs. The reality of 'home'

is that it will mostly remain incomplete and abstract. The respondents may be chasing what is

difficult to hold but if it provides emotional fulfillment, its purpose is met.
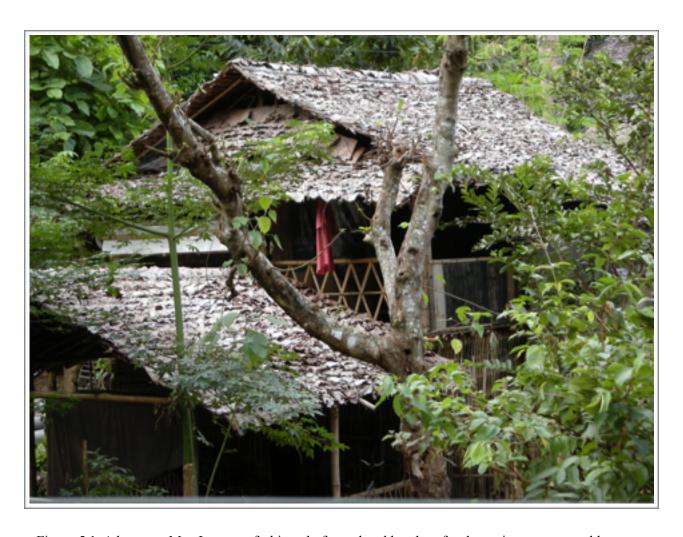
Figure 5.1. A house at Mae La camp fashioned of wood and bamboo for the main structure and leaves for the roof in Section A.

Figure 5.2. A home with a small business on the main floor in Section B at Mae La camp.

Chapter Six: The taste of home—the material, social and symbolic roles of food in creating home

POSITIONING

I am interested in the role that food plays in the lives of displaced persons because I come from a culture where it is common practice for extended family members to gather each weekend to talk, eat, nap and spend time together. Before the presence of satellite television, we were each other's entertainment. As a child that impacted me deeply and I formed associations about love, togetherness and unconditional support. When these types of interactions were no longer possible with migration, we chose to gain support from our extended network of friends. These were individuals with whom we had no or very loose connections in Yangon but here in Canada, they were the people who made those first few years actually livable. And so, I explore the urgency of having enough to eat, how we strategize to access familiar foods and the ways that we fill the absences in our lives again by sharing those dishes.

INTRODUCTION

For Diasporic populations the value of food goes beyond what's necessary for nutritional sustenance and survival but also facilitates the performance of cultural identity and social transactions. The taste of the regional cuisine can connect these individuals viscerally to their former homes and to the lives that they once lived. After migration, precisely recreating these meals can be a challenge when specific ingredients are not readily available. Therefore, being

able to enjoy these types of food again can often be what newcomers try to recapture of their past.

The time and care devoted to the preparation of dishes and the process of sharing them speaks to how we form relationships. Who we choose to include in these rituals demarcates and reinforces the boundaries and terms of community membership. How individuals engage with their material world and the culture created with these entities (Heidegger, 1971; Merleau-Ponty, 2005) provide compelling stories of memory and the struggle to safeguard what is fleeting.

The concept of visceral politics contributed by Probyn (2001) and augmented by A Hayes-Conroy and J Hayes-Conroy (2009) allows us to theorize the meaningful relationships that people form with food. We react viscerally to cuisine in a multitude of ways; our senses, such as taste, sight and sound, contribute to the richness of everyday life. When related to food, this theorization demonstrates how both the continued involvement with the practices of cooking and the consumption of meals are specific and personal.

Certain foods can allow people to re-live memories and to nurture their nostalgic attachments to places and people they have had to leave behind (Sutton, 2005). They can also facilitate the coming to terms with their present realities (Rodaway, 1994). In turn, these negotiations inform the conceptualization of home in new locations when displaced. The inability to recreate certain dishes because of the unavailability of certain ingredients can encourage creative substitutions that change these traditions and the narratives of the families, permitting the formation of new practices (Tolia-Kelly, 2004). Food is also very political, from the gendered nature of cooking, to the role that the kitchen itself serves as a meeting place for families (Duruz, 2010), to the dietary restrictions that people impose on themselves to meet

religious or moral objectives (Probyn, 2001; Roe, 2006). When one considers the role of food in the very political context of a refugee camp to the emotionally charged process of acculturating to a new environment after resettlement, the power dynamics involved in the access and consumption of nutritional sources becomes even more complex. In this chapter, I will be examining the material, social and symbolic meanings of food in the creation of home for Karen refugees. With resettlement as an option for some of the displaced persons living in the camp, they are now able to contemplate on where 'home' is, whether it's in Burma where they may never return, in Thailand where they lack freedom, or the challenging third-country where they may attempt to build a different type of life. The relationship that Karen refugees along the Thai-Burma border have to food is closely linked to its use as a way to create 'home' and larger power systems that are in place to manage displacement at the border.

OBJECTIVE

For this chapter I will be discussing the role of food in the lives of mainly Karen women at the Thai-Burma border and Canada, how they access it, negotiate larger distribution systems and the ways in which the concept of 'home' is influenced by food. While it is clear that they are not passively awaiting resolution, my findings also demonstrate that they are actively engaging with the everyday within their spatial confinement to create 'home'. The strategies they utilize to mitigate their limited mobility and economic resources to obtain food is related to their experiences as men and women living along the Thai-Burma border and how camp inhabitants are managed and contained in space. I argue that as they negotiate power relationships and

challenge systems to access food, which plays a major role in helping them create a sense of

home in Mae La refugee camp and later in Canada, they are also working through the banal but

important aspects of daily life. It is within this 'ordinary' rhythm of preparation and

consumption that they find the means to cope and moments of joy. From the contentment they

gain through food, they also find a way to connect their personal history to their present identity

(Longhurst et al., 2009; Dudley 2010). I will be framing their experiences with the material,

social and symbolic values that they place on food in the two contexts.

MATERIAL: FOOD DISTRIBUTION AND ACCESS

The food available at Mae La camp comes from many different sources and the ways that

refugees negotiate with the different players raise issues of power and resistance. The

production, distribution and consumption of food are all interrelated (Anderson, 2005; Ashley et

al.,2004; Hassanein, 2003) and that is why both biological and cultural meanings are conveyed

by our associations with food. When framing the relationship to food in purely material terms

the concept of scarcity is a dominant theme. It is this shortage that aid organizations are trying to

manage and prevent while the lack of nourishment is what the refugees are grappling with. The

prevention of hunger is a primary concerns for both aid providers and the community members.

The main food aid is distributed and managed by the Thai Burma Border Consortium or

TBBC, which has been working at the camps since the late 1980s. The TBBC utilizes support

from local and international donors to ensure the nutritional needs of the population at Mae La.

The provision is managed through a ration system which ensures that only those who are

registered with the UN and living full-time within the camp receive these basic food items.

Logistically, the amounts are marked and measured in a ration booklet and members gain access

to this network by completing administrative duties such as providing personal information and

getting their photograph taken. After this process they are literally and figuratively 'counted'

and their presence has been made legible. The materials they receive include chili paste, rice,

beans, oil, salt and coal to cook with. These specific ingredients were chosen after consultation

with the Karen community to determine food preferences that were still affordable and within the

means of the aid agencies to provide. The food materials they chose as part of the ration package

also represent items that are traditionally enjoyed by the Karen community and were readily

found in the Burma. These types of consultations are at the core of much of TBBC's mandates

since they pride themselves on being there from the beginning of the displacement to this region

in the late 1980s with "not a top-down, externally imposed program, it's very much working with

the community for them to find their own solutions and their own ways of working" (Key

informant at TBBC; January 31, 2011; man; Mae Sot, Thailand). The rations are distributed in a

scheduled system in each of the different sections and families receive the items according to

house number. That is why the wait times can vary from 1-2 hours to half a day since the house

numbers are called in ascending order, with the largest numbers having the longest wait times.

This is an important detail to note because the houses that were built later have larger numbers

but as a member of the TBBC team notes, other complexities result from distributing according

to address (Key informant at TBBC; January 31, 2011; man; Mae Sot, Thailand):

> Whereas in other camps and other refugee settings where there will be house number 1,
> 2, 3 all in blocks and in lines, as you well know in Mae La, it's very sort of organic and

really TBBC is looking to try and strengthen this a bit more. Many houses don't have house numbers, some houses have the same house number and it's really evolved from a very organic start, I mean at the beginning people would just build their own houses...things were fairly flexible.

Very few participants articulated their critiques of the distribution system or offered alternative methods. But it is clear that, though theoretically this system is an orderly way to assist people in need, it is not apolitical and inequalities do arise. The main problems lie in the access, quantity and quality of the materials which all impact their everyday practices to meet the nutritional needs of the household.

When speaking with camp residents about food, the most commonly expressed words are "miss," "difficult," and "want," indicating the affective reactions to this aspect of their lives. They elaborated on their desires and how they negotiated them in turn. Their anxieties and disappointments co-exist with the pleasures of living within a cultural milieu of ethnicity, faith and rituals. For *Lin*, she is not sure of whether she will be able to reside outside of Mae La but that does not change her longing for a different existence (October 29, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

I do not want to live my whole life in the camp. I would like to change my life situation. If I get a chance to go to a foreign country as you said, I would like to go. I will be happy if they give me an ID in Thailand. We may have a better life if we get that chance. We make money every month. But for every month it's not enough. We do not know what will happen in our future. We have to save and collect as much as we can. People meet difficulties and you should hold some money for it. We need to think before it happens.

I use this quote to demonstrate not only the hardships but also the will to improve her situation. Her struggle lies not only in the stress of having to come to terms of her current condition but it's the constant insecurity that also wears on her resolve. But she plans for these moments of crisis to the best of her ability and I feel that her strategies mirror many of those utilized by other

families, regardless of their economic situation. Their futures are highly uncertain, but they build their reserves with the little resources they have. This type of ingenuity comes from *Lin*'s history of overcoming various trials throughout her life, which have inevitably marked her perspectives and approach to the world. When we unpack her statements and focus on the "not enough" this gives me a starting point to discuss both the institutional and personal strategies for coping and living. This scarcity can be attributed to nutritional deficiencies as well as other material goods for living.

Some of the other individuals I spoke to were much more vocal about how there were problems in the distribution strategies that is supposed to be fair and just. These deficiencies mainly stem from how inefficient the overall methods were. *Mia* spoke of how even though she had followed protocol and was registered, the amount of food she received and every notation on her ration book existed within a cultural context. In reference to the aid organization and long lines, she states: "They came and supported us which is perfect. But, sometimes it [food] decreases because people in the line take their own share and they come one after one. We have to follow them and if not, we can't eat" (October 29, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). To clarify, she is referring to how the aid workers, unintentionally I'm sure, may fill the rations differently at the beginning of the distribution than at the end when the supply has been depleted. Even with the funding, which is often in a precarious state itself, there is a finite amount of food. If you are called to collect later on in the day and there are still many registered refugees waiting after you, your portion of food will ultimately be affected. For *Cynthia*, even though her friend (Aunty K) only devotes a part of her day to collecting rations, she is not as lucky (November 12, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

> Ei Phyu: How long do you have to wait for a ration?
>
> Cynthia: Sometimes if they call the small house numbers first I have to wait till sunset. Big households have to wait till sunset.
>
> Ei Phyu: Is that really how long it takes? From start to finish? Aunty K said that you can get it within two hours.
>
> Cynthia: Their household number is small, their number is just over 50. Mine is almost 200. I have to wait much longer.

This is time that these individuals could be devoting to their families, the upkeep of their homes or the further development of their education. When framed in this way, the inefficiencies of the system is even more glaring and the human potential that is wasted is much more apparent. To draw out this point, different items are allocated for distribution on certain days. For example, Wednesday is always for rice while Thursday is for fish paste. This is in place for a myriad of reasons, such as the TBBC members having to transport and work with specific items each day, which can prevent further complications. They are also working to have more stringent monitoring systems at the insistence of several donors:

> In the last three years as well TBBC has gone from feeding everyone to feeding what we call eligible people. People that fit into the certain criteria. And the criteria is very loose basically if you are in the camp, you will get rations. When we distribute our rations everyone 18 years and older has come themselves to collect rations and if you don't appear you won't get your rations. There are some exemptions to that such as people that are working in the camp, elderly people, pregnant or lactating women, there are different groups we identify as being exempt but otherwise, you have to be in the camp to get your ration (Key informant at TBBC; January 31, 2011; man; Mae Sot, Thailand).

However, for the recipient, they or a family member needs to be present for said item. The wasted potential multiplies even more because it can impact an entire network of people.

These feelings were not unanimous since at least one interviewee, *Yu* (October 29, 2010; Female; Mae La) is emphatic that not only is her well-being safer politically at the camp but that it was a relief to have a "sufficient" amount of food to consume.

Even the process of registration is impacted by the continually swelling population. *Mary* (October 29, 2010) feels fortunate that she is recognized by the system and knows that her situation does not reflect everyone's reality: "It was easy when we arrived. We got ration immediately. Some people get ration after only 2 or 3 years because there are more people" (October 29, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). I spoke to many new arrivals who had not yet been registered by the UNHCR at the camp and therefore could not access these food materials. They were subsisting by sharing the food items offered by family, friends or neighbours. That is how *Kay* survived her first few months when she was still recovering from her lengthy journey across the border and coming to terms with her decision to leave: "I lived with others when I first arrived. I did nothing and I did not get rations at that time. I ate around at people's homes who I know at that moment. They were in the same group as me" (November 12, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). Even the members of the camp community, who are registered and are granted the opportunity to get food-aid on a regular basis, must still manage the resources in a strategic manner to sustain their family units. When there is not enough food, they strategize in various ways to work within and outside the existing system to practice their social reproduction. These practices rely on the destabilization of objective forms of knowledge and a further exploration into how lived experiences demonstrate the connection between human agency and social realities (Bourdieu, 1977). Therefore, in the context of the Karen refugees, there may be instances when they have to rely on these networks to survive but it often comes at a cost and the

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expectation of reciprocity. There may be a time when it is within their means to support the

community and they too must perform their social duty to assist others in need. For example,

Leah depended heavily on her friends to build her home. At the completion of the project she

did not want to lose face and approached a money-lender to purchase items to host a dinner: "I

did not have enough money for food. That's why I borrowed the money to feed my friends who

came to help me" (November 12, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). She not only wanted to demonstrate

her gratitude but knew that this was her closest network of peers, one that she would have to

interact with on a regular basis for many years to come. She wanted it to begin well.

Item	Frequency of distribution
Rice	Weekly
Chilli paste	Weekly
Split peas	Weekly
Oil	Bi-weekly
Salt	Bi-weekly
Sugar	Bi-weekly

Table 6.1. Food items in the ration package that is distributed by the Thai-Burma Border Consortium in 2010-2011 (TBBC).

With the basic food items (see Table 6.1.) that they receive most of the families eat rice

with chili paste twice a day, for their morning and evening meals. To supplement these rations

and meet their nutritional needs, the families mitigate these issues by seeking employment and

utilizing programs offered by non-governmental organizations that support livelihood options. I

will elaborate on the livelihood options later in this chapter but will focus on their employment options now.

Any other food materials that the refugees want to supplement their meals with, such as vegetables, sources of protein through meat or fish, or spices must be purchased with their own income at the market (see Figure 6.1.). The different sections of Mae La camp have thriving markets that offer many options, not only in the form of food but other products such as computer, electronics, books, clothes and toiletries. Food in this and many other contexts are symbolic of the status and power of the family units (Anderson, 2005; Counihan and Van Esterik, 2012). How do the refugees, whose mobility is severely limited manage to purchase these items to sustain their family and extended family units? The financial sources come from seeking temporary employment outside of the camp, employment within the camp, and financial remittances from family members who have resettled abroad.

Although the refugees are not legally entitled to leave or seek employment outside of the camp, many choose to participate in temporary work in the surrounding Thai villages and towns. Both men and women are picked up each day by their employers and are returned to the camp at dusk. There are also employment opportunities within the camp such as working with international and non-governmental organizations as interpreters, community trainers, in the hospitals and as teachers. Some are hired to help manage the population in the camp by serving as security guards and assisting with the distribution of food and material aid. Families will raise livestock that they can utilize as a protein source or as a resource for selling within the camp to earn money. Some non-governmental organizations like KWO and the "women's organization" implement income-generation programs that provide wages to create handicrafts that are then

sold in the local and international markets. Other camp inhabitants also receive financial remittances from family members who have resettled abroad or risk living in Thailand outside of the camp. If they do choose to work as day workers outside of the camp, it comes at a cost of losing their access to food-aid, as *Marla* has experienced. When asked how she accesses her food she described her current situation (October, 29, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

> Marla: But, we spend our income. Some people's situations have improved while they are living in the camp. Some close friends went to third country but we have to establish our life in the camp because we're newly registered. Income and jobs are dependent on our abilities. We must try to live even if it's difficult. We did not receive ration before and we had nothing to eat. Other people got ration and they went and took it. We also tried to get it.
>
> Ei Phyu: You mean food from the UN?
>
> Marla: We are registered. But, they cut the provision because we went outside to get work. I have two nephews in my family. Their parents sent them to attend the school here and no one gets ration. Because of them, we have to try everyday because they do not get a ration and there is no support. We face difficulties. (Oct, 29, 2010)

It's not just proper health and nutrition that is at stake here but obtaining clean and safe drinking water is a similar challenge. When *Tina* reflects on the beginning of her time at the camp, the inability to access an integral component for survival, water, placed a great deal of pressure on her family (November 19, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

> The first time I arrived, the children were so young and there were instances of soldiers shooting guns that I dare not watch. I had no house also. It was in Thingyan (hot season) period, it's hot. No water. I could not find water. I climbed to the mountain to get water and I could not climb. I asked others but I did not get a favour. I have to sacrifice and even still they look at me.

She was not also struggling with the new reality and conditions but also feelings of social isolation. Her lack of informal support at this time created a great deal of stress that she can still recall to this day. Refugees thus negotiate their realities to sustain adequate sources of food but it remains a perplexing question as to why they are required to do so in the first place, particularly when under UNHCR protection. To further explore this complicated situation involves considering its different facets. The displacement from Burma has been occurring for over twenty years, continues to this day and the political conflicts shows no signs of being swiftly resolved in the near future in spite of recent political reforms. This means that refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border have a system in place for their continued order and management. There are critics who feel that aid can cause problems of dependence if groups are not given meaningful ways to develop and utilize their skills. However, in the case of Mae La camp, refugees are not provided with legal recognition and they have limited options to earn an income. The basic food items offered are for basic survival so it is not surprising that the populations will investigate and utilize other options to go beyond this level of subsistence. For those who do not wish to return to Burma or resettle in another country, their lives at the camp are their present realities and they must negotiate to create a place for themselves. Even if they have a genuine wish to move on to different circumstances, it's still dependent on other factors such as permission, ability and safety. The food ration system is constructed to meet the needs of temporary refugees, however this political situation creates more long term refugees whose conditions may require lengthy and involved resolutions. With this time also comes the further development of homesteads and attachment to life in Thailand. Along with shelter, food is an integral component of being able to thrive and perform the necessary functions for health and

wellness. With hunger comes emotional stressors that can destabilize the relationships within the home and undermine hopes for the future.

These issues of access and distribution of food go beyond questions of scarcity and are also related to people trying to live a life of purpose and dignity. There are also concerns about quality. As reported by *Nancy*, the material that is donated is not always palatable: "We eat hard rice. Sometimes they give us rice that is so bad I even could not eat it. But, I tried to eat it" (October 14, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). Many refugees I spoke to conveyed that the food aid is not enough and they have to look at other means. These examples demonstrate how food can be utilized as a mode of resistance by different groups (de Certeau, 1998) through their refusal to accept the lowest common denominator. Their palates simply demand it. The TBBC who manages the distribution is also under pressure to continue their work with reductions in funding resources. As a result of financial strains, the rise in commodity prices and currency exchange rates working against them, the TBBC has been required to reduce the amount of rations they provide and implemented this in 2011:

> A genuine partnership requires a lot of work. For example, here we are with these ration reductions. In the first week of November [2010] we got told that we were losing a million Euros from one particular donor, we had to make a decision as to how quickly that was to be implemented. The longer we took to implement it, and the longer we took to sit down with refugees and refugee committees and discuss the implications of this and outcomes of the nutritional survey with their recommendations saying we've got to change our reporting system or improve our food basket in terms of nutrition, this will have big implications in the camp. The longer we take to sit down and work this out and with partnership with refugees, the larger the cuts will have to be...so we made the hard decision to cut in January [2011]. (Key informant at TBBC, January 31, 2011; male; Mae Sot, Thailand)

When I spoke to a refugee in February of 2011 she confirmed that they now receive 13 g of rice versus the former 14 g and that TBBC is not offering as much beans as a source of protein, which puts further pressure on the families. TBBC has also been urged by their donors to change the types of foods that they offer to meet nutritional standards, which means that they may be required to give less chili paste and more protein in the form of split-pea beans. Chili paste is an integral part of Karen cuisine and culture and the camp population will feel the emotional impact of the change in diet. With these changes in the amount of food aid, it is clear that the strategies that the population utilize to mitigate these nutritional pressures will be further strained and tested. These setbacks and the strategies that follow go deeper than a relationship between an aid provider and a community receiving and utilizing the resources. The refugees are utilizing their present reality of seeking protection with limited freedoms in nuanced ways that negotiate systems by providing feedback on the types of food they wish to eat, like chili paste, and their own power by supplementing their diet with meat and vegetables.

In the Canadian context the search for the familiar and defining the new is not lost on the respondents. *Sai* (September 13, 2011; Toronto, Canada) complains that he generally finds Karen food to be bland and in his words is "monotone." He laughs when he tells me this and says that he eats it anyways, with rice as a staple and soup on the side. When he lived in the camp he reflects on how members of the community ate all types of vegetables, "anything with green leaves," along with the more common betel, gourd and morning glory. Even if they were defined by others as inedible they still found them to be delicious. Now he mainly enjoys curries and stews and the occasional chili salad. He is able to recreate all of these dishes because he resides in the metropolitan city of Toronto where Chinese grocery stores are no longer just found

hidden in the ethnic enclaves. He is impressed with their ubiquity and knowledge: "they must have good outreach or business researchers. If I wanted to open a shop in Toronto I would not be able to compete with them" (September 13, 2011; Toronto, Canada). At the time of the interview they had recently started selling betel leaves along with the bamboo. Members of the Karen community in Thunder Bay similarly frequent their local Chinese market to gather their ingredients, though they have to rely on public transportation, their own vehicles or car pool to navigate the more urban sprawl in the city. The accessibility of the items not only relies on its presence but also in its affordability for the market that they are serving. *Sai* elaborates that compared to at the border "you pay $4 for 20 pieces canned food here. In Thailand, I see people cross border with 1000s [food] on their back and they get $3 for entire bundle." Similarly, the comfort of creating and consuming cultural dishes is not lost on *Kidd* (September 12, 2011) who states that she was surprised at the social acceptance of different cuisines: "I thought that I would have to eat bread and cheese but I am amazed that I can find everything in Chinatown. You can find vegetables and even fish paste that's very similar to the ones from Southeast Asia." She mainly attributes her father's ingenuity with agricultural practices and the ability to cook birds and pythons to her varied palate at the camp. She recalls searching for plants in the forest to compliment soups and other dishes and she knows that not everyone was as lucky. One of the more surprising finds in her life in Canada is that similar vegetation can be found in more rural areas of Ontario. She laughs and says that members of the Karen community are known to stop the car by the side of the highway on a trip to collect plants to pickle on the weekends.

These stories serve to remind us of the visceral politics (Probyn, 2001) that informs the joy and relief of eating dishes from 'back home.' Like Proust's madeleine evoked memories of

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his childhood, those exiled long for engagement with their past and food is often the most accessible medium to achieve these objectives. Through their substitutions and more hybrid forms of 'traditional' cuisine, they firmly place these practices firmly in their present for further consideration as new immigrants defining their home.

SOCIAL: FOOD AS A WAY TO CREATE 'HOME'

As I have argued, food plays a central role in the lives of many refugees since they invest a great deal of time in the collection, preparation and consumption of food. I will now elaborate on how food can also help create a sense of 'home' in the refugee camp in both emotional and material ways.

When examining the actual contents of the meals, the refugees often eat rice with chili paste on a daily basis while curries are considered to be more special. The expensive nature of cooking curries is associated with having to use oil, which they receive a limited amount of in their food rations, and they have to buy additional items such as vegetables, meat, fish or spices. Chili paste and rice, on the other hand, are a part of the basic food aid package that they receive from TBBC. The frequency with which families are able to eat curries also varies and can indicate the amount of income that they have access to. Some families are only able to eat fish or chicken curries on holidays such as Christmas, Karen New Year, or Karen Martyr's Day, while others eat it once or twice a week. When interviewing a member of TBBC that distributes the food rations, he indicates that there have been several consultations with community members to ask what types of food they desire and chili paste and rice were the two most essential items they wished for. Therefore, the organization realizes the importance of food in helping create a sense

of 'home' for individuals while they reside in the camps waiting for political stability in Burma or the chance to create a life in a safe-third country. When asked what type of food they had in their former lives, some relate how chili paste and rice was a large part of their diet but was often supplemented by their own crops. The continuity of agricultural practices from their former lives is an ever-present desire within the population since farming is an integral component of Karen culture (Dudley, 2010) and was a constant during their time in Burma.

The frequency with which people in the community share food is important because these meals provide the opportunities to celebrate occasions, perform traditions, conduct social transactions and determine who is included in the social network (Harris, 1987; Goody, 1982; Douglas, 1984). These rituals are a form of gift-giving and there are a multitude of negotiations and expectations that are a part of this complex social ritual that cannot be easily portrayed as separate from the will of individuals. The uncertainty that is present in these social relations stems from the fact that the players can control the tempo at which the exchanges take place, which in turn alters the meanings that are made from the practices (Bourdieu, 1977). This tempo refers to the frequency with which these shared meals take place and the expectations for a return of the same level of care and devotion in the future. For example, extended family members may meet several times a week and pool their resources for consumption. Other, more distant connections may be maintained with occasional meals or on holidays. Most families only eat a morning and evening meal each day and may not be able to share a meal together because of varying schedules. Many of the husbands seek work outside the camp and therefore have different schedules from their children who attend school or their wives who work within the camp or at home. When asked if this is different from their former lives in the Karen State,

many respondents relate how their lives used to be based around their homestead and farm and therefore it was easier to coordinate times to meet and eat together with immediate and extended family members. They could eat, experience togetherness and still fulfill their responsibilities. This reduction in the amount of family time requires households to adapt to these new realities and alter expectations of each other while still finding moments for intimacy. A sense of home often relies on this type of rapport to be continually sustained.

Other venues still encourage community building. In the Karen State, worshipping at the church and taking part in the activities offered the most opportunities for them to interact and build relationships with their neighbours. In Mae La camp, places of faith serve a similar role with community members joining with each other to celebrate religious holidays by cooking together and sharing meals. Activities such as Sunday bible study and other extracurricular activities offer refugees the chance to build networks. Especially during December leading up to Christmas Day, many homes will host 'sweet December' parties where friends and family members gather to share food and stories while waiting till midnight to celebrate and build excitement for Christmas. Families will take turns hosting the different parties and many have the chance to attend several 'sweet December' parties throughout the holiday season. Therefore, although the chance to gather as a family may not be as feasible and is more difficult in the camp environment, more collective means of sharing food and creating bonds still exist.

In connection with the Karen refugees missing the ability to supplement their diet with their own crops, they also long to take part in agricultural practices. Mae La camp has over 40,000 inhabitants and the plots of land have very limited space to grow crops. Gaining land outside of the camp boundaries is also a challenge since the permission must be granted from the

Thai government. Even if such areas were available for cultivation, the mobility of the refugees

is limited and there are questions of how they would be able to access and care for the crops on a

regular basis. To mitigate these issues, TBBC does have a program in place that offers seeds and

material support to families who have the space and the desire to grow crops in the area within

their homestead. Any refugee registered in the camp is able to approach TBBC to request the

materials and are able to grow vegetables to supplement their diet. Many families will also sell

remaining vegetables at the market to gain income. Vulnerable people, such as those with

physical disabilities or health issues, are also served by the Catholic Office for Emergency Relief

and Refugees or COERR who provide similar support to those who are not able to gain access to

food aid easily (Key informant from COERR, February 23, 2011; woman; Mae Sot, Thailand).

Participation in these livelihood practices on a smaller scale are alternative means to reconnect

with their past home and help sustain themselves in the present.

For those who choose to take up these opportunities, there are options beyond living on

the basic food aid or purchasing food items at the market, they are also able to grow some of

their own food. The number of refugees who are able to live beyond the basic food items vary

and those with the means to consume these curries and salads at varying frequencies depending

on their financial state. This practice also serves an affective role since memories of cultivation

loom large in their minds. Whether this is enough varies according to the individual. What is

important to witness are their attempts to make it be sufficient and to remember the times that the

outcomes exceed their expectations. Due to geographic proximity and similar climates, they are

be able to grow certain crops that were a large part of their diet in Burma such as morning glory,

cucumbers, cabbage and tomatoes, allowing them to create dishes beyond those possible with the

basic food aid items. As *Nancy* states, the actual taste of food items vary across locations: "I had to grow vegetables when I lived in Burma. There is only one thing that we disliked and it was the soldiers. It's better to eat vegetables from Burma" (October 14, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). Not only is her fondness for her former home gleaned from this statement but also her differentiation when it comes to the satisfaction that the food delivers. This is something that she cannot recapture easily, no matter the amount of time she devotes to living in the camp or the price she pays for the same vegetables at the market. There are some things that are lost with exile that cannot be reinstated in a new home.

While certain tastes and feelings are inevitably lost in the move to Canada, the importance of social bonds and obligations can gain in strength. Framed as a duty that Karen people feel honor bound to help one another, these responsibilities exist somewhere between burden and necessary joy. The most important holiday is Karen New Year and it is marked with gravitas and devotion. The pomp and circumstance is reflected in the food, which even *Sai* (September 11, 2011; Toronto, Canada) admits has greater flavour and appeal. It is common to eat sticky rice with young coconut, which *Kidd* (September 11, 2011; Toronto, Canada) notes requires a fair bit of investment in time to prepare, accompanied by fried noodle and grilled meat. Though according to *Sai*, you know that they are celebrating a holiday because of the beverages: juice, coffee and hot tea. He adds that coffee is more often than not for the guests because Karen people tend to favor the jasmine tea. These meals are communal but shared on different scales. Many take part in the annual New Year's celebration in January, which is a major event on the community calendar. The food is served as a potluck and each family within the community is given funding to create a dish to feed their family and a few more guests. They

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will also host smaller parties for friends that they have closer ties with. In both cases, the rituals are the means to reflect their history, lives and Karen identity. Having attended one of these events in January of 2012 in Toronto, I marveled at how all of the guests felt so welcomed and the community members seemed at ease. My husband noted that even the teenagers who were not active participants in the performance of cultural dances or speeches sat in the very last row. I wondered if they were bored. He said, it doesn't matter, they still came to politely watch the festivities.

Perhaps that is what migration and resettlement can mean: to carefully draw in and out of the inner circles. Some may choose to stay closer while others seek to lead a different life. But the strength is in the knowledge that there is always a place to return to and that in all likelihood, a table will be set for you as well.

SYMBOLIC: FOOD RELATED TO WOMEN AND THE MANAGEMENT OF REFUGEES

In both the food stories I've just discussed: the system of food aid distribution that refugees in Mae La camp utilize and negotiate with, and food in its role of creating a sense of 'home' for displaced persons through the social act of sharing meals, there is one constant—the labour of women. The reality of being a refugee woman living on the border requires grappling with the structural system in place to manage their displacement and the ways that can constrain their access to food and influence the meanings they associate with food and place.

Women devote a significant portion of their daily life to the collection and preparation of food and food plays a large role in creating a sense of belonging (Bell and Valentine, 1997; Law,

2001). Female members of the household are often assigned the responsibility of managing the household while men are in charge of building the house, maintaining the viability of the structure and collecting the materials to make any changes to the home. These expectations are elaborated on by *Diana*: "For women, they cook, they supply the food to the chickens and pig. And then, they're weaving and sewing when they have the time. For the men, they have outside duties or agriculture. They perform their duties" (November 12, 2010; Mae La, Thailand).   The household responsibilities that women take charge of involves ensuring the welfare of the family members by providing food, caring for the children and cleaning the homestead. Many of the women indicate that their daily schedules involve waking up each morning, prepping the morning meal for the family before work and school and then spending their days waiting to get food aid, gathering feed for animals if they are rearing livestock and working on their weaving. The preparation of the actual meal is also a labour-intensive process where they have to heat the charcoal, boil water for the rice, cook the meat or vegetables or just season the rice with chili paste.

Much of their desire for more types of food exists relationally to what precisely is available for them. Rice and chili paste can serve as a form of comfort since they had previously eaten it in their village but alternative tastes and appetites exist. As *Rachel* articulates, she would choose to eat something else if her economic status allowed it (October 14, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

> Rachel: We are looking to farm. We have to eat fish paste and chili everyday. We have to eat like that because we have no money. I would like to eat everything.

> Ei Phyu: How long does it take you to find vegetables in the forest?

Rachel: We go up the side of the mountain and we find food. It takes a day.

Ei Phyu: What did you eat when you were growing up?

Rachel: Pumpkins, morning glory, lady fingers. There is a bitter eggplant too but it's a bit bitter.

Ei Phyu: It's a small one right?

Rachel: Yes, it has a spine.

Similar to *Rachel'*s earlier experience, many residents articulated that when they lived in the Karen State, the surrounding forest and jungle were great sources of vegetables and herbs. Certain roots also served as a source of feed for the livestock on the farm (see Figure 6.2.). Although they wish to perform these types of livelihoods now, when they live in Mae La camp, they are prohibited from gathering food in the surrounding forest by the Thai Royal government for two reasons: 1) they are not legally entitled to leave the camp boundaries and 2) the forest is considered to be conservation area. If they are found gathering materials in these areas, they risk being arrested, fined or deported. Some still take on this risk to get food for themselves and their farms while others will go and utilize bamboo, wood and leaves from the jungle to build and maintain their homes.

Their desires range from certain types of vegetables to curries but it's clear that both options require some effort and commitment to acquire. Firstly, the vegetables are for sale in the market but are inaccessible to many. Just because there is a developed infrastructure for the exchange of goods and capital, through competition and greater resources entering the camp, the prices are on the rise. For *Mar*, she considers her options when shopping for her family (October 29, 2010; Mae La, Thailand:

We have to buy everything, even jackfruit. We didn't need to buy food to eat like fruits, jaggery and sugar cane when we lived in Burma. Sometimes when we would like to eat there are lots of people selling. There are Karen, Muslim, Thai. It's become more expensive now. We could not buy with one Baht. At least 5 Baht for each vegetable. The cheapest is catfish.

Her situation is fluid and depending on the month she is able to provide more nourishment for her family compared to others. Although I do not know the average income of the inhabitants, from listening to the respondents, the majority of the people cannot obtain all that they want to eat in a month and others will occasionally be able to cook dishes they wish for. In *Mia*'s case, she wants to eat various dishes but most of her income is saved for her husband's chronic health condition: "It's expensive. 40 Baht for sturgeon and 60 Baht for chicken for a kilo. I need to save money for when my husband's sick. Sometimes we just have 100 Baht or 200 Baht left" (November 19, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). As noted, they use the surrounding region to compensate for what is missing in their diet and nutrition, but this too shifts with the seasons as *Kate* describes: "There are lots of vegetables in the rainy season but it's difficult to find in the summer. Nothing. There is nothing. That's why, we just eat fish paste" (October, 14, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). The summer months are the most difficult because of the severe temperatures and the already arduous task of searching in the forest is often given up.

An individual's well-being within the camp is very much contingent on gender. Gender representation within the organizations at Mae La vary, with women and men being fairly equally represented within non-governmental organizations and in some institutions such as schools and hospitals. Although there are still exceptions with primary schools having more female teachers, or an NGO like Solidarities that mediates the health and hygiene issues in the

camp having more male employees. There is however gender disparity in the realm of governance, with the political camp office having more men serving as section leaders. The questions to ask then are, where are the women who are not performing such roles and what are they focusing their time and energy on? Also, for those who have access to these more vocal and visible positions, what backgrounds, advantages and skills did they have to obtain them?

Most of the women I interviewed focused on maintaining the well-being of their families and households, but knowing more of their lives and the lengthy tasks they often have to perform, I may well not have been able to meet or hear their stories if I had not worked for a 'women's' organization. Many scholars have already reiterated why these narratives are significant and can provide greater understanding on how one negotiates with all facets of one's identity. Being a woman and a migrant are not mutually exclusive (Enloe, 1993; Szczepanikova, 2010; Al-Sharmani, 2010; Giles and Hyndman, 2011). Women play a significant role in the international labour regime where they are filling gaps in Western nations in the sex-industry, as agricultural labourers and caregivers (IOM, 2005). Both the management of migrant and refugee populations often call forth a normative categorization of the vulnerability of women to reinforce problematic notions of gender, race and class (Fitzgerald, 2011; Keenan, 2011). While still recognizing the potential for gendered violence (Giles, 2013) in the camp setting, overemphasis of the weakened positioning of displaced individuals can be disempowering and essentialist. It is evident that social transactions influence how issues of mobility and immobility impact the lives of men and women in both divergent and comparable ways.

Several of the respondents are involved in the "women's organization's" income-generation program, which offers safe and flexible employment for women to create handicrafts

that are sold in the domestic and international markets. They indicate that they enjoy the fact

that they can work from home which allows them to tend to their domestic responsibilities while

still earning an income to buy food and materials for their families and to support their children's

education. There are also other employment opportunities within the camp and non-

governmental organizations have put programs in place to encourage women to participate in

these activities. Within the organizations that offer support within the camp, such as the schools

and hospitals, there are a fair number of women teachers and health-care professionals

employed. However, when it comes to more structural organizations such as the security

personnel and food distribution, there is less representation of women. A member of TBBC who

is responsible for the food distribution stated that they are specifically trying to recruit more

women not only to promote gender equality but to work with the many women who represent

their households and line up for the food provisions each day. Women are also encouraged to

take part in the local governance body of the camp called the camp council, which elects

representatives from among the Mae La population, but the positions are mainly held by men.

Clearly, there should be more employment opportunities for women that allow them to

earn an income to support their families in a safe environment where they are not putting

themselves at risk with lack of legal status. They require these wages to help supplement their

nutritional state and to support the education of their children. The residents negotiate an

environment where it is difficult to sustain themselves with the basic rations, have limited space

to grow their own crops and it is illegal to utilize the resources in the surrounding forest. All of

these factors relate to how they are contained and managed within space. *Habitus* as Bourdieu

argues, is a pervasive aspect of social interactions because it guides the actions of the different

players involved: "If agents are possessed by their *habitus* more than they possess it, this is because it acts within them as the organizing principle of their actions, and because this *modus operandi* informing all thought and action (including thought of action) reveals itself only in the *opus operatum* (1977: 18). The concept of "need" is a pervasive aspect of the social context within a refugee camp but nuances in class and practice are present as well. The actions of the players within this social field are performed through the circles within which they operate. But the longing for the "frills" are still there, whether it's in the form of soda or providing pocket money for their children, they compare and contrast their lives to others and question if and when they measure up (see Figure 6.3.).

Although I state that they are confined within space, the boundaries are still porous and there is a continuing influx and out-flux of people. Some women refugees leave each day with companies that offer them wages for working in the surrounding area, they carefully utilize the materials in the jungles around the camp and pay for family members to come visit or to begin residing in the camp. There is also a flow of funds from relatives living abroad who offer financial support to those still living within the camp. Although the boundaries are more flexible, it is not to say that refugees have the freedom to have full control over their mobility and the management of resources. These opportunities, whether it's in the form of employment, agricultural support or gender equality programs, do offer the chance to live a productive life of purpose even within a structural system where there are limits to their rights and freedoms. The women are managing these realities associated with living along the border by working within and outside of the rules and regulations that are set out for them and sustaining their families in nuanced ways that complicate the assumptions of the refugee camp hosting a population relying

solely on humanitarian aid and waiting for resolutions to conflicts around them. Many instead are utilizing their network to mitigate current realities and looking forward to greater opportunities in the future.

If these opportunities do lie abroad, the cultural constraints don't simply vanish with the new surroundings. In the Canadian context I reference the respondent *Sai* a great deal because not only is he an involved and well-respected community leader, but also a very expressive and open person. This means that when I sat down with him to hear his stories, he articulated his fears and regrets, along with the positive aspects of his life. His enthusiasm and optimism is clearly not meant to demonstrate the experience of all or even the majority of Karen community members who have resettled in Canada, most social scientists who conduct qualitative research would never dare to make such an assertion. But he is present a great deal in this dissertation because he was willing to show a part of himself that was deeply personal, that other respondents in Canada were more reluctant. *Sai* states that the social expectation for women to fulfill the role of the docile nurturer has lessened in the past decade, but "you can't say that Karen women are like Canadian women" a statement I'll elaborate on in chapter 7. The more open gender roles within the community exist because community members are more mindful of feminist political frames and they don't have to "just stay at home to cook, clean and be mothers" (September 13, 2011; Toronto, Canada). Even with the right to do more, chores and the necessities for social reproduction still exist. Having to complete tasks within the home is a part of most of our realities. Meals still need to be made and families still share them together when work schedules permit. In many cases this ritual of eating dishes grounded by their cultural heritage is an opportunity to cope and gain strength. The duties just seem to be shared. Though I am not

aware of the exact nature of the division of labour, which I'm sure is nuanced for each family and their background, there does seem to be an openness to more flexible gender roles and relations in Canada. ***Kidd*** (September 12, 2011) is performing her own politics in her community through the education she received abroad, the internship in Ottawa at Citizenship and Immigration Canada and all of the years she has lived abroad. She leverages all of this against her role as a mother and financial provider for her family. Clearly, the social constraints are more flexible with both time and credentials, but women with different histories are also carving out their own meanings in this new place. They are forming their version of the 'Canadian' woman with all that intersectionality of race, gender, religion and class allows.

CONCLUSION

Food plays a significant role in the lives of Karen refugees living within Mae La camp whether it is through how they manage within the food aid system, how creating certain dishes can help to create a sense of home and the ways that the negotiations themselves are influenced by the larger structural system in place that manages their displacement in space. The importance of food to the Karen sense of home continues in Canada through their desire to continue eating their cuisine and the role that these dishes play in social gatherings that strive to strengthen their sense of solidarity.

Basic food aid is distributed by TBBC and comes in the form of rice, oil, beans, salt, sugar, flour and charcoal. In order to supplement this diet with nutritional items such as vegetables and protein, many refugees will take on employment within and outside of the camp

to earn an income. This income allows them to purchase these items at the markets in the camp and enables them to create different curries to be eaten on special occasions or at least once a week. Because they must purchase expensive items such as meat, vegetables, oil and spices to create these dishes, the frequency with which they are able to eat these dishes depends on their financial state. This demonstrates the forms of social differentiation that occur at the camp through their access to both the amount, quality and types of food.

Their two daily meals, which are eaten in the morning and evening, mostly consist of rice and chili paste which are considered staple food items in their diet. When recalling their former lives in the Karen State, the participants mostly missed the ability to utilize their own crops for the different dishes. Although they can purchase morning glory, cucumbers, tomatoes and long beans to recreate these dishes in the camp, it requires financial resources to be able to purchase these items in the market. They are also unable to collect food materials from the surrounding forest because they lack legal status outside of the camp and the forests are considered to be conservation areas. Some do choose to work with the TBBC to grow vegetables around their homestead to help supplement their meals and sell the remaining vegetables for profit. There are some markers of identity that are inevitably lost through displacement, such as the fulfillment of being able to practice their livelihood regularly and with constraints in space. Emotionally, food eaten in exile from the Karen State may never quite taste the same or bring forth a sense of complete contentment. Clearly, the role that food plays in our lives are very much dependent on context.

Can this type of food help create a sense of being settled in the camp while they wait to return to Burma or to make a life in a safe-third country? With regard to this case, the political

conflict in Burma has been ongoing for many years and it may take many more years for a sense

of stability to be established. Many of the inhabitants have been living in the camp for over

twenty years and have worked to sustain themselves in the situation and to also live a life of

purpose even with the lack of freedom. These issues of how the refugees manage within the

food aid system, how they challenge these conditions by taking on employment within the camp

or illegal temporary work outside of the camp, or by participating in small livelihood programs

run by non-governmental organizations are linked to their limited mobility. Because they are not

recognized as refugees in Thailand, they are unable to easily mitigate their lack of food source

and must look for nuanced strategies that may require them to put themselves in risk of arrest or

deportation. However, they do take on these challenges and work towards the creation of a life

in conditions that would be impossible for some and work hard to create a place in a highly

securitized area that is supposed to be considered to be rootless and temporary.

　　　　This resilience is carried forth when they are resettled abroad. Though their legal status

may now be more grounded and determined, finding a place for oneself within exile continues.

Food still plays a central role in their new negotiations in North America through its use in social

transactions and as a grounding facet of cultural identity. Though I am not suggesting that the

presence of Chinese food stores solves all issues of desire and longing that still exists for one's

homeland, I do assert that it is a start. There is also the potential to farm some of these crops and

the Karen community in Ottawa has taken on this opportunity. Being able to consume and buy

vegetables and spices to create these dishes can provide a great deal of comfort and stability in a

time with other aspects of their lives are more in flux. Though the practice of eating may seem

banal, because truly what is more obvious than the need to sustain one's self, I suggest that the

form of sustenance that is provided can be of great emotional depth. Sure, tensions may exist

due to differences in financial capital, status or never being able to quite capture the taste of

"home," but just because a project remains unfinished does not mean that it is not significant and

in the end, fulfilling.

Figure 6.1. A variety of vegetables are available at the market such as gourd, long beans, cucumbers and herbs.

Figure 6.2. Some families raise livestock on their assigned area of land.

Figure 6.3. A store selling snacks, beverages and vegetables.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

POSITIONING

The theme of gender relations is ever-present in my empirical findings on the material cultures and relationship to food of Karen refugees but this chapter will explicitly draw out the complexities through the exploration of transnational meanings, violence and gender roles. The analysis is a fitting end to this document since it brings together many of the facets of this project: trauma, access, endurance and new forms of relating to one another. My closing words for this dissertation will engage with a subject matter that aligns closely with both my values and political perspective. The concept of gender equality has become engrained so closely with what I stand for and promote that I forget that I acquired these ideologies through educational training and life experience. I continually reflect on how these perspectives have been changed at various life phases when I negotiated my version of femininity, the outcomes it produced and the lessons it taught. Mostly though, it makes me respect my mother's version of womanhood and those of my grandmothers, aunts, cousins and friends and how all these approaches are equal in value and strength. The gender politics of home are much more salient now that I am a mother and realize how negotiating the various responsibilities brings forth fulfillment and joy, along with guilt and pressure. It also makes me mindful of my mother's experience of raising a child in a context that was so much more isolating than the one she was born into, where siblings and extended family members all contribute to the well-being of a child. I think of her coming to terms with that while still trying to protect her marriage and have a career in North America. All of this occurred

within the home, mostly unseen by others but felt but us. But they all played a role in the way we interacted with the social world and still do. It is through these intersections, between the public and private that the gendered meanings of home, and their stories, get told.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation has addressed the mundane rhythms of everyday life. They are the keystones of my argument because these ordinary conditions are precisely what allows for recovery and solace in extraordinary circumstances. I write of violence, loss, relationships and rights of my respondents but they are the ones who lived through them. I just try to do their stories justice. The analysis is also influenced by my own complicated negotiations with home and personal history with Burma. As with many lives, the ties are messy and do not disappear with migration. We are forever connected to those nations and their politics through the joy, struggles and contentment of family members.

It's this heap of meanings that displaced persons sort through, especially when they are expected to make a name and a place for themselves in North America; when they enter the fold and try to adapt. Often the concept of being nowhere is associated with lack because individuals are continually encouraged to end up somewhere. Their performance of acculturation may even allow them to "pass" as someone who holds the citizenship through birthright and not naturalization. But sometimes, even they want to belong, laws and people will make it as difficult as possible. There are limits to the empathy and the state that refugees find themselves in is not meant to be permanent. So often, they do end up in a sense 'nowhere' and live next to a

borderline for over twenty years without legal status or citizenship. This is when your mobility can be greatly hindered.

Though immobility may seem like all is at a standstill, existence is dynamic because everyday life itself is productive. Most immigrants will tell you that there is a price to pay for freedom, whatever form that freedom takes, be it political, economic, cultural. The costs accumulate and you pay for them through hard work, estrangement from loved ones or exile from a country. But there is a flow to these days through new friends who become your family and a community that becomes a second home. That is why I'm compelled to study the negotiations that exist beyond the veneer of what a displaced person's existence consists of. It's these informal interactions on a smaller scale that offer insight into how individuals cultivate their version of belonging without completely losing themselves in the process. Being in a liminal state of in-between can help you create a 'home' that you can live with.

OBJECTIVE

This concluding chapter is interested in how subjectivities and gender relations are altered throughout displacement since these transformations inform how food, material cultures and other power dynamics help construct home. Being fully embedded as agents within the power negotiations that take place in the social context of the camp and in a North American cultural fabric, it is clear that context will influence interactions within the domestic sphere. The issues, such as the division of labour, cultural practices, violence and familial relationships all impact the ways that the home is created and destabilized. The following stories relate the

experiences of men and women refugees within the multi-scalar home and how gender roles are renegotiated at different periods of their migratory process. I will explore how transnational meanings, violence and gender relations impact the conceptualization of home and then conclude with the theoretical and policy implications of my empirical findings.

GENDER AND TRANSNATIONALISM

It was difficult for **Dawa** to remember the exact dates and years but she knows that she lived in many other encampments before settling in Mae La. She was born in Tee War Klu village in Burma but fled to Thailand with her parents when she was two years old. Being so young, she doesn't remember the steps her family took to leave but has tried to connect the fragments that her parents have told her to recount her story. They said that she was born in Burma, but they dare not return or live in their former village, and that is why they live in a refugee camp now. In spite of this, she still believes that if there is peace, she would like to return to Burma to live in her 'home country,' a country, she admits she knows very little about. The home plays a central role in the formation of identity because it is the site where affective meanings of belonging are created, performed and then transformed, with these processes occurring at different scales. The home remains a contested site because of the relational way it comes into being and the gendered relationships that occur within the structural walls. A shelter can be a haven or a trap, a site of care or violence and in reality, goes beyond these dichotomies by offering a mixture of both positive and negative associations (Blunt, 2005; Rose, 1993). The complication and further theorization of the home-space has had many contributors, including

post-colonial writers who have brought attention to the role of social reproduction within the domestic sphere of reinforcing imperialist agendas and the central role that women played in nationalist campaigns that helped power independence movements (Chakrabarty, 2000; Chatterjee 1993). The work of scholars within the critical race fields have suggested that other identities also influence home-politics such as class, sexuality and racialization that can make the home a place of compassion and relative freedom (hooks, 1990). Like the meaning of home can extend beyond the scale of the individual household, transnational ties can also instigate the two fold phenomenon of having both a material and imaginative home that extends beyond national borders (Blunt, 2005), as demonstrated by *Dawa's* case. She is pulled to different sites through her imagination and socially mediated memory. She cannot recall any concrete experiences with the Karen State but this does not limit her from imagining, perhaps idealistically, that it must be the place where she belongs. These transnational ties are not monolithic by any means and can be conceptualized as 'roots', or the hope of returning to a homeland, or 'routes', the continued project of creating a sense of belonging within flows of movement (Goldring and Krishnamurti, 2007).

Defining home in terms of attachment to several places is common when informants are trying to determine where they feel the greatest sense of affinity and inclusion. This process is detailed so articulately by *Teresa* who is currently living in Toronto after spending many years at the Thai-Burma border (October 5, 2011; Toronto, Canada):

> I cannot define where it [home] is. I cannot live in Burma even though I'm was born there and it's a familiar culture, because of the political situation, the discrimination I don't feel that I belong there. At the same time in Thailand, I like it, I like to live in the refugee camp, gather with my community, work for them, I was really happy, it is not

home as well because I'm a refugee, I am not allowed to go outside of the camp easily. But living here, it is also four years already and I don't feel that I belong here even though you may be welcomed, people will treat you professionally, but it is at the same time, there is discrimination. Only with the Karen community I have a sense of belonging, but with other people I don't feel a sense of belonging.

Gaining a stable geographic location and access to the rights and privileges afforded in the North American context cannot solve all aspects of creating a place. The making of home still relies greatly on engagements with one's identity, social situation and past experiences.

GENDER AND VIOLENCE

The home can also be a tool of disempowerment by reinforcing notions that women are subordinate to men and to also prevent them from forming solidarities with other women. Additionally, the maintenance of these havens requires work, difficult labour that falls on women and without remuneration (McDowell, 2002; Brickell, 2013). These complex dimensions are what make the home political. When I spoke to **Dawa** (November 12, 2010; Mae La, Thailand) she was one of the most informed people about the gender programs that are offered at the camp which can help shed light on the different forms of power negotiations that are occurring within households. One of the organizations addressing gender issues within the camp is the Karen Women Organization (KWO) whose mandate is to empower women through skills training and employment programs. They have a strong presence in the camp and prior to shutting down due to security reasons, they were also offering education sessions for women across the border in Burma. One participant, **Lane** related how she was familiar with the organization even before living in Mae La (October 29, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

The place where I lived before was in the mountain side and there is a women's organization. The KWO branch from here went to give the training at the KWO branch there. It's once a year because it's not easy to reach this place. Sometimes KWO from here [Thailand] went to give the training there [Burma] and they changed the location and I missed the training. They had to stop because of security reasons.

Beyond giving women the opportunity to earn an income and improve their position in the community, KWO also operates a safe house that provides refuge to women who have experienced domestic violence and/or rape. While life at the camp can encourage supportive relationships within the home with spouses sharing the workload and blurring gender roles, which I will speak of later in this chapter, pressures can also result in dysfunctional and violent unions. There are opportunities for men to take part in gambling and to consume alcoholic beverages during their leisure time which in turn siphons away some of the financial resources from the household. Confrontations between spouses over these issues can result in women and children seeking protection at the women's shelter at the camp. Due to limited resources, the women cannot stay indefinitely at the safe house and many will return to their partners to reconcile and try to repair their relationships. With the help of community members some marriages do improve with time while for others, the cycle of violence and dysfunction continues.

While many of the participants were aware of the income-generation programs for women that some non-governmental organizations offer, issues of domestic violence or other gendered relations within the home were not discussed as openly. This can be attributed to the fact that such topics are often considered to be private matters that must be settled between the family unit and there is shame associated with such conflicts becoming more public. This was in

contrast to ***Dawa*** who knows that the safe house in the camp protects women who are victims of

domestic violence and children who have been raped. Surprised by her willingness to discuss

this social initiative and the sensitive matters associated with it, I asked her to elaborate on the

prevalence of violence within the home (November 19, 2010; Mae La, Thailand):

> Ei Phyu: Do you see any domestic violence in the camp?
>
> Dawa: How?
>
> Ei Phyu: For example, is the fighting or arguing with couples normal in the camp?
> Did it used to happen? Does it happen too much?
>
> Dawa: Yes, too much. If the husband is not at fault, the wife is and if wife has made
> no mistakes, the husband has made some. They were fighting because they are a couple.

I believe that her answer indicates that, in her opinion, it can be difficult to lay blame for the

complex nature of the conflicts that take place between couples, especially when factors such as

alcohol consumption can intensify the discord within the family. I do acknowledge that this is

my interpretation of ***Dawa's*** words and it's this interpretation that I'm basing my critique and

analysis on. Although I commend the open-minded nature of her viewpoint that recognizes that

domestic negotiations take on different forms, there is a danger in normalizing the occurrence of

brutality. Even after resettling in Canada, witnessing domestic violence in the camp is an

experience that still resonates in ***Teresa's*** mind (October 5, 2011; Toronto, Canada):

> Alcohol. There is no other recreation like movie theatre or library. We don't have that
> recreation there so most of men tend to end up taking alcohol, Karen wine, so they drink
> and they become addicted to it so this is the only way out. Men, when they have that
> alcohol, when they get back home some men they were abusive, they hit their wife...I
> think women are unfortunate compared to men, men are able to leave the house, the
> women they have to stay at home, take care of the kids and cook, wash the dish all those
> things, at the same time when their husband comes home they abuse them. Mainly

alcohol, sometimes gambling in the camp and they try to ask money from the wife. When the wife didn't give them money they treat them poorly.

A myriad of issues contribute to the dependence of alcohol in the camp. From unemployment, post-traumatic stress syndrome to other traumas, certain members of the community may rely on it as a way to cope. Addiction, if left untreated, is a serious problem that can put lives at risk and create disorder within the home. Clearly many are driven to destructive behavior because of stress and past traumas, but this does not mean that supports should not be further developed to address these societal repercussions.

Even with the presence of a shelter that is managed by the Karen Women Organization (KWO) for victims of domestic violence to seek solace, the provision of such assistance comes at a cost for the women and there are questions of sustainability. *Teresa* speaks of the social repercussions that many women face when wanting to challenge their current state (October 5, 2011; Toronto, Canada):

> Yeah the NGO try to help them, give them domestic violence education and the NGO try to reach out to women but in this country like Toronto it's a big city, you can have a secret shelter. But in the camp if they have the shelter, no you have to have 24 hour guard...if the women are there, sure, the husband will come and take them out and beat them in front of people so that it become very controversial inside the camp...if the women stay there it's against the husband so women dare not come to the shelter. It is really essential for the local people to work with the NGO to explain to them. Some of the NGO they came in with their own policy and their own ideology to go tell women their own standards but you cannot apply directly in this situation. Of course if women get help from that shelter and live there, probably when the time comes, maybe the husband won't allow her to come back at the same time they cannot stay in the shelter forever, shelter is only for temporary so where do they live?

There are no straightforward solutions to issues of domestic violence and even with the implementation of programs that try to prevent and treat such occurrences, these interventions

cannot always get at deeper societal causes within the community. But as *Teresa* infers, what do some of these women have to come home to?

GENDER ROLES

Within the home, the gendered relationships are mainly framed through the undertaking of masculinized and feminized roles that are embedded within the culture (Dudley, 2010) and contribute to the management of the homestead. Although many Karen men may take a more prominent role in the family, the gender relations cannot be easily defined as being patriarchal. One example is how in Thailand, Karen women own the land and inheritance practices deem that these holdings are passed down through the woman's mother. This helps to demonstrate the importance of women and their lineage. Similarly, many Karen households hold in high regard the maintenance of ethnic identity through the performance of traditional practices, which are very much gendered. Weaving as a handicraft has mainly been perfected by women within the household and most of the interviewees named this as an art-form that only women are able to take part in (see Figures 7.3-7.6.). Older members of the family pass down their talents through ritualistic sessions so that younger women are similarly able to create clothing, blankets and accessories. Wearing these woven products are a source of pride for members of the Karen community to display their ethnic identity, through design and colours, which can help to explain why the producers of these fashions are held in such high-esteem.

Concerning the domestic practices within the camp, the distinction between feminine and masculine jobs have become more complicated. These nuances are what drive feminist scholars

to explore the gendered power relations that take place within the physical structure of the home (McDowell, 2007; Brickell, 2013). The pressures associated with earning an income and the gendered power transactions that result similarly exist for the refugee populations at Mae La camp. Some of the men have employment within or outside of the camp and spend much of the day away from the home. Within the camp some men work with aid organizations, as part of the camp committee that is one of the political groups that manages the camp, or as teachers or healthcare providers. Employment outside of the camp is mainly in the form of temporary day work in the surrounding Thai villages. Other men do not have employment and therefore spend most of the day at home. With several tasks that need to be completed in the duration of a day, the gender roles can become blurred as illustrated by *Elaine's* statement: "For now men also do the washing...it's not the same [for every] person. Some don't understand and some don't know how to do it...as for me, whoever is free has to do it. I do it [housework] when I'm free and he has to do it when he's free" (October 14, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). Some men will assist with household duties by collecting water or undertaking certain tasks during the cooking process, which were once relegated mainly to women and children. They perform work that in the past was deemed undesirable and emasculating. Why this change? Is it because their new realities force the sharing of labour? Are the men actually trying to encourage more equitable gender relations? Are their politics changing or are they doing what they are told? These are questions without easy answers but regardless of the reasoning, these encounters provide the potential for new power dynamics and perhaps more equitable social relations. While the completion of household tasks can fall on both men and women, the responsibility of building and maintaining the structure of the home is assigned to the male members of the family. Whether they are

constructing a hut on a new plot of land, improving their current home or repairing the year's worth of damage from the elements, men collect, purchase and transport the materials that they must use.

Definitions of childhood are also destabilized in the camp setting when responsibilities of earning an income falls to some men at an early age. While many of the children do attend school, others will ask their sons to contribute to the household by assisting their mothers, as was the case in *Kate's* family: "Yes, my son was selling...he was just 6 years old and he sold fried onion. He would shout 'fried onion, fried onion' and [it was] very nice to listen to. He may not even understand what the fried onion is and what it provides us" (October 14, 2010; Mae La, Thailand). These practices bring forth many questions about parenting, care and the rights of the child. Gender and generational relationships are thus somewhat flexible in the camp environment and contingent on strategies taken on by families as a whole to survive their specific realities and life conditions.

When they have moved the Canada, the gender relations continue to evolve and are specific to family circumstances. For some families, the blurring of gender roles, with men helping out with domestic duties, may continue and have the potential for further development. Some families take on jobs that require irregular hours and this is why the household duties have to be shared with the members within the family. For other unions, the male members of the household have never taken on domestic duties, are unaware of how to perform them and this may not necessarily change when they are living in Canada. I asked *Sai*, a prominent community leader to reflect on the reconfiguration of gender roles during the various stages of their displacement (September 13, 2011; Toronto, Canada):

For women the time at the camp was a good transition for them. In Burma traditionally they are expected to be nurturers and docile. There are social expectations but in the last two decades there has been more empowerment. They don't just stay at home to cook, clean, and be mothers. When in Canada there are still conservative expectations but you have to frame women's rights; you can't say that Karen women are like Canadian women.

This statement, which I referred to briefly in Chapter 6 but quote in full now, offers insight into the intricate nature of gender relations within the Karen community. Although there have been more opportunities for women to adopt different roles, his last sentence illuminates how there can still be social and cultural factors that have the potential to constrain their aspirations.

Choosing to resettle elsewhere does not change the communal tactics used to ensure the well-being of the family. Perhaps these strategies become even more critical when they have to confront such challenges such as paying rent and living within their budgeted means. The financial well-being of the families depends on several members of the family keeping jobs, often with many youth working part-time jobs while completing high school and university. Not every family is so lucky and certain family members will remain at home during the day and rely on social assistance to support themselves. Like there were pressures on the family at the camp, there are similar stresses related to their financial state, lack of meaningful employment or feelings of alienation from living in a foreign culture. All of these factors can destabilize a home and shift the political terrain of the family.

ASSERTIONS

My research questions investigate (1) how Karen refugees develop a sense of 'home' across multiple sites of displacement and (2) how borders and boundaries at the Thai-Burma border and Canada shape place-making activities.

The displacement trajectories of my respondents, like others that have been studied before them (Malkki, 1992; Nolin, 2006), often contain phases of starts and stops. By being one of the longest protracted refugee situations in the world, the context can resemble lengthy periods of waiting (Hyndman and Giles, 2011). But within these temporal categories, lives are made and remade, people leave and come back. Through the negotiation of their immobility with temporary or precarious forms of movement, their participation in these flows destabilize the concept of home being rooted in place. It is through the management of the welfare, nutrition and acculturation and self-development of this refugee population, in the Thai and North American milieus, that the governance powers impact their creation of home. Within the context of limited freedoms, the informal practices of everyday lives and the gender relations shape the outcomes of their desire to belong.

APPROACH

The most valuable skill that I've acquired in getting to this stage of my doctoral program is the ability to think critically. In fact, it is this expectation to see beyond surface value and the status quo that often made me question my place or comfort in academia. But, I believe that this

is how rigorous doctoral training helps to maintain and further develop the field, by breaking down our own biases, checking our privilege and asking us to look again.

I've never been afraid to question. In fact, it's this need to assess if demands align with my values that has defined me as being 'impertinent' in more conservative Burmese circles. However, because of this scholarship I know better how to speak and write in a measured way.

This field is founded on critique. It's also based on the respect of various approaches to doing it. In the last stages of this course of writing I have finally incorporated myself in these attempts. Of course I'm trying to see and acknowledge all of the shortcomings and gaps. I'm just personally more interested in the 'good' and the simple pleasures that make life worth living. I want to know, well, what we do, and where do we go from here? That is what you've seen reflected in these chapters.

EMPIRICAL SUPPORT

I ground this thesis through my empirical observance of Karen material cultures and engagement with food. Their negotiation with political boundaries and gender relations and inform these practices.

The history of violence is played out most readily in the minds of the refugees when recounting the moment they crossed the Thai-Burma border or several other ones before landing in Canada. The actual crossing is ultimately physical where they fear getting 'caught' and in turn confine themselves in vehicles and hide their bodies from view. It's when they reach the other side that the struggles to support themselves begin and they strategize within the bureaucratic

system to be recognized and helped. With the border in close proximity, they speak of new

people who arrive each day, some of them familiar who bear news of their former villages. That

desire to return is something that remains and is reinstated constantly through the rules that keep

them within the camp's limits and how much of Thailand is closed to them without the proper

papers. The lived experience of the body in relation to this geopolitical context reminds us of the

different players at various scales that participate in the making of these demarcations through

their engagements.

The commitment, care and time that my respondents devoted to the structures and

interiors of the homes spoke of 1) the disconnect between service provision and the needs of the

residents 2) the central role that shelter provides in offering meaning and security during difficult

times. The materials of wood, bamboo and rope themselves are worn against the inclement

weather and time but they find the resources to repair and rebuild because the walls and steps are

the venue for their social reproduction and emotional ties. This does not shift in North America

where they contend more structural issues to secure housing and to own property as well. They

affix photographs of former lives and loved ones who are somewhere else. These examinations

speak to how making a home is much more than material, whether the material comes in the

form of building tools or social assistance. Without the means to also feel in place, that sense of

insecurity and trauma may never quite leave.

The past may hold trauma but can also produce joy. These pleasures are performed

through culinary engagements that produce stories, memories and the chance to relive what was

so lost. Though the ingredients may not be exactly so, the visceral reactions that they produce

allow them to remember, and for at least a short while, be there.

All these empirical accounts are framed within the larger theme of gender relations because the negotiations are continually embedded in the socially constructed meanings of what it is to be a woman or man, displaced at the Thai-Burma border or beginning anew in Canada. The categories of gender roles, relationships, domestic discord and economic gain are all interwoven in the social transformations that are produced through displacement and the limits to these alternative lives.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Associating mobility with the conceptualization of home may seem counterproductive since theoretically, and more generally in larger society, being rooted is an integral part of being home. Perhaps there is a sense of stability when individuals are firmly in place and it's this security that provides the time and space to belong. But when working with refugee populations, movement is often an inevitable part of their lives and histories since they crossed political borders because of persecution and rely on international laws for their protection. With the dynamic nature of conflict many of these populations do wait for some form of resolution and take on an existence that is both mobile and immobile at the same time.

It is within this context that I seek to study how home is built and shattered, made and reformed. Because no phenomenon exists outside of the social realm, I demonstrate the personal and political ways that these places are impacted structurally and emotionally. As active agents within this process, many of my respondents found a place for themselves within the bureaucratic regulations, sustenance programs, educational instruction and cultural practices.

Theoretically, I demonstrate how the home can be both formed and diminished within the flux of movement and immobility precisely because of everyday life practices. This contribution is timely since there are several scholars, many of whom I cite in this dissertation, engaging with the debates about where the conceptualization of home exactly stands. My intervention lies in being mindful of the affective associations that inform the transnational home but grounding it in the material ways that displaced populations negotiate their domestic realm. The practices of safeguarding the shelter and cooking food help to maintain the home precisely because the tasks become so engrained and almost benign in our existence. Repeatedly working through these daily acts can be part of a larger scheme to further delineate a home in one place though they may feel at home in multiple places. By not seeking the definitive answer as to whether they succeed in making a home for themselves, we get further in adding richness and nuance as to what a home exactly means. Through the banality of home repair, cooking and interaction with social players, the respondents do find a place to stay. By living, they show what is possible beyond how their existence is formally counted and managed.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

When managing the outcomes of conflict or displacement, the concept of survival is of utmost importance. This strategy is similarly true when trying to assist newcomers adapt to their new surroundings. From the offset, people must be fed and clothed and their health assessed and treated. Later children are enrolled in school and the job search begins to make one's existence more meaningful and sustainable. But what is required beyond making situations manageable to

encouraging lives that are resilient? Because with time the objectives will change and people inevitably become more interested in the things that make it livable; people seek and deserve contentment.

But how exactly do governing bodies, international organizations and settlement agencies go about encouraging these type of negotiations, negotiations that are inherently personal and on the terms of their clients? How do you make policy suggestions about a feeling that is abstract? Because in terms of programming, there is always room for improvement. Steps are already taken to prepare refugees prior to arrival, but there is only so much you can do to make them ready for the lived experiences required to acculturate since coming to terms with the new realities relies so heavily on the visceral. These negotiations, that are inherently tied to the emotional, are defined by Wood et al. (2011) to be "soft" infrastructure in their examination of the resettlement experiences of Karen refugees in Calgary. One such measure to mediate this gap, and to encourage the implementation of "soft" supports in settlement provision is to interview and document other Karen refugees who have resettled abroad. By asking the participants, in a documentary format, to relate their narratives in their own language and on their own terms, some of the struggles and optimism that result from such journeys will be showcased. Viewing this documentary can perhaps ease their minds but also ready them for some of the barriers that lie ahead.

I suggest that there are very material ways of promoting well-being but these victories on a smaller scale require strategies that address much larger issues. It's working towards an inclusive society where difference is valued and civilians strive to live respectfully. Steps are taken through programs that support the education of refugee youth and the professional

development of adults. Similarly at the camp, perhaps the first action is to recognize that these

individuals and livelihoods are not temporary. After this acknowledgement, existing programs

can work towards cultivating a sense of belonging and the refugees in turn will have some

semblance of stability on which to build their lives on. Re-evaluating the contents of the ration

packages to include a wider variety of food, further support of agricultural practices and greater

consideration of home repair needs are practical ways that will positively impact the Mae La

community.

I can understand how the concept of making individuals feel at home may be much lower

on the policy agenda than helping them in other ways. Of course it's more satisfying to see

tangible results. But what this project has illustrated is that beyond what can be measured, such

as language acquisition or job placement, is the equally salient and important process of making

them feel welcomed. There are actual outcomes to these projects too, they just might be a bit

more quiet and less obvious. It is only through these victories on a smaller scale that you can

encourage engagement and investment in their social welfare and the wellbeing of others.

Belonging goes a long way, after an especially long journey, to making a life that you imagined.

SHORTCOMINGS: NEXT TIME

As someone who entered the 'field' wanting to conduct research about 'home' it was

fairly disappointing to not have entered the homes of many respondents. Due to the requests of

the non-governmental organization who was helping me secure a camp past and the comfort of

the participants, I mainly relied on their words and description of the meanings of the home,

what they place within them and the interactions they enact. These narratives were all told within the organization's office, which at least was a place of comfort, a site where they regularly worked, weaved and gossiped. Though I conducted most of my interviews in Canada within their place of residence, my time there was limited and I gleaned the meanings from their stories and my observations to the best of my ability. I would improve on this shortcoming by volunteering with an organization that worked within the refugee camp daily and though my stay could never be beyond sunset, I would gain even richer results to analyze and write about.

Methodologically I would also try to have the same research assistant for all of the interviews conducted. Speaking to mostly women, the rapport I had with them become much more formalized when a man was asking the questions. Though he behaved professionally and is a well-respected member of their community, the laughter or words did not flow as easily after this change.

If I do continue my examination of the concept of 'home' I will strive to work with a community where I can conduct the interview in their native language, like Burmese or English. The themes of belonging, alienation, loss, longing are all intertwined with this one word that is all too personal. I will be able to capture the nuances the next time around when I am able to better understand what is not lost in translation.

ONWARDS

During their displacement, many informants faced new social and cultural contexts. For some, the gender relations that take place within the home are transformed within these arcs of movement, while others remain quite the same. The heterogeneity of the political acts that take

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place within the home is the only stable assumption to be made since life at the border and in resettlement offered the chance to redistribute gender roles for some while in other instances the boundaries between what is deemed to be feminine and masculine realms remained intact. Regardless of the power dynamics of the domestic realm, it is clear that the dichotomy of public and private cannot be easily maintained because these concepts are challenged by the embodied experience of the men and women. What may be the site of renewal for some is a confined place of violence for another, so, the gendered relations in the junctures of displacement for the refugees remain ever-political.

This is a time of immense change in the geographical region that I study and the population that I have worked with. As a result, my proposed future research will work with citizens in Myanmar and members of the Burmese diaspora in this current context of increasing political freedom. It will examine the violence associated with losing a 'home' in the aftermath of persecution and how gender relations are complicated by contemporary policies that try to encourage limited civic engagement and international collaboration.

The political landscape is very different from when I began this research project several years ago. I am hopeful that these transformations will consider the value of collaboration, difference and negotiation. I say with certainty that it is within the means and capabilities of the people there to lead and manage the circumstances. But I'm also respectful that this is a process and like any learning context there will be setbacks and failures before a sustainable future is secured.

In the end though, wherever you are, I hope you that you make a place for yourself in spite of the

circumstances. Whatever shape it takes, we tend to create ones for ourselves don't we? I know

that it can be worth everything. And if you aren't home yet, I hope that one day you will be.

Figure 7.1. Preparing to weave.

Figure 7.2. The tools involved with weaving.

Figure 7.3. The result is an intricate and beautiful design.

Figure 7.4. The artists take great pride in the practice and product.

Figure 7.5. My second mother and my second home

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