KACHIN REFUGEE WOMEN'S WORK
IDENTITY: NARRATIVES
IN TRANSITION

by

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ABSTRACT

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This project compares and contrasts Kachin refugee women's experiences of work in the American and Burmese workforce. In-depth interviews with twelve Kachin women in the North Texas area provide the basis of research used to analyze the dynamics of migration and workforce; areas of gender and class are most emphasized in this work. Research presented strongly supports the notion that the expectations of the women interviewed are primarily based on the ideologies and attitudes regarding gender and class in their native Burma. Subsequently, they mostly draw from homeland ideas of gendered ideologies because these ideals create and enhance both women's gender and class-statuses in Burma.

The structure of work in America required these women to renegotiate the ways in which they will perform gender-appropriately in the new context. As gender and class status revolved around showing good manners in the home, Kachin women working in America have to re-map other avenues based on their current context. Kachin women often re-established prior views of gendered worlds in order to conform to a different workforce culture. For many, this task also often requires expanding prior conceptions of appropriate gender and class doings.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of Research

Today, increased migration is a salient issue that anthropological and sociological studies are actively addressing. However, most academic work on immigrants, specifically refugees, often grouped refugees as monolithic entities, characterized as a homogenous mass, devoid of different experiences and identities. Migration researchers, such as Cecilia Menjivar (1999), Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila (1997) and Sarah Mahler (1995) realize the need to study how social location and context play an important role in experience and identity reconstruction in the host country – as migrants come from different political, economic, social, cultural and familial situations.

Migration studies have also come a long way in gender equitability, more often incorporating women in research. While studies from the 1970's focused on men, the scholarship of the 1980's and 1990's has shed light on the experience of women's migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999) and how gender impacts the process of identity reconstruction. Still, most women-inclusive migration studies reflect on the question of how migration changes definitions of household roles and identities for both men and women, specifically in the context of women's paid work. In essence, much of the research attempts to answer the question, "do women gain or lose in the migration experience?" However, certain metrics are routinely lost in these studies, most often those related to a migrant woman's pre-migration and host-country class-status.

Most academic work has focused on refugee women whose pre-migration status was working-class or lower, thus ignoring the relation between a woman's experience and her original socio-economic class, each of which play a crucial role in shaping the newfound identity of refugee women. Cobble (2007: 2) illustrates that this variable, noted as "the sex of class", describes the "realities" and "differences" of work "as women experience them." She indicates

that there is a "revival of interest in class among gender scholars" (5). However, as McCall (2007) correctly articulates, gender and class are rarely researched in tandem, a fact that is especially true in the realm of refugee literature. In addition, originating regions have similar, though different, effects on a woman's identity.

Assumptions regarding refugee homeland class-status as monolithic are antiquated. Today, under the term "refugee," many people, including Iraqis and Iranians, are resettling in host countries with different class-statuses. Presently, political and social unrest within countries uproots a variety of individuals and groups, including those who are of high social standing within their communities. Consequently, it is important to recognize and highlight refugee women's class as an important aspect of identity and experience. My research challenges the abundance of monolithic research in the field by exploring the different ways women renegotiate their work identity based on their pre-migration class location. Specifically, this study held twelve interviews with women from the Kachin ethnic community in North Texas, a minority ethnic group that hails from Burma (Myanmar)[1]; a relatively new community, most of the group recently migrated as refugees and political asylees fleeing the persecution of a military government.

The primary reason for using this ethnic population as a sample group is related to my connection to the Kachin community - through marriage. This yielded important access to my respondents and fostered an underlying relationship that facilitated the actual research. Given the sensitive nature of refugee populations, the mutual trust I developed within the community is important in penetrating experiences and valuable issues of identity.

Burmese refugees (the most recent Southeast Asian refugee population in America) have twice the concentration in white-collar jobs that other Southeast Asians have and the least amount employed in service sector work (as measured by the 2000 United States Department of Commerce Profile of Selected Demographic and Social Characteristics for people born in

[1] The country name itself is of some contention as the military government changed the name from Burma to Myanmar in 1990 as part of its crusade to unite all ethnic groups and to distance itself from the westernized/anglicized connotation "Burma." While it seems well-meaning, ethnic groups do not recognize the name due to the militant ethnic cleansing campaign in the name of unification. Furthermore, the United States government only recognizes the country as Burma on legal documents. Therefore, for cultural sensitivity and government formalities, I will refer to the country as Burma throughout my thesis.

Burma). Likewise, Burmese refugees earn approximately twice what other Southeast Asian refugees make in the national statistics. These figures, though, do not accurately describe the sample group; in this study's observation, North Texas Kachin women typically work in service sector jobs and factories, yet they do earn slightly below the average $73,000 per year, as indicated by the above demographic study. This disconnect – low job status yet high economic status – prompted my inquiry into Kachin refugees experience of work in the local area.

Upon more in-depth observation, I came to realize that the Kachin are different from other Burmese refugees in relation to their pre-migration class status. Kachin refugees distinctly classify themselves as middle-class in relation to other refugee minority groups in Burma. Focusing on Kachin refugee women allowed me to draw on their prior socio-economic locations and discuss implications for class mobility in the United States, which existing literature had particularly ignored.

Drawing from symbolic interactionism[2] and concepts of identity reconstruction, my thesis explores refugees' perspectives of their work identity and the way in which it is changed, relative to both their community and family in the host country. More specifically, my research examines how first generation Kachin refugee women identify themselves within the context of work – both paid and unpaid – through the experience of homeland middle-class identification in juxtaposition to host country work experience, which typically provides a downgraded class-status. This topic is explored through narratives, derived from questions based on the following research goals: how do middle-class refugee women's work experiences and identities change based on prior class and work experience? How do these work experiences and class identities change the way they reconstruct unpaid work in the household? How do they make sense of the expectations of work and home life in the home country versus the experience and requirements in the host country? Does their privileged class background explicitly make their narratives different from other refugee experiences?

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[2] Specifically the focus on everyday interaction of individuals in their social environment and the impact this constant interaction has on their identity.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Typically, the major focus of research on refugee women is on the impact of women's paid work on their status within the home, including role-shifts and power dynamics. While this thesis seeks to incorporate and analyze women's paid work experience, the work also includes how paid work impacts unpaid domestic labor.

1.2.1 Gender and Work

Generally, scholars argue refugee women are required to work in America to earn an income for the economic survival of their families (Martin 2004; Benson 1994; Blau, Kahn, Moriarty, and Souza 2003; Zentgraf 2002) in order to supplement the wages of refugee men (those able to find jobs in America) who usually have meager and low-paying jobs. Consequently, refugee women are compelled to enter the work force in order to support their families. Immigrant women are able to enter the labor market with ease due to the economic restructuring in the U.S., which gave rise to female intensive industries (Pessar 2003; Espiritu 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999). As a result, refugee women work at higher rates and on a more regular basis than refugee men (Benson 1994; Espiritu 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003; Pessar 2003). Thus, the literature suggests that refugee women often replace men as the family provider and breadwinner (Gold 1992; Zhou 1997; Freeman 1995).

In this way, refugee women are depicted as breadwinners in the literature; scholars agree that the increase in employed refugee women also results in role-shifts and different power dynamics in refugee families (Corsellis and Vitale 2005; Muecke 1995; Min 2001; Judith 1994). However, scholars disagree as to how the shift takes shape. Regardless of scholars' positions on power dynamics and role adjustments, most (Foner 1997; Martin 2004; Pessar 1984; Symonds 2004) articulate that, even though refugee women are equal workers with their spouses, they are also the primary homemakers. Thus, women are responsible for both paid and unpaid work due to what Blair-Loy (2003) expresses as "the family devotion schema." This schema, she argues, is entrenched and powerful, essentially relegating females to the carework of children, their husbands, and their households. A female's attention to the household allows men to fulfill their

role in the work devotion schema as provider. Thus, men may "help" women with housework, but women are still primarily accountable.

Though scholars agree refugee women continue in their homemaker role, they differ in regards to how they see this playing out in the family setting. Many prominent researchers suggest that migrant women's paid work impacts equality in the home (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999; Menjivar 1999; Espiritu 1999; Thapan 2005; Judith 1994; Zentgraf 2002; Pessar 1984) and, subsequently, this new economic contribution increases women's power and independence. Espiritu's (1999) work argues that gender changes are the most visible among service sector workers.

On the other hand, some scholars argue that the shift is not as decisive as indicated by the above researchers. As Luong (2003) points out, an increase in women's workplace participation and shift in breadwinner roles does not necessarily lead to an increase in household status. When women perform public sphere tasks in the homeland, the tasks are often labeled as an extension of their household duties. Many refugee women, in their homeland, define work as taking care of their families – an extension of their caregiving role. According to Luong (2003) and Kibria (1993), women bring this ideology with them to the host country. These scholars regard refugee women's work-identity as something that is closely tied to the family, insisting that women adhere to traditional household balances of power even after migrating.

I use Kibria's (1993), Luong's (2003), and Blair-Loy's (2003) work on reinforced traditional values of the family devotion schema, and further it by articulating that Kachin women continue to value housework because this is a way to obtain social status as a woman in the community. In addition, while I use Blair-Loy's definition of the family devotion schema, in which she writes about marriage and motherhood as the primary vocations of women, I expand the meaning to include the Kachin context. My participants were also held responsible for building and maintaining wider community relationships. In other words, the Kachin women are responsible for not only their immediate family members but also for all extended family members in the communal society, thus mediating well-being among "fictive kin" (Hill Collins 2000).

I also use West and Zimmerman's (1987) work on "doing gender" to give more detail to women's responsibility within the family devotion schema. As West and Zimmerman (1987) articulate, gender is conceptualized and achieved by performances or actual *doings* that express the "essence" of gender as natural. These social *doings* (129) consist of activities that occur in everyday interaction. Thus, interaction is a key to West and Zimmerman's concept of "doing gender," as people are placed and policed in appropriate boundaries for accomplishing the idealization of the essence of gender. In regards to the division of labor, this is seen by the allocation of labor based on the notion of gender differences as natural. Thus, women and men are inclined to perform differently. However, performing these activities (doing gender), itself creates differences and thus continues the division of labor and the distinction of the essential nature of men and women. Those who fail to perform, as required by society, are ultimately censured. Therefore, people self-regulate behavior and activities based on what West and Zimmerman state as foreseeing others' judging and then respond to in particular ways (140). Consequently, as long as women and men are perceived as different, it is unavoidable to "do gender."

I draw from West and Zimmerman's (1987) concepts of appropriate gender boundaries to discuss how Kachin women negotiate gender, and even class, in a new context. This paper argues that Kachin women adhere to socially agreed-upon concepts of gender and, dutifully, perform these through gender-appropriate channels. These socially accepted rules allow a Kachin man to perform "women's work" in certain circumstances – while alone, for example – but not in the presence of other men or in mixed company. This is because the female is outwardly responsible for such duties and, in mixed company, is expected to behave as such. In addition, the behavior is supported by women, as this kind of work is an embodiment of true femaleness; the adherence to such rules is both to avoid ostracism and to maintain self-identity (if only through community standing/acceptance).

Once Kachin women enter America, many are required to work, thus re-conceptualizing the performance of how to continue doing gender appropriately. As evidenced by the study's

participant-stories, Kachin women still cling to their homeland's socially-constructed gender rules. Due to the new context provided by a new country and culture, they are forced redefine the new "essential" natures of women as their necessary roles in the family structure change. For instance, even though a Kachin woman may give positive meanings to her paid work, she is still expected to reinforce the family devotion schema because of status received in the community.

The groundbreaking work by Espiritu (1999), Hondagneu-Sotelo (2003), Vernez (1999), and Foo (2003) specify that immigrant and refugee women are typically placed in gender and ethnic- specific jobs. Vernez (1999) indicates that females tend to be employed in only one of a few industries, including textile, electronic, and domestic service jobs. Since refugee women hold more jobs in low-skill service sector industries (Kats 1982; Marino 1998; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003; Kelly 2005), "female ghettoes of employment" become most prominent among Southeast Asian refugees (Espiritu 1999: 639). In other words, refugee women enter low occupational status positions. While several women in this study work in the electronics industry, many enter masculine work that requires them to perform masculine roles, as opposed to prior studies. This paid work experience is among the many factors that shape refugees' lives and identities as they negotiate their new lives in the host country.

1.2.2 Class and Work

In America, certain aspects of identity are derived through one's work experience; this is especially true for class identity (Du Gay 1996; Hodson 2001; Braverman 1974). Ghidina (1992) agrees, stating that one's type of work is an important source of self-definition in American society. For example, the first question many people ask at either formal or informal social interactions, in order to locate the other person's class identity, is "What do you do for a living?" or "Where do you work?"

Refugees, however, are unable to enter the best labor markets when they arrive in the United States. This is because labor queues tend to favor refugees only when they need cheap labor and low skill set. This type of low-paid job requires a change in identity for middle-class refugees. In turn, this change imposes a loss – a downgrading of identity. Coming from a

position of status in their homeland, Kachin refugees are forced into a class of workers whose skills sets and ability are not comparable. Expectations and qualifications of these middle-class refugees are then downgraded. This is true even in the face of coping mechanisms used to rectify the disparity between the new job, and that of old employment in the host country (Chambers 1994; Thapan 2005) which, for many first-wave Southeast Asian immigrants (as Kelly (1986) and Haines (1989) indicate), was typically professional employment in their homeland. Chan (2004) states that among refugees most are blue-collar workers in the host country while few – only five percent – are classified as white-collar, professional workers. This contrast serves to underscore the difficulty that Kachin women and men have with reconstructing self-identity after migration.

This thesis contends that class issues are a point of strife for women who enter the United States with a middle-class background. While the majority of Southeast Asian refugee women who come to the U.S. are not middle-class, some are. Regardless of pre-migration class-status, research has been negligible to discuss the implications of women's differing class locations and how this impacts resettlement in the host country.

Kachin refugee women are quite similar to other middle-class immigrant women, in that they came from urban areas that provided access to education. Their families also had status and resources to help them migrate. Once they arrived in America, however, they entered working-class jobs due to their status as refugees. Migrant stories in sociological literature reflect this downward social status, especially the aspect of hard, manual labor. Altagracia, an El Salvadoran participant in Sarah Mahler's (1995: 85) work on migration, infers disillusion with the American dream stating, "You work a lot and earn very little." Parrenas (2001) identifies this difficulty in accepting low labor market status and the discrepancy between the social status of the current job and actual training among her Filipino participants (who are now domestic laborers). Subsequently, she cites the ambivalence of contradiction of upward economic status in comparison to the homeland, and downward social mobility in regards to status of work of middle-class migrants in her study.

According to George's (2005: 72) study of class and migration, Mr. Samuel, a respondent, stated "There is no status here, period…You can't say that I don't do that kind of thing, because you have to eat and you have to pay the mortgage. There I could say, 'I don't care for that job. I don't want it. That is too cheap.' Here there is no way to say that." Kelly's (1993) interviews with Iranian refugees in Los Angeles also suggest the difficulty in adjusting to new class-status criteria. He indicates that questions of class and expectation enter into the dialogue (Kelly 1993: 54) and discusses the lack of options and requirement to take any type of work.

The literature on refugees that addresses the issue of downgraded identity often assumes male work-identity, because female refugees typically did not work in the homeland; if they did work, they did so only for extra income (Chan 2004; Haines 1989; Kelly 1986). Therefore, prior research generalizes men's and women's experiences when discussing downgraded work identity because men are thought to lose a greater amount of status after migrating. However, it is not only men who lose status when migrating; Kachin women are also required to enter the workforce – where they then obtain working-class jobs. These two positions produce downward mobility in juxtaposition to their homeland status.

While Parrenas (2001) and George (2005) discuss work identity of female migrants, their research focuses on immigrant workers who migrated due to economic and labor market necessities. Kachin women, who migrate as refugees, experience work identity similar to Parrenas and George's work. Consequently, refugee women bring to the host country their actual work experiences (whether inside or outside the home, volunteer, paid and/or unpaid work) and their expectations of work opportunities. My research incorporates how, and if, refugee women experience downgraded identity through the sector of class in both work and family life, specifically analyzing women who came from a place of privilege in their homeland. If they do indeed experience this downward mobility, how do they cope with and reshape their new status in the host country?

Moreover, my research builds on prior studies which insist that refugees reformulate identities based on their own experiences and thus renegotiate identity through both homeland and host country experiences of gender and class (Krulfeld 1994). Resettlement often makes it impossible to meet the expectations of gender and class (Muecke 1995). Refugee women do not rely on American feminist's views, but use their own cultural standards to defend new views of what it means to be a woman and middle-class (Chan 2003). Therefore, it is also important to situate identities in social history (Lowe 2003) and study the intersections that both gender and class play on the context of refugee work and life.

1.3 Subjects of Analysis

According to the United Nations, a refugee is someone who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his (her) nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself (herself) of the protection of that country. Waves of refugees have spread out over the globe, especially during the second half of the 20th century (Braziel and Mannur 2003; Lewellen 2002). With the formation of the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1951, government organizations allowed a new generation of immigrants, tormented by the above criteria, to relocate; as many as three million refugees were resettled in First World countries in the 1990's alone (Lewellen 2002). In 2006, it was estimated between 13 to 17 million refugees, per year, are uprooted from their homes and seek safety in other host countries (Lahav and Messina 2006a; Lahav and Messina 2006b; Office of Refugee Resettlement).

1.3.1 Refugees and Class

Refugees are often seen as "others" within their home country and also as "others" within the host country, wherein they are regarded as living outside mainstream politics, economics, ethnicity, and perhaps religion (as seen with Kachin refugees). Within the host country they are considered "refugees," a political term that often legitimates their existence in America (Kibria

1994), but signifies them as "other." This "other" category also implies refugees are different from the dominant group in ethnicity and class (Brazaile and Mannur 2003).

The term refugee, in respect to class-status, also conjures up thoughts of dirty, poor, uneducated, backward people (Chan 2003). These labels are located in a web of social hierarchies and power, and are used by those in the host country to classify individuals (Lowe 2003; Ong 1996). Race and class ideologies in the host country can affect the way refugees receive labor market opportunities (Duany 1998). Most refugees enter ethnic-specific jobs regardless of education and skill in the homeland. This disjuncture of labor market and prior class-status requires a reconfiguration of how one sees oneself in light of the new context.

Through forced migration, groups are required to reshape and redefine their concepts of work, gender and class based on past, present, and future histories and experience (Benmayor and Skotnes 2005). Chambers (1994) argues that movement involves a complex transformation – a reworking of history, culture, and tradition (which includes gender and class). Redefinition is not necessarily assimilation but creolization, in which a blending of meaning and perceptions are created (Foner 1997). Bridging these new possibilities can be difficult, especially if the host country is very different from that of the home country.

Overall, the refugee experience provides for loss, but also regeneration (Camino and Krulfeld 1994). Refugees play an active role in recreating identity, even within the social constraints of the new environment. Thus, it is important not to portray refugees as simply victims, but also as agents of identity renegotiation. "Refugees are not simply objects but conscious subjects who take on an active role in carving out their new lives, making their own decisions along the way as they face new situations and cope with new contingencies" (Anderson and Lee 2005: 15). In other words, my research takes the stance that refugees are actors in their environment and that they make choices, although constrained ones, within their social setting.

1.3.2 Kachin refugee women

According to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, Southeast Asian refugees were the largest group of recent refugee arrivals to the U.S., compromising 52 percent of all refugees from

1975-2002. Southeast Asian refugee research has often focused on Indochinese refugees (Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians), primarily due to length of time in the United States and Americas' political policies surrounding those countries. Burma, though, is considered both geographically and culturally a Southeast Asian country; furthermore, a substantial number of refugees have flowed from the country in the past two decades. Regardless of these compelling attributes for study, however, research has remained rather scarce on this group.

This research fills the void by including a sample group of Kachin women who are themselves refugees from Burma. The Kachin ethnic group, one of eight main ethnic groups in Burma (complete with its own language and distinct culture), is comprised of roughly one to one and one half million people; the composition is further delineated between six different groups (Wang 1997; Kunstadter 1967), all of which have roots in the Tibetan area. The majority of the group has since settled in the hill country of Burma, known as Kachin State (Leach 1954; Wang 1997). Prior to British rule, Kachin governed Kachin State autonomously.

As a minority group in the country, the Kachin struggled to keep their own land and government after the British granted independence to Burma in 1948 (Silverstein 1977). After independence, the Burmese majority government tried to unite the main ethnic groups/states (including Kachin State), with a common language, Burmese, and religion, Buddhism. This Burmanization (Naw 2001; Tinker 1961) led to ongoing civil wars between ethnic minority groups and the Burmese ethnic majority (Van Hear 1998). Military rule and dictatorship became the standard government from 1948 onward. Two ethnic groups, Kachin and Karen, started insurgency groups because they believed that the Burmese government considered them insubordinates (Lehman 1967; Lintner 1997). Their fears were not entirely unfounded, as the government still has tight control over information and is especially suspicious of any speech in opposition to government ideologies. People who protest the regime are routinely imprisoned or killed.

The Burmese economy is stifled, in large part due to the country's closed-door policy regarding foreign trade; frequent civil war is also a contributing factor. The military-controlled

country frequently changes currency, leaving people without means to support themselves and their families. As the government usurps businesses, job opportunities are scarce (Silverstein 1977). Due to growing economic and political instability, as well as ethnic and Christian persecution (especially after the 1988 protests), many people are forced out of the country as refugees.

Due to these varying reasons, Burmese ethnic minorities' migration stories are not easily identified; furthermore, few historical accounts have been officially written. Therefore, researchers often rely on refugee narratives. One such narrative, "Exodus from Burma: Their Stories in Guam," compiled and written by refugees themselves, offers one refugee report (Kio 2001) that describes the trek of 800 ethnic Burmese who traveled on tourist visas to Guam in order to seek political asylum in 2000. While the Chin ethnic group was the primary pioneer of this escape journey, this account estimates that around 100 to 150 Kachin were also involved.

Many of the Kachin women now living in Texas are among the Guam "tourists." Social networks, resources, and money dictated the opportunity for these women to migrate. Financial resources determined people's ability to migrate, as each person had to pay for an airplane ticket (around $2000 U.S. dollars). This amount is difficult to acquire when the average monthly salary is approximately $10 in Burma. Individuals who migrate though this route are considered privileged in their homeland.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement indicates that 377 Burmese refugees (representing 13 percent of all Burmese refugees resettled in the United States) settled in Texas from 1983-2005. This made Texas the fourth largest home-state for Burmese refugees during that period. Meanwhile, 2007 data concludes that over 1163 Burmese refugees were initially resettled in Texas last year.; this new data makes Texas the main home-state for Burmese refugees.

As indicative of those resettled through Guam, refugees often relocate based on prior established social networks. According to oral narratives, Kachin often relocate to Florida, Nebraska, California, and Texas, where social networks are already established. These states provide refugees with social connections that offer employment options. Through the

researcher's casual observation, there are an estimated 50 Kachin refugees that now live in North Texas. At least one-half of the individuals who have settled in the North Texas area are women.

1.4 Method of Analysis

I utilized purposeful sampling in order to build a population due to my connection with the community and availability of participants. From there, I interviewed each participant personally. Each participant had multiple necessary criteria: (a) female, (b) ethnic group, (c) working age (>= 20 years old), and (d) work experience in the United States.

Women were included if they were considered refugees specifically from the Kachin ethnic group. The study was limited to women in the North Texas area (the Dallas-Fort Worth area) with one year or more of work experience in the United States. The logic behind this requirement was women in the workforce for longer periods have the most opportunity to experience work to a considerable extent in America, and thus contribute more to the interview process on work identity in the host country.

1.4.1 Interviews

The interview guide (see Appendix B) consisted of ten questions regarding participants' migration experience and their paid and unpaid work experience in both the homeland and the host country. If married, they were asked about their spouse's work experience in the homeland and the host country. Furthermore, I probed for what they considered the difference between America and Burma in regards to being a woman. Questions concerning the interviewees' class in both the homeland and the host country were also raised.

Interviews were obtained over a span of one month. Since I am a member of the community through marriage, women were very willing to help with the project. As prior acquaintances, they readily welcomed me into their home. Many were eager to share their experiences, especially because they work long hours and normally do not have an outlet for their concerns and feelings.

All interviews were in home settings, whether the participant's (n=8), a friend's home (n=3), or the researcher's (n=1). These interviews were tape-recorded, with permission from

each participant; many women, however, were nervous about being recorded. Several times the device was turned off, allowing a bit of thinking space to pass. From there, recording was resumed only when the participant was ready. Interviews were conducted in English, but a Kachin translator was available if needed.[3] In three cases, interview questions were posed in the Kachin language.[4] After each interview, I transcribed the interviews either the day of the interview or the day after the interview. Then they were reviewed one week later to test for reliability of transcription.

A demographic sheet (see Appendix A) was given to each participant at the end of the interview. It consisted of twenty questions regarding the participant's migration date, age, income, work hours and education; if married, data on the spouse was also collected. Each question and answer was translated in Kachin for ease of use.

The interviews allowed me to take the role of the participant (Lofland 1971) and understand what meanings the subjects assign to the concepts and ideas being researched. Gubrium and Holstein (2003: 23) state that interviews allow the researcher to "locate, read, and interpret" the story subjects convey. With the increase in refugee studies, it is important to understand refugee life from the perspectives of refugees themselves not just as numbers. Because refugees "take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and identities" it is important to "analyze the lived and fluid experiences of individuals who act in ways that challenge space and social identity" (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton-Blanc 1994: 36). My research required Kachin refugee women tell their own stories and experience of work identity reconstruction.

1.4.2 My social location

While the goal was to hear Kachin women's stories, my own social location both within the Kachin community and as a white American in the context of studying my subjects places me

[3] A female translator was present at each interview but was in another room. The translator earned a Bachelor's degree in English from Thailand and grew up in Burma. Her primary language was Kachin. She only translated directly for one participant.

[4] The interview questions were translated prior by an interpreter.

in the dominant group discourse and affects my view of their narratives. My relationship to the Kachin community is through marriage; therefore, I am both an insider and an outsider. This insider status within the Kachin community allowed the community more willingness to share their narratives with me as opposed to an unfamiliar researcher. However, while I am a member of the community, I am still different (and thus an outsider) in many ways, most obviously in my primary language, culture, and ethnicity.

In a way, this outsider status is akin to that which was imposed on these women in their home country. Automatically, I am regarded as an American first, then as a white woman, which already subsumes middle-class status (even though I was raised in a working-class family). I am highly educated, regardless of my class background, and have had the opportunity to work in several white-collar jobs. I reap the benefits, in regards to race and class, of hegemonic American society and standards. My own social location as a stay-at-home mom and former white-collar worker contrasts with their factory positions. I am also positioned as a white American woman, which many Kachin attribute to my ability to stay home and do research.

While my position as outsider situated me in dominant categories, it also allowed women to open up about things that are not as acceptable within the Kachin community. This is due to the fact I am not in the gossip circle and they can trust that their words will not to go into the circle. This was obvious when they told me things opposite to what I had heard through the gossip circle[5]. For example, one woman mentioned in her interview that her husband helped her a lot with housework. Meanwhile, the gossip circle circulated that he never helped her do anything – that she did everything herself, thus implying women may alter actual housework occurrence stories in the community, which gave her more power in the Kachin community. This was acceptable to discuss with me due to my non-participation in the gossip circle and my position as an American woman, who is perceived to value other things besides housework. My outsider perspective allowed my participants to some extent let down their facades regarding gender boundaries.

[5] In these sessions, wherein I was privy to the community's gossip, I was a listener, not a participant.

While my research allowed Kachin women to share their narratives, I interpreted their stories through my sociological understanding and knowledge, as well as from my own social location. My sociological understanding of their stories may gloss over their true meanings and voices; not to mention the fact I am studying them. Even though I seek to truly highlight their own narratives, I still must disclose my own social location in regards to class, race, gender, and work. I do acknowledge that my background places me in a position of power and privilege and influenced answers, as well as my interpretation of Kachin stories and work identities.

1.5 Demographic Analysis of My Participants

The age of the twelve participants ranged from 28 to 43 years old; more than half (n=7) were between the ages of 30 to 35 (see Table 1.1 below). All women arrived between the years of 1998 and 2006. A little under half of Kachin women (n=5) first entered the United States through California, Florida or Texas via Guam. Others came to the United States first for short terms visits and then applied for political asylum or applied for asylum while living in other countries. Two women came to America after their husbands achieved asylum status. Women who arrived in other states later moved to Texas.

Table 1.1 Participant's Migration Experience

Participant	Age	Arrival Year	How Migrated	Initial Resettlement State
Kaw	30	2002	Husband (Conference)	California
Kai	34	2001	Guam	Florida
Htu	30	2006	India	Texas
Hka	31	2005	Student then asylum	Arizona
Thawm	28	2003	Husband (Guam)	Texas
Pri	40	1998	Conference then asylum	California
Lu	31	2000	Guam	Texas
Ja	28	1998	Guam	California
Mai	40	1999	Student then asylum	Texas
Htang	34	1998	Guam	California
Roi	43	2001	Guam	Florida
Con	35	2003	Malaysia	Texas

As required for the study, all women were employed (see Table 1.2 below). Most women worked in three main industries: sushi (different locations), an electronics factory (which is

hereafter referred to as AssembleNRepair), or a bakery factory (which I will here on out refer to as FreshNHot). Pri[6], Mai, and Htang work at FreshNHot. Kaw and Thawm make sushi at different restaurants while Lu makes and delivers sushi to grocery stores and schools. Hka, Kai, Roi, and Ja work at AssembleNRepair. Con is a pre-school teacher and Htu sells homemade Kachin food from her home.

Table 1.2 Participant's Work Experience in America

Participant	Occupation	Hours Worked Per Week	Education	Personal Income
Kaw	Sushi	50	Bachelors	Up to $19,999
Kai	AssembleNRepair	40	Some College	Up to $19,999
Htu	Selling homemade food	20	Some College	Up to $19,999
Hka	AssembleNRepair	40	Bachelors	Up to $19,999
Thawm	Sushi	66	Less than High School	$20,000 to $39,999
Pri	FreshNHot	40	Bachelors	$20,000 to $39,999
Lu	Sushi	35	Some College	$20,000 to $39,999
Ja	AssembleNRepair	46	High School	Up to $19,999
Mai	FreshNHot	40	High School	$20,000 to $39,999
Htang	FreshNHot	40	High School	$20,000 to $39,999
Roi	AssembleNRepair	40	Bachelors	$20,000 to $39,999
Con	Preschool Teacher	40	Some College	Up to $19,999

Kachin women interviewed work a range of 20 to 66 hours per week. However, most work 40 hours a week.[7] Those who work less than 40 hours per week work part-time only. Indicative of my participant's responses, sushi requires women to work more than 40 hours per week.

Most women in my study (n=8) attended some college or received their bachelor's degree.[8] Nonetheless, the level of education did not influence type of employment, as all were working in low-skill jobs. In addition, education did not seem to affect hours worked per week.

[6] Respondents were given pseudonyms to help with anonymity.

[7] This hourly schedule is applicable now because those who work in factories currently are not required to work overtime. This is not true at all times of the year and varies with production output.

[8] The education system in Burma is very unstable. Since the main democratic protests in 1988 occurred in the university by students, the government has been suspicious of university students. When the government is challenged, they automatically close the schools. For months at a time, students are not allowed to attend classes. This type of system makes it difficult to finish coursework and a degree.

Personal income among participants varies little. Six women indicated they make 'up to $19,999' and the other six indicated they make between '$20,000-$39,999' per year. Women verbally indicated they make in the lower range of the category '$20,000-$39,999,' while their household income typically is in the '$40,000-$59,999' range. Kachin women listed their salaries at approximately half of what their husbands make, thus this study challenges other Southeast Asian literature that position refugee women as breadwinners.

Women who arrived earlier than 2001 report an income higher than those who arrived later, mostly '$20,000-$39,000' per year as opposed to those who arrived later than 2001 making 'up to $19,999.' Perhaps, this has more to do with type of employment, as those who arrived earlier are employed mostly at FreshNHot. Arrival date and type of employment are correlated, as are type of employment and personal income. Those who work at FreshNHot and sushi make more money than those who work at AssembleNRepair and other work environments.

The majority of women in the study are married (n=10). Three women (Kaw, Thawm, and Con) were married prior to their migration to the United States. All others were single upon entry and entered the United States without other family members. Seven other women later marry in the U.S. Spouses ranged in age from 36-46 (see Table 1.3). The average age of spouse was 40, indicating that husbands were typically older than their wives. Ja stated her spouse was still in Burma. Therefore, data was not collected regarding his experience of work in the United States.

Table 1.3 Participant's Husbands' Demographics

Participant	Married?	Age	Spouse's Age	Spouse's Arrival Date
Kaw	Yes	30	46	2000
Kai	Yes	34	44	2001
Htu	Yes	30	38	2006
Hka	No	31	NA	NA
Thawm	Yes	28	44	2001
Pri	Yes	40	36	1995
Lu	No	31	NA	NA
Ja	Yes	28	36	NA
Mai	Yes	40	40	2001
Htang	Yes	34	40	2004
Roi	Yes	43	42	2001
Con	Yes	35	41	2003

All husbands are employed full time and all but one works in one of two types of employment, either as sushi chefs or at FreshNHot (see Table 1.4). More than one half (n=5) are employed as sushi chefs, while three husbands work at FreshNHot; the last works as a lab assistant. Spouses, unlike their wives, did not change the type of employment they held. Other than Kaw's husband, the others did not have the same professions in Burma. They left entrepreneur and religious positions to work in factories and restaurants.

Table 1.4 Participant's Husbands Work Experience

Participant	Spouse's Education	Spouse's Hours Worked Per Week	Spouse's Current Work	Spouse's Work in Homeland
Kaw	Bachelors	45	Lab Assistant	Chemist
Kai	Bachelors	60	Sushi	Pastor
Htu	Some college	50	Sushi	Pastor
Hka	NA	NA	NA	NA
Thawm	Some college	40	FreshNHot	Pastor
Pri	Some college	60	Sushi	Family business
Lu	NA	NA	NA	NA
Ja	NA	NA	NA	NA
Mai	High School	60	Sushi	Student
Htang	Less than High School	60	Sushi	Student
Roi	Some college	40	FreshNHot	Jade[9] entrepreneur
Con	Bachelors	40	FreshNHot	Student

[9] Jadeland refers to land that produces the most lucrative business in Kachin State –the mining of the precious Jade stone.

Spouses work, on average, 10 hours more per week than their wives (ranging from 40 to 60 hours per week). The average hours worked is higher for spouses because more men make sushi and are required to work 60 hours per week. The three men that work in the bakery work 40 hours per week. Wives do tend to work less hours per week than their husbands, except for those women who are employed making sushi.

Of those married, six women in my study have children (see Table 1.5). Younger women have more children than older women. Those who arrived earlier than 2001 also have fewer children than those who came later. Most families, except two, have children that are not yet of school age.

Table 1.5 Participant's Children and Household Income

Participant	Number of Children	Age of Children	Household Income
Kaw	4	8, 6, 4, 1	$20,000 to $39,999
Kai	2	4, 2	$20,000 to $39,999
Htu	1	2	Up to $19,999
Hka	NA	NA	Up to $19,999
Thawm	4	10, 9, 4, 3	$40,000 to $59,999
Pri	0	NA	$40,000 to $59,999
Lu	NA	NA	$20,000 to $39,999
Ja	0	NA	Up to $19,999
Mai	2	5, 4	$40,000 to $59,999
Htang	0	NA	$40,000 to $59,999
Roi	1	1	$60,000 to $79,999
Con	0	NA	$40,000 to $59,999

Household income of women interviewed ranged from 'up to $19,999' to '$60,000-$79,999'. Three women reported a household income of 'up to $19,999,' three more women reported a household income between '$20,000 - $39,999,' five women reported a household income between '$40,000- $59,999,' and one woman reported a household income between '$60,000-$79,999.' Household income did not tend to increase with children present in the home. The trend of making sushi, if one has children, caused a correlation between number of children and hours worked per week. Therefore, while women with more children are working more hours, their personal income and household income are not increasing more than those without children

present in the home. Unlike their wives, husbands with more children did not work as much as their counterparts.

Many women in my study entered marriage with work experience and income equivalent to their spouses. Even women who arrived after marriage still have comparable incomes to their husbands. While not the sole breadwinners of their family, women still earn equitable pay and contribute a large percentage to the household income. Perhaps Kachin men and women's similar pay reflects their work in the same market space.

1.6 Overview of Chapters

In chapter two, Kachin women's experience of work in the homeland, as contextualized by gendered spheres of paid and unpaid work, is discussed. As women and men enter the same work positions in America, their experiences of gendered paid work and its consequence on housework and childcare responsibilities are unique. Here, I analyze the different ways that women re-map these two arenas and the reasons they do so. While having to do everything (work, home management, and childcare), they renegotiate household obligations due to status they receive within the Kachin community.

Chapter three looks at Kachin women's narratives of class and work in America via their prior homeland, middle-class status and subsequent entry into the working-class job sector in America. The research assesses women's work stories with the theme of downward social status through physical and emotional demands. Meanwhile, the paper discusses the ways in which women navigate into work environments, which give them more money and benefits; specifically, through upward economic mobility, they contribute to their families' class.

The last chapter seeks to merge class and gender by discussing the ways in which the two intersect in Kachin women's experience of work. I contend that Kachin women re-map spaces of middle-class and gender in America, and thus redefine what it means to be a middle-class woman. In other words, I portray how they self-identify given their cultural and structural positions. Their stories are similar and conflicting in regards to how they negotiate work identity in America, specifically given the contradictory interests of gender and class-status.

CHAPTER 2

RE-MAPPING GENDER: NARRATIVES OF SHOWING GOOD MANNERS

2.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter analyzes participant's experiences of "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987). West and Zimmerman (1987: 125) conceptualize this term as the "routine accomplishment" of perceived natural "essences" of what it means to be female or male; this is relative to the ways in which people self-regulate themselves based on "everyday interaction" within society to maintain gender-appropriate identities. I start by exploring the participants' narratives of gender in Burma and then discuss how these boundaries are challenged and blurred in the American workforce.

Female migrant research (Kibria 1993; Espiritu 1997) often focuses on migrant women entering female-specific jobs that entail unstable, informal work. This, in turn, allows them to continue "doing gender" in traditional homeland ways. My work focuses on the way in which my participants arrange gender appropriate behavior in America around their entry into different levels of masculine-work. This research questions if those who enter more masculine work compensate by performing domestic labor and carework; in other words, they conform to traditional standards of "doing gender" so they can still be labeled a "good woman."

However, while many women try to re-enact traditional ideologies of gender, some are confined by structural work requirements and thus not able to act in prior homeland female-specific standards. Their struggles to juggle work and traditional ways of performing gender are frustrating for them, as constraints require new appropriations of actual practice. This leads some women to give the appearance of upholding traditional gender behavior regardless of their ability to actually do so. This shows the importance of the interactional aspect of legitimizing oneself within gender limits and earning status to fit within the natural order as defined by a specific community.

2.2 Homeland Experiences of Doing Gender

Women's experience of work in their homeland is a starting point for their experience and expectations of work as women in the host country. In the following section, I will discuss how women in different types of work in Burma portrayed their performance of gender. Of the twelve respondents, four were students (not involved in any type of work), two were full-time homemakers, three helped with family businesses, two worked full-time in religious work, and one worked full-time in an untraditional employment setting.

2.2.1 Full-time Homemakers

Thawm met her husband while she was attending Bible College, where he was a teacher. At 18 years of age, she quit school, got married, and became pregnant with their first child. Thawm's life in Burma primarily consisted of taking care of her husband and two young children. While her husband taught at a local religious college, she remained at home, where her duties included cooking, cleaning, and tending to her children - what she called "showing good manners." During the weekends, her husband served as a pastor of a local church, where Thawm also taught Sunday School. She said,

> In Burma, I'm not really work, but I have to take care [of] my kids and then I have to take care [of] my husband. Only that. And then I work [at] the church only. In the morning sometimes I teach the Sunday School. Only Sunday, ya know? Not like America, ya know? Not Monday through Sunday, not Monday through Friday. Not like that. Only Sunday I work; but only church work.

Thawm proceeded to tell me that it was typical for women to stay home and for men to work outside the home, which was echoed in other participant's stories as well. She emphasized the necessity of married women to prepare three meals a day for all family members and guests – a lengthy task requiring a daily trip to the market for fresh vegetables and meat, cooking and serving the meal, and cleaning afterwards.

Most people in Burma do not have refrigerators, except in the capital city, Yangon, where electricity is regularly available. My participants lived in Northern Burma where they did not have access to regular electricity – electricity was filtered to homes during the day only, and turned off at night. In order to be fresh, a meal's ingredients usually had to be obtained on a daily basis.

Each meal consisted of at least three main dishes made from scratch, requiring extensive time and attention.

Thawm mentioned the importance of showing good manners on a full-time basis. She defined her primary responsibility as a married woman as carework for her family and the household. Other full-time homemakers interviewed also saw their main duty as showing good manners, or carework for family along with daily household activities.

2.2.2 Helping with family businesses

Htu, another married woman, did not stay home full-time. Like Thawm's husband, Htu's husband served as a pastor on the weekend and taught at Bible College during the week. Prior to marriage, Htu had assisted her aunt with her office supplies shop on occasion. After marriage, she continued to help at the shop when necessary. However, this was an infrequent work experience for her.

Htu did not have a substantial job prior to marriage because her mother was sick. As the eldest daughter, she was required to look after her mother and care for her during her illness. She alluded that caring for her mother was a full-time job. After her mother passed away, she started her own business, cooking and selling homemade food at the street market. At this time, she was also helping her auntie with the stationary shop on occasion. She said she was dissatisfied with her work in Burma because her food goods were expensive and she "sometimes didn't have the traffic." Traffic, according to Htu, meant customers. Since she had few customers, she was not making any profit, and the prices of food increased over time. Therefore, she quit and relied on her husband's income alone.

She mentioned work requirements for women and men in America are different from her experience in Burma. "The difference is, here in America, the women and men are the same – both have to work. But in Burma it doesn't matter. The woman can work or cannot work, [but] the woman's [main] job is in the household." She saw her own work as secondary to her husband's work, especially as she articulated the woman's main job was tending the household.

Htu's story shows how she occasionally assisted with her family's business. Other women who helped with family-run businesses also narrate their infrequent work experience depending on the necessity of the business needs. Htu also did not seek work because of her responsibility to care for her ailing mother. Carework, to her, was a full-time job and she would not be able to both attend to her mother and work. Her narrative highlights difficulties of dividing loyalties of work and family. She draws from the naturalness of women to care and assist others and men to be the main provider of the family. While she did not deny women could work, her story illustrates that women are expected to position their work secondary to showing good manners.

2.2.3 Religious Work

When Mai graduated from Bible College, she still lived with her parents. Bible College graduates often have limited job opportunities, as available positions in churches are filled with elderly ministers. Young people of both genders tend to find work as youth ministers or the like. While it is uncommon for a newly graduated male to find work as a pastor, it is especially rare for a woman to be hired as a pastor of a church. Mai, however, professed that she worked as a preacher. She described her experience as a preacher, "I am alone. I call all the other people [for] communion. [If] we have worship program I invite them. So I am [a] full-time minister, like [a] pastor." While this description sounds like the communications liaison for the church rather than a pastor, Mai called her work *ministry* and claimed that she was paid as such.

Mai also talked about how challenging her work was due to the government's position on Christianity. "Actually it is illegal over there [to be a pastor]. So that is why people don't want to stay in my country." The Burmese government forbids groups over a certain number to gather in public or private, hence Christians are not allowed to worship because it is considered a possible political rally. Many Christians continue to congregate despite the ban. As a result, the military soldiers frequently question pastors.

Mai said she later moved to the capital city, and with her future husband's permission, she worked at a small shop. I asked why she used the term "husband's permission", and she said

she wanted to make sure he approved of her working before she took the job – even before they were married. Mai described the work as optional. She wanted to work to support her parents and the church through her earnings. Tithing was an important aspect of religious service and even though Mai was not able to preach in the capital city, she wanted to support other ministers.

The participants who worked in ministry described their work as fulfilling because they were rendering religious service to the wider Kachin community. They felt they contributed to the community through their religious service, which is an important factor for many Christian Kachin. Therefore, these women, although technically working outside the home, continued to show good manners to the larger community through their religious work. Mai's description of earnings supporting her family and religious faith are important concepts for framing her work in America.

2.2.4 Full-time Employment

Hka, unlike the other women, worked full time to support her siblings while they were attending school. They rented an apartment in the capital city of Yangon, while the rest of her family lived in Northern Burma. She told me, "Yes, I was supporting myself and also I take care of my brothers and sister. I let them study [while I worked]."

Hka's desire to work to support her family was influenced by her mother's work experience. Her mother loved working as a nurse even though she was not fairly compensated for her service. "So her type is [to] not stay home. Even though she is force[d] to stay [at home], she won't. So she work[ed] even though we can't see her salary at the end of the month. We only depend on my dad's salary," said Hka. The main provider, or breadwinner, for her family was the eldest man in the household, her father. This was also a true for other participants – either their husbands or their fathers earned a "family wage," while the women's jobs were for extra income. In her mother, however, Hka had witnessed a female working full-time outside of the home by choice rather than necessity.

Hka's work as a limousine driver at a hotel challenged the gendered sphere of paid work even further, as she entered a predominately-male occupation in Burma. She explained that both her father's insistence that she (and all of her siblings) learn how to drive and her contact with a

language school teacher helped her obtain the job. She was taking Japanese language classes because all universities were closed at that time due to a political crackdown from the government. Her teacher, knowing she needed work, told her about the position. She applied and was hired. Hka did not take the credit herself for entering male space, but rather praised the business for their initiative in hiring a woman. She attempted to work for economic reasons and was surprised that they hired her as a woman, "[the employer is] really pioneer if they hire the lady driver."

Hka said her work was exciting because she was able to interact with many international guests while driving them around the city. She met many interesting people, including the Canadian Ambassador. However, she also portrayed her work as dangerous, since Yangon is overcrowded and driving there can be not only stressful, but fatal. She stated that the work was unique, as the job function is traditionally considered masculine. The main point of working, however, was identified as a way to support her family economically.

2.2.5 Overview

Many of my participants discussed "doing gender" in Burma around what Thawm called "showing good manners." Participants who entered the workforce in Burma worked in order to *support* family, whether the work was in a family-run business or in an outside workplace. Thus, work was often seen as an extension of their caretaking roles (Luong 2003). Others entered religious work, which offered status within the community. Some indicated that they did not desire to work in Burma because work was not monetarily rewarding. The experience of women helping with work and working for family was also shaped by the structure of work opportunities for women and the importance of performing gender appropriately through the duties of carework and household labor – especially if married.

As illustrated by these stories, there were both pull and push factors that kept the participants primarily in the home, "showing good manners." Women felt pulled to take care of their children and household. They were also pushed away from seeking paid work because of the structure of work in Burma – which offered limited opportunities as well as low pay. Not

having to work for family income reinforced my participants to stay in the home full-time, and thus promoted the ideology that a woman's natural location is in the home, performing household work and childcare. This also encouraged the women to "show good manners" as a way to do gender appropriately.

Showing good manners in Burma, as painted by these stories, was an important way these women could earn the title of "good woman." Women often see themselves as the natural providers of home comforts such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare, as evidenced by Blair-Loy (2003), Pessar (1984), and Gabaccia (1994). Those interviewed reinforced this, identifying a woman's primary duty as managing the household and all subjects under its roof, thus preserving their families' well-being and attending to each person's needs. Women showing good manners, therefore, were acting in what Kachin society considered natural for females. Women would not be *doing* their gender accordingly if they failed to fulfill such societal expectations. In the case of Kachin women, their presentation of gendered selves (showing good manners) was an outcome of their society and *legitimized* their place therein.

Kachin women's experience of unpaid and paid work in Burma hovers around gendered spheres. The experience of women helping with work and working for family is shaped by the government structure of work opportunities and earnings they do receive if they work. The overall structure of work and social requirements in Burma for Kachin women discourage them from seeking full-time employment; of course, this is made possible by the ability for a family to survive on only one person's salary. For many women work was sporadic and unnecessary, which further solidified a woman's role in the home.

2.3 Necessity of Redefinitions

With the current state of the economy and labor markets, many families in America find that in married households both must work in order to meet all economic obligations. This is especially true of immigrants and refugees, as most enter ethnic-specific jobs that pay less than a living wage. Consequently, many immigrant men are not able to fulfill the primary expectation on them to be breadwinners (Gabaccia 1994; Kibria 1993; Freeman 1995). Therefore, it becomes

important for immigrant and refugee women to work in order to pay for required bills and to continue working to maintain a certain standard of living in accordance with class-status. These new work identities of both men and women have implications for understanding how women renegotiate gender in the context of work.

While the research participants had some work experience in their homeland, those interviewed were required to enter the workforce in the United States for economic survival (Martin 2004, Benson 1994, Blau, Kahn, Moriarty and Souza 2003; Sassen 2003). Each of the eight people who arrived to the U.S. single found it necessary to secure employment upon arrival; additionally, married women felt it necessary to find work, at least initially, in order to support themselves and their families. Entering the workforce full-time would mean, for many women, having to rethink prior ways of doing gender appropriately within Kachin societal definitions. This section follows several women's stories in regards to the requirement to work and redefine this new necessity in terms of their gender identity.

2.3.1 Working to Pay the Bills

All women related the importance of working in America. Con is a 35 year-old who is married without children and resides in an apartment complex. She noted, "In Burma only one person needs to work in the family. Over here, mom or dad or everybody has to work….needs to work because we have to pay a lot of bills." Her testimony admits the need for all family members to work in America.

Con and her husband first entered the United States in 2003. At that time, a friend referred the couple for work at a Japanese restaurant. They were hired as a sushi chef and a waitress. These two positions were perfect for her and her husband because the restaurant was near her apartment and provided the opportunity to walk to work. This was important because she did not have a car or any money to buy a car. They each earned minimum wage pay and worked approximately 50 hours per week. If only her husband worked, their household income would have only been around $1000 a month. Paying $500 for an apartment did not leave them with much savings, or even enough income to cover basic needs. When asked how she felt

about both of them working, Con said, “Thank you lord! I am very grateful we both have jobs.” Her expression emphasizes the importance she placed on both her and her husband working to earn an income.

However, over time both Con and her husband became dissatisfied with the pay and the treatment they received from the owner of the restaurant. Their hours were cut, which left them with less money per month and Con claimed “the owner, he, was tak[ing] the tips at the end of the night.” She went on to explain that they worked hard, but did not feel compensated for their work. After her husband had worked six months at the restaurant, he began to look for another job.

Con and her husband have several friends in the Kachin community who work at FreshNHot. She explained that when an opening at FreshNHot became available they grasped it right away. She recalled, “We are looking for another new job and we [her husband] had [the] opportunity to take [the] bakery [job]. Now he [is] still working there.” She considered FreshNHot a job environment with stable pay and benefits, unlike her husband’s prior restaurant job as a sushi chef.

Her husband’s employment in a stable work environment enabled her to obtain a position she enjoyed. Con also noted that it was better suited for them, as she very much disliked customer service at the restaurant, “At the restaurant, [I don’t like to perform] customer service. Customer sometimes they have a different situation. Sometimes [it] was very difficult to handle the customer…” Fortunately, she was able to secure another job through a customer while working as a waitress. So, after working one and a half years at the Japanese restaurant, she obtained a position as a preschool teacher and has been working there for two years and two months now. Con described her prior desire to be a childcare teacher through her conversation with the Malaysian Ambassador, “He asked me what do you want to do, you know, in [the] United States? So I told him I want to [be] the teacher. So now I’m [a] teacher. That’s the best. I love it.” While she still resides in the same apartment complex, her apartment is furnished with new furniture, and her and her husband bought two late-model cars. The transition of jobs allowed them to position themselves from no car and hand-me-down furniture, to two brand new cars and

nicer furniture. Such accumulations, in turn, require her continue to work in addition to her husband's income in order to pay these bills. However, because she is doing something she really enjoys now, Con does not complain about having to work full-time. Her work allows her to see children "blossom". The only thing she does not enjoy is the paperwork aspect of her job.

Con's story illustrates the importance of initial entry into paid work, due to financial obligations. She continued to work at the Japanese restaurant even when her husband obtained a stable, higher paying job at FreshNHot. Her husband's job provided her the option to search for a better job, and to purchase two cars and nicer furniture. In turn, she, along with other women interviewed, felt she had to continue working to pay the bills. Since she enjoyed her work, she did not experience any anxiety when facing the decision to be a "good woman" and return to paid work. Con's 40 hour per week (Monday through Friday) schedule also allowed her to perform all the household duties (cooking, cleaning, etc.) while her husband worked at a more physically demanding job. While this story is certainly a tale of cultural change, the majority of the participants indicated that they felt tension between work and family.

2.3.2 Work versus Family

Thawm, a 28 year-old married woman with four children, posed this dilemma due to paid work in America; "In Burma we don't work so we can show very good manner. We have time to be a very good wife and mother." When Thawm first came to America in 2003, through her husband's asylum status, she stayed out of the workforce for over one and a half years. It was important to her to stay-at-home full-time and care for her children, then ages five and six. Her husband worked at FreshNHot and accumulated enough money to put a modest down payment on a new home. Prior to buying the house, Thawm, her husband and their two children lived in a two-bedroom apartment close to his workplace. With the third baby on the way, she felt it was important for them to move out of the apartment. Moving into a house was a source of accomplishment for the family, but financially challenging. An adjustable mortgage payment, a third child on the way, and a car payment prompted Thawm to start working as a housekeeper at a local hotel to supplement her husband's income so they could pay the bills.

Thawm discussed the idea of working to pay bills despite her desire to stay home. She said, "I want to stay home but cannot because [we have] too many bills." She articulated further, that she hated checking the mail because she does not want to open the envelopes. By quoting a proverb, "Money coming is very shout, [and] the money going is very quiet," she discussed how she felt about money. While she may make $1000 or $2000 a month, the money seems invisible at the end of month because it all goes toward bills. She compared the many bills in America to Burma, describing how water is free in Burma and electricity does not cost that much. This lack of bills, or at least the major expense of bills, she tied to being able to stay home in Burma and show good manners. She articulated the lack of choice in regards to work options in America, "I want to stay home but no choice. I stay home [and] the kids they not eat nothing. So I have to work." The lack of choice to work impacted Kachin women in all stages of life. Thawm's work experience over the years portrays her reluctant requirement to work.

After working at her first job for a few months, she felt that the responsibilities of the job were too strenuous on her pregnant body. She then quit and stayed home until her third child was born. Due to the pressure of the house and car payment, she started working again after the baby was born. She obtained work at AssembleNRepair through a friend's referral.

Thawm complained about having to work full-time, but portrayed herself as a good worker at AssembleNRepair. Her duties consisted of receiving damaged or returned merchandise and entering the serial numbers into a computer for processing. She was required to process a certain number of items in one day. Confidently, she said she could process more than the requirements, "I was very, very good. So they very quick[ly] give me a lot of overtime." Explaining the practice of overtime, she said that not a lot of people could obtain overtime as they were slow in receiving and processing returned items. Her ability to process more than others boosted her self-confidence, as well as her income.

Overtime constituted any hours over 40 worked per week and allowed pay of time and a half. While she normally made nine dollars an hour during the first 40 hours per week, she earned thirteen or fourteen dollars per hour during overtime work. Her schedule at

AssembleNRepair, according to her story, was sometimes 18 hours per day. When adding the 45 minute drive to and from work, she could easily be out of the home 20 hours a day. Her time out of the home did not allow her to continue showing good manners, as she did in Burma, and limited her interaction with her children to times when they all slept together.

Within a few months of working at AssembleNRepair, Thawm became pregnant with her fourth child. Pregnancy did not stop her from continuing her overtime routine when the opportunity presented itself. Fortunately, her supervisor allowed her to sit on the job during her pregnancy while others had to stand all day. Overtime pay was used to cover additional expenses she thought she would incur due to another child. She quit AssembleNRepair prior to giving birth to her fourth child.

A friend recommended her to work at a Sushi bar at a local grocery store. Her husband insisted that she wait to start work later, but Thawm felt the necessity to start earning an income as soon as possible. As noted, she promptly returned to work after the birth of each child. Her decision to work revolved around necessity, yet her decision of when to work revolved around choice; as she, not her husband, determined that the start date.

Thawm's new work schedule, along with her four children, made her question her children's placement in formal daycare, which she discussed in the interview. When she had her children in daycare, most of her paycheck went to the provider and little was left for her family. She wondered why she was working to pay someone else to take care of her children. Therefore, Thawm had to decide if working and sending her children to daycare or staying home and having less money would be better for her family.

She chose another option, to work shifting time schedules with her husband. With this option they each could take care of the kids and keep her whole paycheck. In addition, she pulled her children from a private school and entered them in public school. She noted however, that the practice made her feel like a single mother, as she rarely saw her husband. Thawm explained her dilemma in actual expenses.

> Here [everything] is expensive [including] daycare. We [make] $1000 a month, but I have to pay $800 a month [for daycare]. So only $200 [is leftover] for me, so I can't do that. Oh very expensive. At home [in Burma] the daycare is very very good good good – good way you know. [Here] is very hard, you know? The wife, they want to stay home with kids, [but] they can't. The daycare is very expensive.

She mentioned the difficulty in adjusting to this schedule and its toll on her well-being, but her desire to continue to be what she called a 'good mom' encouraged her to continue the cycle.

> Sometimes [it is] very hard for me. But we have no choice. This is America. So sometimes I['m] very tired and my kids [are] sick. So I can't breathe ya know? But I can't think like that. I have to be strong for my kids. So I have to be good mom.

Thawm's story demonstrates the tension experienced by some immigrant women between the home-country culture of childrearing and family life, and the demands of a new, expensive culture that necessitates a two-worker household.

2.3.3. Overview

This research, as evidenced by the majority of the participants, supports scholar's depiction of refugee women as required to work in America and earn an income for the economic survival of their families (Martin 2004; Benson 1994; Blau, Kahn, Moriarty, and Souza 2003). However, most women in the sample did not have a problem working in America – the problem was that they generally have to work every day. The requirement to work full-time interferes with some women's ability to take care of their family and household responsibilities, as one participant mentioned. "[In Burma] they can take care of everything. Here [in America] you cannot do that way because you have to work. You cannot take care of your family and kids full-time." Many participants indicated they have little time to perform family responsibilities in the United States. Necessity to work limits some Kachin women from fully participating in showing good manners. In other words, the structure of work itself blocks women from *doing* gender in traditional ways.

Through the above stories, we see that women with children admittedly struggled with the choice of working versus staying home. In addition, the main struggle was not between working and not working, but rather one of cultural disconnect – that in the United States, it is necessary

for both parents to work. This is supported by the fact that eight of the women in my study desired to quit work if economically stable based on their husbands income alone. Choice, or lack thereof, played a large part in my participant's stories of work and family. Blair-Loy (2003) calls this tension the "family devotion schema," as women feel their loyalties and time are divided, they do not fulfill their culturally natural position as good mothers and wives by staying home and tending to the house and children. Women drew on their prior conceptions of work interfering with showing good manners to describe the diminishing opportunities to continue earning their right as women in the traditional way. Positions of paid work often dislocate Kachin women with families from the opportunity to take care of everything – "their family and children full time."

2.4 Gender at Work and Home: "We have to work like men"

Several prominent researchers (Espiritu 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003; Foo 2003; Vernez 1999) portray refugee women as obtaining work in ethnic and female specific jobs. More specifically, these service sector and factory positions are oriented in a few industries (textiles, electronics, and domestic services). However, many of my participants enter work outside these three sectors. Women characterize their work as masculine, emphasizing that they now work alongside men, performing what they consider to be masculine tasks. I use the term "masculine tasks" to describe respondent's conception of activities that were traditionally assigned to men.

In this section, the three main types of employment (FreshNHot, Sushi, and AssembleNRepair) are discussed, utilizing each participant's narrative in order to derive insight as to culturally accepted gender behaviors on the job and in the household. For readability, I have divided the discussion into separate sections, describing each work venue.

2.4.1 FreshNHot

Lu is a 31 year-old single woman who came to America through Guam in 2000. Her first job in America was at FreshNHot. According to Lu, the division of labor in America and Burma differs. "In America, men's and women's jobs are the same," she said. She implied that women now work the same jobs and positions that men do. Lu discussed her struggle adjusting to men's

work. “I saw that they [were] doing the man[‘s] job [for] eight hours, sometimes ten hours. I mean it [was] really hard for me….I cry…I [had] never done like that before.”

Her first position at FreshNHot was loading baked items onto trays and then lifting those trays on a dolly. The structure of assembly lines at FreshNHot mandated precise timing or the whole process stopped. Lu was required to lift all items consistently and on time. She emphasized that her work was physically tedious and demanding. Lu revealed FreshNHot’s opportunity to request different types of work, or Lines. Lines included lifting the flour bags and pouring them into the machines, operating and overseeing the machinery and/or oven, inspecting items for quality control, making baked goods, bagging baked goods, and loading bagged items onto the dolly. After working at the bakery for a few years, Lu requested that she be allowed to change job functions, instead being allowed to make the baked goods (Line 2).

Despite different Lines, workers are paid according to their seniority. If two people (one man, one woman) start working at the same time, they are paid the same rate regardless of Lines, or type of job function, worked. Therefore, people requesting different Lines are actually requesting a more personality-fitting Line; in this case, it was gender-motivated. The request, however, was not unique to Lu. Several participants requested Lines that require less physical exertion. In other words, women sought Lines more in line with traditionally female appropriate tasks.

At a glance, gender appearances are blurred at FreshNHot. While men and women work the same Line at FreshNHot, they are also required to wear the same uniform provided by the company. White uniforms (pants and shirts) are standard. Their hair, regardless of position and gender, is neatly tucked away under a hair net in order not to contaminate the food. Entering the floor of the FreshNHot bakery one is not able to determine who is male or female, especially glancing at the same Line.

Lu eventually quit, after working at the bakery for five years, the last two at a more feminine-appropriate Line; still, she noted that the work was still physically demanding. This

brought up an interesting research point that centered around appropriate gender performance for women working in masculine described tasks.

Mai migrated to America in 1999 and eventually became a FreshNHot worker. She studied leadership training at a North Texas Bible College for one year, after which she sought political asylum and then full-time work. She obtained a job as a waitress at a local restaurant through a friend. Later, another friend encouraged her to apply to FreshNHot because of the stable benefits and pay, which she did, successfully. Her first duties included loading bagged items on the dolly. Later she requested to work at Line 4, bagging baked goods (a more female appropriate position).

In 2002, Mai was married. Currently she has two young children under the age of five. Mai's husband has worked sushi since he came to America in 2001. They were able to purchase a new home in 2004 with their combined incomes. While both Mai and her husband work full-time to pay the bills, she stated it was difficult to juggle childcare arrangements due to their work schedules. Her worries turn to the next school year when her oldest son will start Kindergarten and his school schedule will pose a conflict with the couple's work schedule, "He gets off at 11:30 a.m. It will be very difficult. I don't have time to pick him up. Even to put him over there longer will be more money." Her statement 'putting him over there longer' meant that extended daycare hours will cost more money. She was apprehensive to pay more money in addition to all her bills. However, she was unsure how to arrange dropping-off and picking-up her two children at daycare.

Her husband does help her with the children and with other household duties, albeit to a lesser extent. She does not find fault with this, however, as she feels that childcare is primarily her responsibility, and of women in general; she described the responsibility as "having to do everything." She added, "Sometimes I feel I am a robot here. Going to work, coming home, with the kids, and then the cycle begins again. Women have it hard." She further articulated that while women in Burma show good manners only, here they are required to continue showing good manners *and* work.

Mai felt obligated to continue working because she had to help pay the mortgage and the car notes. She took the six week paid maternity leave option from FreshNHot and then returned back to work after each of her children were born. For those six weeks, she was paid sixty percent of her original income. After the initial paid leave, FreshNHot also offered her the option to continue her maternity leave up to six months without pay. Mai's choice to return to work likely revolved around economic constraints she felt in regards to loss of income if she continued on unpaid maternity leave. Mai planned to stay in her current position at FreshNHot due to her benefits, despite how she viewed her work environment. Mai explained her work at the bakery as tiring, "Okay so now my current job, I don't like it because sometime[s] [the] work is too hard – like a machine – running machine." She has good health insurance for herself and her children. While her husband envisioned opening a family-run sushi business, Mai desired to stay in her current factory job for the stable benefits. "For me I think [I want to stay at] this job because [of] the benefits … Because here I [have] seen a lot of people [say] 'I don't have insurance' and their kids got sick." The reason Mai continued the job she did not necessarily like was due to the benefits it offered her family. Mai downplayed the physical demands as she portrayed her job as taking care of her family.

FreshNHot is a work environment that proves to be physically demanding for some women. While complaining about the physical aspect of the job, others downplay those demands; although the demands do make a difference in household obligations.

2.4.2 Sushi

Kaw, a stay-at-home-mom in Burma, came to America after her husband was granted political asylum. She borrowed money to purchase airplane tickets for her and her son. It was with this debt that she felt a strong need to find any type of work soon after her arrival. She explained, "But whatever job [I obtain], I just take it, for the money."

Kaw entered several jobs in the informal sector (homecare, janitor, and babysitter). Her subsequent pregnancies, three in total, would require her to quit each position and then look for another job right after giving birth. She had the opportunity to obtain a nursing assistant

certificate and started working as an assistant nurse. While she really enjoyed her nursing work, she felt she was not making enough money for her family. Kaw took a friend's advice to enter sushi because of the money it entails compared to nursing.

She was quite hesitant to enter sushi because she learned from her husband's experience in Japan that food prepared by women was less desirable to customers. To her surprise, the owner hired her despite the fact that she was a woman. She articulated, "Even though we are [a] high school teacher, elementary [school] teacher or nurse [in Burma], we [women are] lower than men. But in the U.S. [it is] not like that. We got our right, I think." Kaw was referring to a woman's right to work. She felt women now had the same options of work as men. Eventually, Kaw capitalized on this ability; she became confident in her work and later acquired two sushi stores with the help of a friend.

> She [my friend] help me [buy] everything and then I can start my own business. Then, after one and a half year[s] [the business] is [doing] very good. Because the first couple [of] months, one to three months, I have to just spend, spend, spend. But after three [to] four months the profit c[a]me in.

Such opportunity to work also required additional demands on her. When she lived in California, she commuted across two counties [250 miles per day] and she had to work 70 hours per week. A typical day for Kaw consisted of waking up at 3 a.m., going to the store, and preparing sushi. At 9 a.m., she would go to her other store and make sushi. After she finished her duties at the second store, she would go back to the first store again to check on her sales for the day before she drove back to home. She worked seven days a week, since she owned the businesses.

In comparison to FreshNHot, sushi requires more hours even though it takes less physical exertion. The making of sushi is also comparable to the making of art or handicrafts, thus it is seen as more female-specific. Sushi requires both women and men to wear similar outfits [gloves, a hair net, and an apron] and sushi chefs perform the same tasks (making the sushi rice, cutting fish and vegetables, and then preparing the sushi entries). Chefs decorate the plate to please the customer's eye. Therefore, both men and women sushi chefs have an

obligation to attract the customer with their skill. A different person has a different way to decorate the presentation of food, while following the flavor set by the owner or company. This may allude to one way sushi allows women to do gender at work.

The importance lies with not only in the look and taste of the sushi, but also in the amount chefs can produce within a set time. Kaw, as other women in my study who make sushi, mentioned having to work six or seven days per week for long hours (sometimes for ten to twelve hours per day). In addition, many mentioned working non-stop with few vacation days.

While pay is adequate, benefits are rare. Women employed in sushi are typically listed as self-employed franchisees or are employed at restaurants that serve sushi. They usually do not have benefit packages from their employment. Therefore, they must rely on their spouse's benefit package.

Having to work full-time like her husband, Kaw pointed out that women get a 'bonus' in America. She defined a "bonus" as housework in addition to paid work.

> Men, they just go to the job, come back, relax, eat, and take care of baby a [little] bit. But then, we women, have the same job like a man and then come back and do everything- laundry and vacuum and clean up and sometimes cook.

Kaw is frustrated that as a woman she has bonus work and that, in contrast, men have none. Her frustration lies with both the structure of work but also men's lack of initiative to assist with women's added responsibilities. Kaw is bothered by additional chores that she has to do in comparison to her husband due to traditional household gendered distribution of labor. However, she did say that her husband does help with several household tasks (childcare, cleaning, and cooking), though not as often as she would like. In the Kachin community, she circulated stories of having to do everything, implying that her husband is not helping with the children, cooking, or cleaning. She stated she has to do everything. This shows women's talking, or bragging about what they have to do in the household as the way to show the community their "good woman" stature. However, Kachin women may not necessarily be the ones performing all the task(s) in reality.

Kaw was ambivalent about working as a woman. While she enjoyed the opportunity to work, she begrudged the limitations on family life that accompanied it. She also actively felt the tension between caring for her family and working. When asked to give her opinion, in general, she said that working is "in some ways good but not good [also] because we have four kids." While her in-law parents live with her, she said that they are too old to help, and that daycare services are too expensive. Even though she enjoyed her work options as a woman, she also felt guilty for not being there physically for her children. Positioning her work as a requirement for her family, she was still dissatisfied with having to give up her time with the family due to work.

2.4.3 AssembleNRepair

Hka, a single 31 year-old, came to America in 2005. She entered an Intensive English Language Program to further her knowledge of English so that she could continue graduate studies in Biology. After completing her program, she visited a friend in Texas and decided to stay and seek political asylum.

After being granted asylum status, she started looking for work, but she articulated the difficulty of educated refugee women to find employment that matches their training.

> I finish [my] biology [degree] so I was expecting [to find a job in] that [area]. I'm still trying to get the right position for me. I love science…so I was hoping that I could find a [job] related to my study…The [job] with the related study is a little bit difficult for us to find.

Upon the recommendation of a friend, she interviewed and obtained a job at AssembleNRepair through an employment agency. Women who work at AssembleNRepair initially had to go through employment agencies for temporary hiring. Employees hired through agencies do not receive benefits until hired by AssembleNRepair permanently. Typically, it takes over one year for the company to officially hire temporary workers.

Besides withholding benefits, employment agencies only pay employees a portion of what the company pays them for the employee's service. Hka portrayed that wages were too low for the position. "I demand … I want to demand … Most of my friends would like to demand a little bit higher wages. So that we can stand up and rise alone in the United States … I can't

survive by myself." Those who work at AssembleNRepair are often limited in both pay and benefits due to their initial placement by employment agencies. Employment agencies also block access to resources and advancement, or at least prolong the process to obtain those benefits.

Once Hka was hired by the company, she sought employment in a different department. Hka complained about her former position, which required her to stand up the whole day and process merchandise. She discussed her physical ailments due to the position, "Our feet hurt, and my back ached." Hka is now working at the repair section, which she calls "a raise". The repair section allows workers to sit on the job and Hka considers the job easy in terms of physical demand. In relation to other jobs, AssembleNRepair has low physical labor requirements; no women referred to this location as masculine work.

Hka, one of three women excited about work options in America, recalled women's limited options in Burma.

> Usually in my country the women should have a baby. Women in America they can work and have a job like any other man. It doesn't matter. But in our country almost all the ladies just stay home, especially when you get married. Oh it's not your job anymore [to] work out[side] the house. [Women] just stay home and clean the house.

Hka mentioned how women in America can now work instead of just staying home. Her story portrays women having to show good manners full-time in Burma because of the large extended family. However, such gendered requirements change, at least for single women in America. She enjoyed the newfound freedom from not *having* to show good manners. On the other hand, she assumed the traditional female requirements by cooking and cleaning for her male room-mate.

Roi's story, in contrast, states with regret that AssembleNRepair limited her ability to show good manners. Roi, a 43-year-old married woman, came to America through Guam in 2001. She was single at the time, but later married. Her husband works at FreshNHot and they have a one-year old son. After her son was born, the couple bought a house and a new car. In addition to welcoming their new child into the world, they also sponsored a refugee family of four

by offering shelter and food. Under these circumstances, Roi emphasized the importance and need to work everyday, unlike her sporadic schedule in Burma,

> Right now we have the baby and we have the family. So we buy the home, right? So I want to stay home and take care [of] my baby, but I can't. I have to work everyday. We pay the bill a lot, right? If my husband work[s] only, we don't have enough [income from] that job. So we both [have to work].

Roi has worked for AssembleNRepair for almost two years. The company hired her permanently during her pregnancy. As she was recently hired, Roi was not covered by the Federal Medical Leave Act policy which would have allowed her three months non-paid maternity leave. Roi was disappointed that the company would not consider her prior year of service with the company through the employment agency towards her tenure. Due to the regulations of the company, Roi could only take one week off for her maternity leave. If she did not return to work after one week, she could lose her job. She desired to stay home with her newborn longer, but felt the pressure to go back to work in order to meet family financial obligations.

Two female friends lived in her house and took care of her son when she returned to AssembleNRepair; this was helpful, as she then had the ability to work and earn money while she felt comfortable knowing that her child was properly cared for by another. On the other hand, she did not have an opportunity to bond with her son. In public settings, she often tried to take care of her child to continue the appearance of strong bonds of motherhood, but the child yearned for one of the other caretakers. Often, Roi was away from him during the day and she would return home at night when he was asleep.

While work distanced her from motherhood, it would not distract her from completing household tasks. She still strived to be known as the best cook in the community, which she claimed as an attribute of being a good woman. Working at AssembleNRepair did allow her to take care of household duties, even though her schedule did not allow her to take care of her son full-time. Roi emphasized one aspect of showing good manners over another and eventually defined her employment as working hard for her son to compensate for not being present with him full-time.

2.4.4. Overview

Kachin women and men often enter similar positions of paid work in the United States. Some Kachin women, in my study, perform what they call masculine tasks in various levels of physical labor. They are now required to perform gender in ways antithetical to prior conceptions as they execute masculine activities at work. Furthermore, these masculine spheres of work require redefinitions of what it means to be a good woman.

Specific to the subjects' workplaces, FreshNHot is by far the most intense masculine-work environment, followed by sushi, then AssembleNRepair. While sushi and AssembleNRepair are more female-specific, they also pay less. This study agrees with existing literature (England, Herbert, Stanek Kilbourne, Reid, and McCreary Megdal 1994; Rose and Hartmann 2004) regarding female-specific work paying less.

Although AssembleNRepair has the most female-specific work, it offers less opportunity for motherhood. Meanwhile, women employed at FreshNHot have a rather generous maternity leave, despite the masculine nature of work at the bakery. Sushi does not offer maternity options as most are self-employed or work at restaurants. Those employed in sushi or at AssembleNRepair through employment agencies are given little time off, if any, for maternity leaves.

Various work environments also offered various outcomes of childcare and housework assignments. Women employed in sushi require more help with household duties than women in other locations because of the long hours they work. Next, women performing physically demanding work at FreshNHot require additional help with housework, but to a lesser extent than those at sushi. Women working at AssembleNRepair were able to perform more household duties than women in other types of work.

Most women wanted to follow culturally acceptable means of showing good manners, but the nature of work inhibited them from doing so. Other women who were excited about paid work still reinforced traditional showing good manners, but were happy they did not *have* to. Women's renegotiations of gendered spheres of work or continuing to show good manners to the best of

their ability in the host country led to what Kaw called “bonus” work. However, bonus work was not their choice and their frustrations focused on their husbands little or lack of help.

However, as shown in Kaw’s story, the discrepancies of what is said in the community gossip channel and what is actually practiced in the home may be different. Regardless of their accuracy, the mere act of Kaw’s storytelling shows the importance of showing good manners in this newly immigrated community. Women alluded to the importance of appearance of performing gender within traditional boundaries of showing good manners. Thus, women in my study continued to reinforce gendered spheres of unpaid work or redefine the boundaries within gendered limits.

2.5 Conclusion

Gendered spheres of work in America are altered and tailored due to how women experienced both paid and unpaid work in Burma. The performance of showing good manners was important to my participants because if they met these requirements, they felt as if they were living within the appropriate boundaries of being a good woman. According to participants, a woman’s main job in Burma was in the household; work outside the home was seen as secondary. In America, required work, especially in masculine work environments, necessitates new articulations of how to earn one’s status as a woman. Work requirements in America interfere with Kachin women’s ability to continue their status through showing good manners, which entails taking complete care of the household and its inhabitants. The structure of paid work in America, with its long hours and physical demands, stifled women’s ability to perform household duties; despite the stress of long workweeks, the women still maintained primary responsibility over the house and its occupants. When interacting with me (a stay at home mother and student), women have used the term “lazy kitchen woman” (a rather nasty name to have in Kachin terms), some women did let down their guard and opened up about their inability to perform of showing good manners in regards to housework. This portrays the requirement to show and tell how they are showing good manners within the community. Sometimes what they

say and what they do are two different stories. This illustrates the continued importance of showing good manners as a way for women to obtain status as a good woman.

While women may say they seek changes within the unpaid labor force or feel overburdened with the requirements of both paid and unpaid work, they have an obligation to uphold the appearance of showing good manners despite lack of actual practice. The family devotion schema of the homeland, in respect to gendered unpaid work, is a deeply ingrained ideology that is not easily loosened even though the structure of paid work in America negates it.

CHAPTER 3

RE-MAPPING CLASS: NARRATIVES OF SHOWING GOOD MANNERS

3.1 Introduction to Chapter

In the previous chapter, I discussed how women performed gender through unpaid and paid work spheres in both Burma and America, and the importance my participants ascribe to showing good manners. In this chapter, I respond to the newfound give and take between showing good manners, in light of workforce entry, in regards to class.[10] First, I analyze how the participants define themselves, in terms of class prior to migration. Then, I analyze how they redefine their class-status in America, based on opportunities and work narratives.

This work draws from the concept of West and Fenstermaker's (1995) "doing difference," in which they conceptualize not only the social doings of gender, but also the race and class in the analysis of social inequalities. Their work focuses on the intersection and inequality of the different ways in which race, class, and gender are accomplished. As such, I examine Kachin women's narratives of class through the structural inequalities that perpetuate class, the interactions and symbols that constitute class and the self-definitions, and tensions that exist therein. I explore their narratives of work in regards to how they "do class" in America with both the context of their work as a factor and their prior ideologies of how to do class in Burma.

While my focus is on the renegotiations of class from my respondent's stories, I also conclude in consonant with Hill Collins (2000) and West and Fenstermaker (1995) - that class and gender cannot be separated as they are intrinsically bound together and not easily teased apart. Therefore, while the focal point of this chapter is on class, gender is not completely silent in my analysis.

[10] Throughout the chapter, I use class in terms of my participant's understandings and definitions of class but also in terms of contrasting income and occupational status.

3.2 Homeland Class-Status: "Not rich, not poor"

Gabaccia (1994) states that middle-class refugee women's status can be claimed by women based on their own local definitions of class-status as perceived through cultural and social contexts. As Ngai concludes (2005: 26), "class is as much a concept of culture and lived experience as of historical and structural conditioning." The participants self-identify as middle-class in Burma in relation to the larger community; as Roi stated, "[In Burma] [I'm] not rich, not poor." In this section, the key ways in which women describe their middle-class status in Burma are presented. Notably, they focus on educational opportunities, family occupations, resources available through one salary, and showing good manners.

3.2.1 Education

Education, or at least access to education, was mentioned by most women as prominent in the middle-class lifestyle in Burma. To have access to education, people in Burma must live in an urban area and have transportation to school, as many children must walk, bike or take buses due to the poor infrastructure in the country. Various minority groups do not have such access to education as they live in rural parts of Burma. However, each participant lived in urban areas where access to education was quite easy. In light of government school-closures due to unstable military rule, many Kachin attended private schools, where the curriculum focused on leisure trades, such as music and language. These schools catered to those seeking to live abroad and attendance was a sign of middle-class status. Several of the participants went to such schools in times of university closure.

Hka illuminates the importance her family placed on education and her access to education due to her families' class. As discussed in chapter two, Hka moved to the capital city so her brother and sister could have access to educational opportunities. She was working full-time as well as studying in a private language school. Her brother and sister were also attending a private music school. Once they finished their studies, Hka planned to start her undergraduate work at the university. However, the universities were closed due to political unrest. Therefore, she pursued a degree outside of the country.

Her cousin worked abroad and helped her find scholarship money to attend school. Connections with her local church in Burma also provided her with additional funds for living expenses. She finished her bachelor's degree in Biology, and then sought graduate study in America. Again with the help of her cousin, she was able to make connections with a university in America; however, she was not able to attend the school, and completed only the English Language Program. Shortly after her study, she began working and applied for political asylum.

Hka's story demonstrates the importance of location for university or private study, as her family had to move to the capital city in order to obtain an education. On the other hand, because the government had closed the main universities, she was unable to continue her formal education at the college level. Therefore, she sought options outside the country to obtain her degree. Thanks to her family's access, she was fully funded during her undergraduate career and was able to come to America to study.

Hka was the only participant to obtain her degree outside the country, while three women graduated with their bachelors in Burma, and three started college but migrated prior to their matriculation. Family background led to financial networks that allowed many of my participants to give priority to education. Education, then, was both a mark of and a direct result of middle-class status.

3.2.2 Occupational Status

Mahler (1995) rightly points out that migrants are among the few in the homeland who have the resources to migrate. As mentioned in chapter one, Kachin refugee women in the North Texas area had the means to accumulate resources to migrate from Burma and seek political asylum in other countries.

Roi, who was single during her time in Burma, talked about the importance of the geographical location of Kachin State where most of my participants resided. Kachin State, as opposed to other ethnic states, has vast resources. According to Roi, "In Chin State they don't have nothing. They don't have a business. My country is Kachin State. They have a lot ruby, jade, sapphire, and gold. So we have a lot." Roi compared Kachin with Chin, another ethnic

minority group in Burma, who do not have the same resources that Kachin do. Well known for its Jade mines, Kachin State offers a wealth of jobs and money for those interested in trading the precious stone.

Actually, Roi's husband worked previously as a Jade broker between Jadeland[11] and China. He would go to several cities looking for business owners who obtained quality jade. Then, he would take the jade to other areas of Burma or across the border to China. His job was financially rewarding but it was also dangerous. Roi described a time when her husband was almost killed by the military government when he was traveling to China for trading purposes.

Jade, according to Roi, was seen as an easy way to earn your way into middle-class status. Her father employed several jade miners. Her mother, brother, and sister owned a tea shop and a jewelry store (to sell the jade her father mined). Occasionally Roi, the youngest sibling, would assist her family in the two stores. Her main duty was to sell the homemade jewelry in the market. She was involved with her family business at her leisure, not on a regular basis.

Due to her families' occupation(s) and class-status, she was able to accumulate the money to travel to America through Guam. She told me about the financial cost, "[To go to] Guam, we have to show between $500 to $1000 [U.S. dollars]. So we [buy] the airplane ticket over $1000." As she mentioned, the gathering of this amount of money is quite difficult for most people. Thus, the place and space of Kachin State lends itself to middle-class families, as resources abound.

Several participants' fathers, besides Roi's, worked as Jadeland entrepreneurs (jade mining), which advanced the financial status of families and their ability to migrate. All interviewees' fathers were employed in economically stable jobs and middle-class professions, such as government officials, pastors, Bible college professors. Salaries for these women's fathers provided all the families' needs and thus a second income was unnecessary. My participants cited work in Burma as paying a family wage.

[11] Jadeland refers to the land area that people mine for Jade.

3.2.3 Showing Good Manners

Most participants discussed their father's paid work experience and their mother's responsibility to show good manners to the family and community. Women regarded females as those who cared for the home but, by extension, actually cared for the Kachin community; through their work, things ran smoothly and social relationships were fostered and nurtured. Kaw described her experience of her mother managing relationships to arrange her marriage. She portrayed these relationships of arranged marriage or mayu-dama customs (Litner 1986) as the responsibility of women in Burma. At the age of 18, Kaw got married to a man 17 years older than her. At the time of her engagement, her fiancé was in Japan. She only met him a week prior to her marriage and did not really know that much about him. Kaw's mother had arranged the engagement through his mother and family.

Her mother played a pivotal part in her arranged marriage. Due to Kachin tradition, only certain families can receive her daughter as their in-law. Her mother found her future husband, who was single, held a prestigious degree, and later owned a pharmacy, through her established social networks. He was looking for a younger wife, as he wanted to start a family. Kaw's mother went to speak to the man's mother and asked if she would consider receiving her daughter for her son. This request does not only come as words, but also as gestures of hospitality that have to be conducted with delicacies (gifts as well as showcasing the daughter's qualities). She persuaded the groom's family that Kaw was young and could give him many children. After several conversations and signs of hospitality, the marriage was arranged. Through her mother's social connections, as well as husband's profession, she was able to come to America. Her example of showing good manners not only served her daughter in finding a husband, but was also instrumental in increasing her own family's class-status.

3.2.4 Overview

Through the above stories, women position themselves in middle-class backgrounds in Burma. The professional occupations of their fathers and even the location of Kachin State in regards to wealth allowed my participants access to education and migration opportunities. In

Kachin culture, women that are careful to show good manners do so in hopes of being rewarded. Most often, these prizes are manifested in economic mobility. The participant women supported this evidence through testimony, thus further showing that, because women are responsible for portraying the "doing" of class, it is gender based.

In America however, daily routines allow less time for women to continue homeland class-status requirements. Entering the paid workforce full-time required a reconsideration of their own social location in regards to class. As Kelly (1993) illustrates (through an interview with a case manager at a refugee resettlement agency) Iranian middle-class refugees bring with them pre-migration experiences and identities related to affluence. Would Kachin refugee women's resources convert when they arrived in America? To examine this question, I turn to a discussion of my participant's structural constraints in the American workforce.

3.3 Structural Constraints: Class Designations in Work Spheres

Globalization has changed the labor market in America. Immigrants and refugees in America have now become what Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton (1992: 13) state as the "proletarian in work and class sector in America." In other words, due to the downgraded skill in labor and simpler work (Sassen 2003), immigrants are entering unstable work environments abandoned by American workers (Waldinger 1994). Furthermore, Portes and Rumbaut (2006: 94) indicate that immigrants and refugees are often confined to the low-wage segment of the market.

Hong (2006: 111) touches on this notion when she mentions the "new proletariat under globalization is not so much the white working-class as it is those who…could not be incorporated in a white working-class: colonized and racialized subjects…" North Texas' labor market, with its many factories and service industries, lends itself to the hegemonic ladder of employment options with immigrants and refugees entering working-class jobs. The current labor market itself leads to refugee's initial entry into cheap labor, but I argue their continuance in service sector jobs is a consequence of hegemonic "othering," or racial and class labeling of refugees. This, in turn, I suggest leads to job typing and blocked occupational mobility.

3.3.1 Linguism

Entering a new context requires a reconstruction of identity based on the new environment (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Berger and Luckmann (1966) articulate that the most important vehicle for upholding identity is daily interactions (conversation) with other people. Kristeva (Reineke 1997) and Lacan (1985) also position the subject imagined in language. Often, American discourse on refugees comes from a position of helping those unfortunate victims of non-democratic, third-world nations, which in turn, determines how renegotiations of class in relation to the dominant group proceed. Embedded in the concept of asylum is the message that "*we* are *helping you* to survive." Therefore, there is a dominant stance over these refugees and a justification that follows the commodification of their labor. This perceived difference labels refugees as "other."

Several of my participants described stigmatization through the term refugee. Some feel that they are labeled as a Third World person with little to no education, no English skills, and no ability or desire to learn (Portes and Rumbaut 2006); what I term "linguism." In this paper linguism is defined as: a hegemonic preconception of refugees as unable to speak the standard English, accent of the host country which, in turn, intersects with racial and class stereotyping. Linguism not only applies to refugees, but also to immigrants. Even though they may speak English well, the reactions from those in the host country focus on their unfamiliar accents and grammatical usage reflected in their mother tongue. Portes and Rumbaut (2006) argue that language, or perceived language, and intellectual ability are instinctively tied together. Furthermore, I contend that language becomes a measuring stick for social status in America.

Htu, a 30 year-old married woman with one child, indicated that she quit her first job because of discrimination, which she attributed to linguism. She and her husband arrived in America less than two years ago. When she first arrived in America, a friend referred her to a restaurant job. She described how she felt one employee was personally targeting her because of her perceived lack of English,

> I am dissatisfied with that [job] because the language problem with [the] person. The person [from her job] look[ed] down on me. And then everyday [they] look down on me. And then the[y were] dealing with me [with] discrimination. That's why I quit.

Later she indicated how unhappy she was because she thought the employer was pressuring her to work "like a robot" because of this marked difference. She explained, "The owner rush me – do this, do that." This treatment, along with the discrimination she felt, led to dissatisfaction with her work environment. She is currently selling homemade food from her home as she did in Burma; however, her husband is a sushi chef at a grocery store and their combined income is not sufficient to support their basic needs, so she is looking for another job. Htu's ultimate desire is to own her own restaurant. She is consulting with other Kachin women about the possibility of co-ownership even though she does not have the financial resources at this point.

While Htu described the linguism she felt at her first job, she also narrated another factor that may have propelled her out of the workforce. Htu expressed her mental anguish as her work schedule blocked her from fully showing good manners. She recalled an incident in which her husband was physically assaulted at their apartment complex and hospitalized. This attack happened while she was at work. Htu felt responsible for the attack due to the fact that she was not there because she was at work. She said, "I repent for the hard work and hardship" here in America. She indicated, "I don't want to work but I have to because of all the bill payments." Her story exemplifies the desire to take care of her husband, yet the requirement she felt to work. This pressure to choose between family and work echoed through many participants' stories. They perceive work in the U.S. as inhibiting their ability to take care of their family full-time.

Thawm, the friend who advised Htu to apply to her former restaurant job, also worked at the same restaurant and fought the same self-perceived linguism from her employer. She said,

> Sometimes they [did] not speak English. Go get papeno – [that means] cucumber….So go get that, go get that. Do this. Sometimes they speak Spanish. So I don't understand. I don't understand [and] they shout [at] me. So sometimes I want to go back [to] my country. But right now my heart is very strong.

She continued, saying that she went home and wrote out a list of terms to study so she would know them and build her confidence. Her story indicates it is not only white Americans perpetuating the stereotype of linguism, but other minority groups as well, such as the owner of the restaurant who bought into and continued hegemonic standards of class.

3.3.2 Job fitting

This linguism is connected to racism, classism and sexism in my participant's stories, and is portrayed as linked to job typing or placing refugees in specific categories of work that are perceived as 'fitting' the individual or group. For instance, Thawm revealed that one employment agency (while interviewing for a job at AssembleNRepair) thought that all refugees did not understand English; this agent had a practice of turning Burmese refugee women away without interviewing them. Thawm used other women's stories of discrimination as a learning opportunity. Her response was to act confident, and as if she could do everything. During the interview, the agent asked Thawm how she was useful, to which she replied "Yeah I know everything. I can do that."

Thawm's experiences in job-fitting and linguism helped her counsel her children after bouts with racist comments encountered at school. She told me her son was recently asked, "Why you come [to the] United States?' and others stated 'Go back to your Asian country.' Her ten year-old son cried because of these remarks. Because she experienced similar treatment on the job, she told him to be strong and smart. She was encouraging him to build his own confidence because others will likely tear him down because of the perceived differences of his skin color, language, and culture. However, she was also encouraging him to study hard and use education as a tool to overcome labeling. Thawm bragged about her daughter and son competing for grades, mentioning that her son came home with a 100 the other day. She was quite proud of his accomplishment.

Thawm and Htu's story illustrate perceptions of themselves and treatment as 'other' through experiences of discrimination due to language, placement in certain sectors of work and

continuation in these sectors due to their inability to escape the working-class job sector. Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton (1992) state that hegemonic standards of class are practiced and internalized by both sides ensuring the current standards are left intact. According to some narratives, Kachin also internalize boundaries of class and thus limit themselves within working-class opportunities. Lu's story reflects such self-limitations as her desire to become a nurse quickly changed to becoming a nursing assistant. "Maybe next year, I don't know. I have save[d] a lot [of] money. I want to go to school. Nursing. Not really [nursing], but I can [be a] nursing assistant. That's fine too."

3.3.3 Overview

Kachin refugee women see themselves as displaced from their own country due to external factors; they enter America and experience work displacement. They desire to achieve American standards of economic and social mobility along with stable jobs that allow them to participate in family life similar to their homeland and enhance their educational status within America.

These stories portray the dominant discourse on refugees – namely, that it is class-based. Once they enter the American workforce, they are deemed to be of the same class as low-skill workers, regardless of their prior middle-class homeland identities. This perpetuates a continuance in ethnic specific labor for Kachin refugee workers, which is also a typical pattern for other refugee groups (Chinen 1997; Kibria 1993). Kristeva (Reineke 1997) and Lacan (1985) claim that 'others' may glimpse the promise of unity propagated by the dominant society, but they are never fully accepted into the dominant class due to the 'alienati[ng] structure of language' or othering (54).

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) posits the objectification of the Other, in which the dominant group judges the 'other' group as inferior, limits the cultural space in which they may reside. Refugees, according to those women interviewed, often have limited identities and mobility as defined by the hegemonic group standards. Therefore, they may never be able to fully achieve the same identification or status as the main group. Here we see what Hill Collins (2000: 229)

calls “race, class, and gender intertwined with nation,” through the dominant discourse on refugees. In the next section, I will address their internal renegotiations of class-status.

3.4 Expectations for So-called Limited Human and Social Capital

I discussed previously that Kachin women had access to education and migration opportunities. Despite this human and social capital, they enter working-class jobs in America. However they actually earn higher incomes in America due to their higher economic status in the United States in comparison to Burma. In other words, while the participants portrayed their entry into working-class jobs as a downgrade in occupational status, the money they earned in comparison to Burma has increased. In this section, I use women’s stories to analyze this discrepancy along with how they deal with the inconsistency.

3.4.1 Upward Mobility?

Similar to several others, Kai, a 34 year-old married woman with two kids, entered America with some college experience. She expanded on the idea that she would be unable to use her prior education in the America workforce and mentioned language as a limitation.

> I can’t think about it because even though I [graduated from the] university at my country, I know we cannot use here. My husband he already graduated. But he cannot use over here. If we want to use it [prior education] we have to go through some kinds of tests.[12] But I am poor in English-kind of.

Not only does she draw on her education not translating in the American workforce, but she also identified herself as poor in English. Her English is quite understandable, but she has an accent. This shyness to exhibit one’s skills also re-enforces linguism and holds Kachin women back in working-class jobs.

Six other women’s narratives relayed they are aware of the fact that their skills and education would not translate in America. These women were among the earliest arrivals so it is important to note they may have contextualized their stories to cultural expectations to cover up experiences of unfulfilled hopes.

[12] American and international educational equivalency is determined on an individual basis based on degree, coursework, university and grading system.

Actually, Kai was excited about her opportunity to work in America. She delights in additional options besides staying home. "I am proud to be a woman in the U.S. because we have the [ability] to work the same job with man. As women, we can work the same [job]. Nothing [is] different. My country, oh my god, women better stay home," said Kai. Kai mentioned that her mother stayed home with her brothers and sisters in Burma, while her dad worked as a high school principal. Her family's experience with work was one of professional status. However, in America she worked in working-class jobs without promise, at least yet, of moving into the professional sector.

Kai's employment history and her current work environment highlights how she felt about work and the pay she received. I will briefly review her work locations and earnings to give the reader an idea of her blue-collar work history and her claim that she is, at least for now, unable to obtain higher occupational status employment.

Her first job was sewing emblems on t-shirts. Since she did not have a car, the church provided her with a bicycle for the ten to fifteen minute trip to work. Kai described how sometimes she was drenched with water because of the rain and how she would have to take a fresh set of clothes and change at work. She worked there for three months, making $6.50 an hour. After 9/11 however, the company laid her off. Her next job - housekeeping for a large hotel chain, paid seven dollars per hour. However, because her hours were based on the guest-occupancy in the hotel, she hardly received full-time work. Therefore, her income was not steady. It was typical for her to work three or four days a week which offered her less than $1000 per month. She rode the bus for transportation to and from work to the hotel for the nearly seven months she was employed. When her friend obtained a car, she interviewed for another job, emphasizing the need for stable income. She worked at a factory making envelopes for two years, making $7.75 an hour. In 2003, Kai married and moved to Texas, where her husband was working sushi with his uncle.

When she first moved to Texas, she worked sushi with her husband until she had her first child. Kai was not enthusiastic about her sushi position, but later gained employment at a factory

processing returned merchandise. During this period, her mother came to the U.S. and looked after her daughter while she worked; she made $7.50 an hour. Her job was to scan the items in the warehouse, then pack and ship them to the correct location. However, when she became pregnant with her second child, she quit work because she was required to lift heavy boxes.

In 2006, she moved to North Texas and began working at AssembleNRepair. She enjoys her work because she considers it a "pretty easy job and they pay pretty good too." Her earnings are nine dollars per hour. Kai does not have to lift any heavy items, only process returns in the computer while standing. She downplayed the physical aspect of her work by emphasizing the 'two fifteen minute breaks and 30 minute lunch break." Describing her work as easy, she also mentioned that the company is sometimes busy and overtime is required on Saturday and requested on Sunday. She was hired through an employment agency and has been with the company for seven months. Kai portrayed her desire to obtain the benefits that permanent workers receive. Currently, she plans to stay at AssembleNRepair. However, she would like different employment.

> I don't know I was thinking I could get some kind of career like [a] nurse['s] aid. I was planning to [go] part time to school this summer [for] nurs[ing]. I think I'm gonna try and if I can get it I can get it. If I can't make better pay than this, I better stay here because it is pretty good. Yeah, those jobs are good for us. Maybe if I have a professional career I can get a [better] job but for me I don't have much opportunity to go to school. So I guess working for the company is good.

Kai's story portrays navigation into better employment over the years, and an acceptance of her place in the other-society, as exemplified by her reluctance to (as of yet) pursue school or any employment outside of the service sector even though she has some college experience in Burma.

3.4.2 Blocked mobility

Kai is not the only respondent who mentioned a desire to go back to school. Ja was single when she migrated to the U.S. through Guam in 1998 and had graduated high school before her journey. Furthering her education was also her goal when she first arrived. However, she immediately started working so that she could support herself and send money to her family

in Burma. When she entered work, she realized that her goal would not be easily accomplished, due to her work schedule.

While Ja had several informal jobs across America, she settled in North Texas and started working at FreshNHot. Often, she worked overtime and became tired easily. Ja recalled her conversations with relatives, "(I'm) tired. Because back home we don't have to work. Here we have to work like seven days and only off [few] days." Most women also mentioned a similar discussion of work when talking to their friends and relatives in Burma. They relate how tired they are, due to the constant hours with little to no days off.

For Ja, the tiring aspect of work, along with its changing schedule, was an explanation for why she could not start her educational journey. "I was just trying to study and then get a good job. But when I got here I start working and I couldn't go to school because I feel so tired. I couldn't study." Thus, by referring to the tiring aspect of her work, she excuses herself from responsibility or ability to obtain a bachelors degree. This is in contrast to her brother, who also lives in North Texas and works full-time, but manages to attend school full-time as well. The story of tiring work may allude to the type of work she performed (FreshNHot) as compared with her brother (sushi) lessening the pressure she feels to continue her education based on family standards.

Regardless of the demands of her work, she was content at FreshNHot; however, she was forced to leave due to an on-the-job injury, the result of which was unemployment for over one year, fortunately on worker's comp. Due to her injuries, she obtained less physical labor at AssembleNRepair. However, she is not content with her new job.

Ja's story, not unlike most women interviewed, illustrates her work environment as non-conducive to continue her education. Whether it was the schedule of work itself or the tiring aspects, she was unable to accomplish her original goal, which was to study and obtain a good job. With her current work schedule, she does not plan to obtain an education in America. Her story also illuminates the structure of work blocks further occupational mobility through education.

Her admission - that she saw education as a means to obtain a good job, portrays her current work-valuation as limited.

3.5 Redefinitions of Class

As Kachin women enter ethnic-specific jobs, how did they cope with this downgraded class identity? In this section, the ways in which women redefined class in America are discussed.

3.5.1 Downplaying occupational status

The participants had various ways to downplay their low occupational status. Women often compared the demands of their prior work against that of their current work, as well as the relative wage earned through paid work in Burma. This allowed them to focus on economic mobility despite their occupational status. For instance, Htang had her fair share of jobs. She moved around America working as a sushi chef in restaurants owned by Kachin friends. She depicted her work as a sushi chef as long and tedious. When comparing her job at FreshNHot to her prior sushi work, she mentioned,

> I like my current [job] better because at [the] restaurant you have to smile [when] customer comes [if] you make sushi. It [the smile] doesn't come from my heart. I don't want to do like that. Sushi we [work] six days [per week] and ten hours a day. We [do] not have holidays or vacation days off - only Christmas. My current job is eight hours.

Htang labeled her requirements - to act a certain way with customers, as "fake." She had to smile at her customers even if it did not "come from my heart." Later she mentioned the physical labor aspect of her current job, stating that it is better than the emotion work (Hochschild 1979: 551) she was required to perform while working sushi because she was compensated with benefits and sufficient earnings at FreshNHot.

While she mentioned the better work environment, she also described her pay at the bakery. Currently she makes $17 per hour. At forty hours per week, she earns around $2500 a month after taxes. Her work at FreshNHot allowed her to pool her resources with her brother, who lives with her and also works at FreshNHot, and buy a house in 2004. Not only was she able

to buy a new home, but she currently pays for three vehicles; one for her, one for her brother, and one for her husband. Each car is a late model SUV.

Similar to many married participants, Htang is in charge of finances in the household. She mentioned, “It is not easy to buy things quickly in Burma because of [the] differe[nce in] salary.” Others would mimic her words, focusing on the little pay in Burma that required them to accumulate money over time to buy property. Agreeing with Htang, Kaw said this was due to the government in Burma often changing the currency. Here in America, Htang and Kaw said, one can earn enough money to buy things quickly and the government structure is stable so the money earned is useful for purchasing goods.

When I asked her how she felt about both her and her husband working, she said, “we better because we make more money.” Her lack of tension between work and family obligations, as well as the division of labor, emphasized the importance of earning an income. She further stated that she was not sure what the future held for her. For now, though, she plans to stay at FreshNHot, “If I win the lottery, maybe I will quit.” Her sarcasm illuminates the importance of having a steady income as well as the significance of the amount earned. Despite the fact that she de-emphasized the current work demands of her job, she highlighted the economic contributions it made to her family, both here in America as well as in Burma.

Htang’s story was consistent with other women who worked at FreshNHot downplaying the physical demands of their work, and focusing on the opportunity it provided financially. Those who worked at FreshNHot or had a family member that worked at FreshNHot each owned a home. However, women who worked at other locations did not have the benefits and income acquired by working at the bakery (see Table 3.1 below).

Table 3.1 Demands and Benefits based on Work Location

Work Location	Physical Demands	Emotional Demands	Income	Benefits
FreshNHot	HIGH	MODERATE	HIGH	HIGH
AssembleNRepair	MODERATE	MODERATE	LOW	LOW*
Sushi	MODERATE	HIGH	MODERATE	LOW

*MODERATE if hired permanently by company

Those who work at AssembleNRepair are often limited in both pay and benefits due to their initial placement by employment agencies. Women who work at AssembleNRepair mention the long time it takes to be hired permanently by the company. Once hired as a permanent worker, women have access to benefits. On the other hand, sushi offered some financial compensation of work, but little benefits. In the next section, I examine how women in other employment sectors addressed their occupational status since their earnings are lower than women at FreshNHot and if women at FreshNHot emphasized other aspects of work besides earnings.

3.5.2 Working hard for others

Kai, who works at AssembleNRepair, portrayed the importance of both her and her husband working. While she enjoyed some aspects of her work, she mostly was proud that she could work for her family. Her family of four and her mother live in a three-bedroom apartment. Kai is frustrated that she has not be able to buy a house yet for her family. Although she mentioned that she is saving money to buy one in the near future.

When I asked her how she felt about having to work, she shared with me a Burmese proverb, “My country they say you better take [the] water when it rains.” She explained the proverb to me. “The water is very poor. [It is] hard to get a water. So when it rains they try to catch [the] water, whatever they have – a cup, even though a small cup. The next day [if] it [does] not rain we can use that water.” She said, “So now is my time. I am young and strong, so I have to work hard to save money for my kids. Yeah we have to work hard if we want to live a good life.” By emphasizing hard work as a way to take care of her children, she redirected her work as

a way to show good manners. She later mentioned her plans to work hard for her children so they can have better opportunities and education than she had.

All women with children stressed the importance working for their children, not themselves. Kaw even mentioned her children were her “future” and “hope.” This portrays that she, along with Kai, did not feel she has made it in the middle-class American society yet. However, she hopes in the future that her children will have the opportunities that she does not have now.

Benefits, as well as money, provided women with opportunities to care of their family, as portrayed in Mai’s story to stay in her current position at FreshNHot because of her benefits. She has good health insurance for her children. While her husband wants to open his own sushi restaurant, she desires to stay in her current factory job for the stable benefits. “For me I think [I want to stay at] this job because [of] the benefits…Because here I [have] seen a lot of people [say] ‘I don’t have insurance’ and their kids got sick.” Seeking work that included benefits is framed as a way for women to support their families.

Women without children also focused on the essence of working for family, not just for themselves. Many mentioned sending money to their parents and extended family members in Burma. While money was a crucial part of work in America, many women framed earnings as a way to take care of their family, both in the U.S. and in Burma. This also shows that women feel obligated to take care of their immediate and extended family. Income has provided women with a new way of showing good manners to parents, siblings and children. This support, through paid work, is one way women claim they are “doing class” through showing good manners.

Working hard also illustrates their belief that they have not yet achieved American middle-class status. Many feel they are not able to enter work environments equivalent with American standards of work, which allow for even higher economic and social status. However, they feel that if they work hard in their current job, that their children can compete with native-born Americans.

Paid work provides economic mobility for women and their families and allows them to earn for their family. As many of the participant stories illustrate, income allows women to contribute to certain class standards through earnings that, as they claim, men did in Burma. Kachin women have now crossed the gendered sphere of class as they articulated in the homeland. This newfound way to show class, however, often leads to competition between Kachin women, specifically concerning work pay. In the following section, the latter (as related to consumerism) is presented and discussed.

3.5.3 Consumerism as competition

Women emphasize income over occupational status as a substitute for their at-home ability to take care of their family; they make these things visible by acquiring items (like cars). Moreover, women are very open with how much money they make from their work; it is common to tell others about a raise, and to ask how much they are now making per hour. When someone obtains a new job, others will ask about income and the work conditions.

Consumerism is the easiest outward display of one's earnings. Within the community, word quickly spreads when someone buys a new item (house, car, etc.). People may visit, but the intent is to ogle the newly acquired material good(s); in the reverse, a buyer may bring the goods to others, such as showing off a car with an impromptu visit.

Pri's story best illustrates the concept of consumerism. She came to America for a conference in 1998, intending to seek asylum shortly afterwards. Similar to many of her cohort members, she traveled around the country seeking better work. Finally, she settled in North Texas. Living in other peoples' houses or apartments was protocol, since she did not have a steady job. However, once she obtained work at FreshNHot, she found an apartment of her own. She lived in the apartment for two years with her boyfriend, who is a sushi chef.

After they decided to get married, they pooled their financial resources and bought a house together. Pri often compared her house to other Kachin houses. Decorations filled the walls, tables, and floor. The couple purchased new furniture. Her house became a symbol of her financial possibilities and defined where she was on the class spectrum, especially among other

Kachin. Recently, she had a conversation with her sister who still lives abroad. In describing the new house, Pri illustrated an eloquent mansion; in reality however, her house is much smaller than her talk.

This portrayal of class-status by Pri was important, as she came from a wealthy family. In Burma, her house was elegant and her family often hired maids to attend to the household duties. While she designated herself as middle-class in Burma, her background portrays her upper middle-class position within society. However, her entry into American society deemed her the same class-status as other refugees despite her prior social location. Emphasizing the grandiosity of her current home was important to her self-identity, as she labeled herself middle-class to others despite her current occupation.

Once she settled into her new home, she also bought a new car; but instead of buying a small, sensible car, she bought a large SUV – even though only she and her husband will be using it. She specifically commented on the size, stating that she wanted a larger car than such-and-such has; therefore, she could not buy anything smaller or less expensive. Pri desired both a larger and more expensive item to show-off her and her husband's earnings. Her story shows the desire to flaunt how much they can afford.

This showing-off may resonate as typical American consumerism; however, I argue that Kachin consumerism takes its own form and meaning as defined by those expressing its art. West and Fenstermaker (1995) also argue that the same activity may have different meanings to different groups of people. While Kachin consumerism mimics American standards, Kachin compete with one another, not with the wider American society.

Pri was one of the only women who said she would work at least part time if given the option to stay home. Her push into the workforce full-time is required as she has used far too much credit to work part-time. In lieu of a white-collar job, she seems to have taken solice in the earnings from FreshNHot, and the buying power that it has afforded.

Pri's continuance in working-class jobs also shows continuance in ethnic-specific jobs due to the labor market and social networks. Each of her positions was obtained through friends.

As her employment increased in status and earnings over time, she was still subjected to blue-collar work environments. Over time, what I call “job witnessing,” or sharing job openings to the community, allowed economic upward mobility. However, these new positions were still in the service sector or in factories.

Prior to these purchases, her primary goal had been to support her parents, still in Burma. While this may still be her primary goal, her behavior contradicts her words. “In America it is important for me to work because when I work in my country I cannot help my parents. In America when I work, I get more money. So I can support my parents.” While consumerism was a function of her work earnings, it was not the main story. As Pri told her story, she emphasized the importance of working for her family. Her story illustrates work earnings can be used as a way to support family and as a way to earn class-status in America.

3.5.4 Overview

Menjivar’s (1999) research indicates that women who desire to achieve middle-class status see work as one way to obtain this goal. Women in my study who work in more masculine environments (FreshNHot or sushi) obtain more earnings and are able to achieve better standing within the community than women employed in other work sectors. While the work will not propel them into another class, certain wages (higher than others) allow a competition of sorts between women with in the ethnic group, thus allowing for informal class-status. Kachin participate in this class-system and try to legitimize their prior class-status over their currently assigned one. They stand between their old identity of middle-class and their new identity of working-class. Their position, quite similar to Newman’s (1988) portrayal of the American downward mobile worker, allows them to forge spaces of middle-class status within their own community. In other words, consumerism is an intentional and deliberate way of recovering or reenacting their lost prior class status. However, working is also a way to show good manners, as it allows women to take care of the household economically.

Although women portray the message that they work a lot, they also state that the money they do receive goes to the overwhelming amount of bills. However, Kachin women accumulate

bills as a sign of ownership in the effort to boost their families' status in America. Pri explained that working in America allows her to consume, "here, if you work, you can own everything." On the other hand, both Lu and Htu mentioned debt, which kept them working hard to pay for ownership of accumulated material goods. Furthermore, women had to continue working in order to pay the bills and meet obligations to take care of others through showing good manners.

3.6 Conclusion

Kachin refugee women bring with them their own conceptions of middle-class status; specifically, one person per family working, high status occupations of family members, access to education, and showing good manners. Women mentioned that their obtainment of class-status in Burma is gendered, as women and men advance their own and their families' status in distinct ways. Men contribute to their own and their family's class by working in professional jobs and making money. Women, on the other hand, increase their own and their families' class by showing good manners. This is their measuring stick of middle-class standards in America.

However, their requirement to enter the U.S. workforce inhibits them from contributing to class-status through showing good manners only. Additionally, American jobs sometimes force a woman to cross the traditional gender-assigned roles in the workplace. Despite these differences and a downgraded status by having to enter working-class employment, women have found identity with their earning potential. They are able to restore their class-status and consequently their families' status via earnings. This new way of providing for their family through income allows women to promote their status through a traditionally masculine way. Women, though, continue to frame their work through the gender appropriate way of showing good manners.

Kachin women are willing to work hard and endure harsh conditions so their children will have a better future and more access to American education then they have had. They often endure harsher working conditions for higher pay, even if it provides less status (as we saw with Kaw's change from nursing to sushi). Work then is contextualized as a way to contribute to their families' well-being – which is in the context of showing good manners.

However, women did not work hard for children only. Pri portrayed the honor of working hard for her parents, “In America it is important for me because when I work in my country I cannot support my parents.” She discussed the lack of options and low pay that Burma offered women. Now she could be seen as a good daughter and a good woman by working to send money to her parents, instead of physically being able to take care of them. This taking care of others though financial means allows women to frame class as showing good manners. Although women earning an income increased a families’ class-status in America, many would filter this possibility through the family devotion schema of showing good manners. In other words, they redirected earnings as a way to showing good manners (taking care of family). Showing good manners transgresses gendered spheres of how women do class. In other words, this enables them to cross homeland boundaries of doing class and gender. Women now conceptualize expanding definitions of how they can “do class” in America.

Listening to the latent context behind their stories, Kachin women enter the workforce initially for economic survival; however, over time this changes. This importance of work itself is not only for economic survival but for paying off bills, which many accumulate by buying items that ‘show’ off middle-class status to the Kachin community (such as houses, car(s), appliances, and furniture). Bills are often acquired in competition for status within the community. While women themselves framed their work around economic necessity, their underlying stories took on a consumerist character.

They bolster their social status by emphasizing their economic status in relation to each other. Having nicer and/or more expensive houses and cars were ways of displaying the outward appearance of class-status within the community. These are symbols used to compete for status among one another. This competition often arises as women try to compensate for leveling of their social status once they enter America despite their prior class-status. They compete within their own ethnic community because they can acquire greater status through their own communities (Gabaccia 1994; Parrenas 2001).

While many Kachin women consider themselves middle-class in relation to others in the Kachin community in North Texas, they do not feel that way in relation to American society. Competition of class-status fuels consumerism while increasing their families' status. Consumerism resulted in more bills, which led to women needing to stay in the workforce and even their constant need to obtain better pay. Kachin women continue in the workforce to further their middle-class lifestyle.

CHAPTER 4

RE-MAPPING GENDER AND CLASS THROUGH SELF DEFINITIONS

4.1 Introduction to Chapter

As articulated in chapters two and three, first generation Kachin refugee women position their lives in Burma in strict gendered spheres of paid and unpaid work. Women felt they earned the title 'good woman' by primarily showing good manners, while they saw men performing gender through paid work and earnings. Their stories illuminate showing good manners as a way women advance self and families' social status as well. The requirement to enter the workforce in America challenges and changes the gendered spheres of showing good manners in regards to both gender and class-status.

As Martin (2004) suggests, immigrant and refugee women are typically considered to be cultural continuers within their family and the community. Furthermore, the community often requires women to produce culture, including gender, similar to homeland ideologies despite paid work status. My participants confirm the desire to re-enact homeland ideologies of gender boundaries. At the same time, they are faced with the question of how to continue their homeland class-status. Moreover, gender and class interests may collide within the work context of the host country.

Remaining "not rich, not poor" in America requires new possibilities of gender and class. These changes and challenges of showing good manners also promote different ways of viewing and naming self. Here in the self-defining narratives of Kachin refugee women, I move to discussions of the intersection of gender and class. I argue that this intersection requires a re-mapping in regards to gendered spheres, but also allows women to articulate and define themselves within the context of traditional ways of performing gender. While gender and class-status negotiations warrant broadening of definitions in the host country, many women re-map each status through traditional gender identities, expanding where necessary. In other words,

Kachin women manage gender boundaries, despite the discontinuance of distinct gendered spheres in America.

4.2 Re-mapping Gender and Class at the Intersection of Work

A re-mapping requires a redefinition of what it means to be a middle-class woman in America. As Ngai (2005: 14) articulates, "the constitution of new selves and identities is an act of power and a process of self-subjectivization, exclusion and displacement that involves the…art of naming and the power of language." I argue that Kachin refugee women bring with them their prior pre-migration experiences of both class and gender, which are used for understanding and negotiating the new context in America (Dickinson 2005).

My participants fell short of the middle-class American and homeland standard of male breadwinner and stay-at-home wife. Kachin refugee women work in blue-collar, ethnic-specific jobs and their narratives portray blocked mobility from middle-class status positions. On the other hand, women often downplay their low occupational status and highlight the economic mobility their earnings offer. Women in this study use the opportunity and limitations of work in the U.S. as a way to work hard to earn money. Through the money they make, they compete for an outward appearance of middle-class status within the ethnic community. Therefore, they use work to increase, and perhaps to compensate, for their lost class-status. In other words, the structure of Kachin middle-class families in America changes due to necessity.

The structure of work in America hinders "doing gender" in the traditional "showing good manners" fashion. The former, in traditional ways, is less possible, so many women stress economic contributions both as a way to do class *and* gender. Therefore, they re-appropriate doing gender in line with job earnings. This approach to redefining what it means to be a "good woman" is not unlike Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila's (1997) classification of transnational mothers who defined work as a suitable way to be a good mother. They redirect their stories of work to incorporate identities of showing good manners. Kachin women label work as gender appropriate, in order to allow room for new context requirements. They extend gender

appropriate behavior to avoid discrepancies and allow women's continuance to meet gender status expectations.

Kachin women's stories express their own self-definitions of what it means to be a middle-class woman in America. However, these definitions are more in line with prior homeland identities. While women in my study configure new requirements into accounts of identity negotiations, ultimately traditional gender ideologies are too powerful to disregard. In other words, Kachin women contextualize their work identity in order to fit prior ways of performing appropriate gender and class identities. This shows the structural constraints of "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987). Gender not only changes based on interactional and individual level ideologies but, due to structural imposition, some women have to change their practice even though they do not want to do so. Refugee women are thus bound to both structures imposed on them and their cultural expectations (Thapan 2005).

My participant's stories show that they make calculated risks and choices of work that meet their families' needs and, to some extent, their own. They arrange and manage their household through their work, determining which job is better. They still put the household first in that they are working for others similar to Freeman's (1995) research on Vietnamese refugees. However, because they work for others, they can take pride in themselves as contributors to their family and continue to earn status as good women. Work is not just a necessity, but also a choice that suggests a better life for their children. Thus, they feel that they are contributing to family and self-improvement; their self-confidence at work environments and ability to contribute and manage new contexts, although subtle, are worth noting. This experience of increased responsibilities will no doubt have a profound affect on households and self-dynamics, as well as community involvement.

Kachin women feel they are still living in a system with strong constraints and limited options, not unlike their homeland. While they cannot be what they used to be in the homeland, as evidenced by Mai's sorrow of giving up her prior profession but pleasure of supporting others

financially ("I can't live in my country. I can't preach…but I can support."), they find alternate ways to continue prior identities.

"Individuals' identities are not aligned with either place or class; they are probably constructed out of both, as well as a whole complex of other things, most especially race and gender" (Massey 1997: 325). Identity is noted as a process of both becoming and being (Hall 2003), not just a single and monolithic entity, but a response to the ebb and flow of the social environment. Refugees, specifically, are required to reconstruct their identities based on both their homeland and host country experiences. During this time, social identities may be reinforced or reconfigured (Yeoh, Huang and Lam 2005).

The Kachin refugee women interviewed strive and hope for different opportunities to boost their own children's status in the host country. They resist limitations through visions and dreams beyond what others perceive are possible for them. Re-mapping explains the way refugee women in specific localities respond to outward political and cultural climates towards themselves. These climates require that they navigate in new territories and interpret how they see themselves in the new context. While unable to assimilate to white American standards, they adjust to new environments by redefining identities as both women and middle-class, on their own terms.

These new definitions expand the options they have of *performing* appropriate gender behaviors due to their everyday interactions and change prompted by the host country. As *performing* suitable gender and class identities collide, women now seek to merge the opportunity of doing gender and class in non-traditional ways. On the other hand, some women's accounts show they re-map their gender and class identities due to structural constraints without a choice in the matter. This highlights structural constraints on individual choices and impacts women at different locations in hierarchical manners. In contrast to Blair-Loy's (2003) participants, who had the structural option to choose to stay-home or not, this study's participants did not.

My participant's expand ways to perform gender and class in their current context. However, these forced re-articulations did not close the gap on essential differences between

women and men. Gender appropriate-ness shifts based on necessity, not self-directed choices. Women cross former inappropriate boundaries of gender by work and earnings, as well as delegating to men some responsibilities for showing good manners.

However, over time these actualities will surface and require an adjustment to ideological possibilities of gender appropriate boundaries. It remains to be seen if Kachin men will expand their definitions of performing masculinity in America, especially as their breadwinner status has been mitigated by labor market and class requirements and their newfound necessity to perform traditional women's work of showing good manners. However, as noticed within the participant's stories, different Kachin households draw different lines of reconfigurations of gendered natures based on structural forces (work) on their lives. If women, and even men, enter different workspaces, they may again have to renegotiate doing gender in different ways than the current context and possibilities.

4.3 Conclusion

Overall, the participants' stories revolve around issues of how the structure of work in America constrained them from doing gender and producing class similar to homeland ways of showing good manners. These structural issues in America form discrepancies not only in class mobility (upward economic status and downward social status), as this paper initially postulates, but also in regard to what it means to confront and change the way people behave with their gender-influenced mannerisms required for both gender and class status. By realigning showing good manners to include new definitions of being a good woman in a new context, Kachin women portray an internalized version of female-specific requirements. In other words, the family devotion schema is so deeply ingrained, that it is hard to renegotiate because women desire to continue showing good manners based on prior notions of doing gender. The implication here is that while women desire to continue to perform gender in socially accepted ways, they are often hindered due to new structural constraints.

In the process of redefining showing good manners in the new context with limitations and barriers, some do not share their work experiences with their family in the homeland. Their

omission to relate their work experience indicates that they are indeed in a space that in unique to their situation and social location as their definitions are not understood and practiced within the wider American society or within their prior homeland. In other words, doing gender and class for refugee women is bound in their concrete everyday lives in their new context, but also derives from prior ideologies. Therefore, they do not violate the schema of family devotion by working but incorporate new definitions to make appropriate ways of doing gender. As typical with many first generation refugee women, re-mapping did not make a decisive shift, but expanded already accepted notions of showing good manners.

Throughout this research, there is admittedly a struggle regarding the actual feelings the participants harbor for their work and its benefits/pitfalls; in fact, some of the responses seemed to take internally contradictory positions on work, gender, and class because of the way they framed their experiences. Upon first reading, as evidenced in many scholars' work, middle class women gain gender status and lose class-status. For instance, women are receiving help with household tasks and have more work options in America. However, many women have a decreased social status in relation to the wider American society. Kachin women, though, do not necessarily situate themselves in the same gender and class loss and gains in regards to women and work.

If one defines liberation based on white feminist standards of the opportunity to enter paid work alongside men, earn equal pay, and enjoy equalitarian relations in the household, they have faired much better here than in their homeland. However, if we use participants' standards of homeland gender and class definitions, we concur that gains and losses are not easily identified. This also makes us question the connotation 'do women gain or loss?' in work and home. Usually we juxtapose this with men, who scholars say lose more than women. Men lose more in professional work status and income than women due to women's prior location in the homeland's structure of work. So women are inevitably gaining, correct? Again, it depends on the way we define work as important. Most research, as I did in my thesis, places work at the center of the text as a way to frame the question of loss and gain. However, as my participants'

narratives state, most women do not allocate their losses and gains based on prior career-status alone, but on other cultural, social, and economic values.

Overall, my research adds to the existing literature by suggesting that Kachin conceptions of social-status renegotiation do not seem as sharp as prior research suggest (Espiritu 1999; Kibria 1993) because they enter similar jobs with men. The structure of work itself, unlike Kibria (1993) and Espiritu's (1999) prior studies, does not allow some women to continue in traditional spheres of gendered domestic labor, although they are primarily responsible for its oversight. As far as first generation refugees, we see that while many do not feel like they have achieved middle-class status within wider American society they are far from working "just to survive." This suggests their prior middle-class status springs them forward to regain status in America.

It is also worth noting that, while my research is branded in the current context of time and space (specific to the local region until further research proves otherwise), it also links refugee research with native-born women's experiences that portrays the structure of work as not easily accommodating different cultural conceptions of *doing gender.* Kachin women do not necessarily like the cultural model that relegates them to masculine work, but it is the only way to earn money in the American landscape. Some desire more gender freeing work that allows space for both showing good manners and earning pay, so they may contribute to their families' class status *and* do gender in the traditional way (or at least have the choice). Unfortunately, they are unable to find female specific work in America that pays well enough.

As more and more American women are required to enter and continue in the workforce in order to continue their middle-class status, American women's definitions will need to be changed to address their own discrepancies. While feminism has questioned definitions and boundaries of doing gender, it has not so quickly organized to question and change the structure of work itself. Americans often take for granted the 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. forty-hour-per-week or more work schedule and way of doing work in which full-time loyalty is required in the workplace as Blair-Loy (2003) conceptualizes in the work-devotion schema. This schema seems to position

class (or the achieving/chasing after higher class standards) as normal. Gender does not easily fit into these connotations of work as either/or devotion.

The higher value is placed on the work schema, or so it seems. Thus, we advocate and invest more for getting women into the work devotion schema, not changing the system to include a variety of ways to structure work. We simply try to adjust our lives in the process instead of adjusting work requirements around our own notions of identities, whatever they may be at the given time and place.

Economic recession will no doubt affect the dominant, white, feminist discourse on women and work. Perhaps, now more than ever, we are able to discuss our differences *and* similarities at the intersection of work, class, and gender and begin to address some of the key issues of work. The structure of work in America regardless of class, race and gender is not as accommodating to gender identities and requirements as it could be. By arguing for a unity of different women's context of structural limitations of work, I do not desire to dismantle the importance of social location in the hierarchical placement of the labor market. Instead I advocate how best to address key issues that affect women in the U.S. workforce, albeit in different (privileged or constraining) ways.

Furthermore, with women lacking the time to meet current middle-class standards of the family devotion schema (due to the structure of work and the current economic and labor market), redefinitions are likely to continue and/or restructuring of work must ensue. I am not arguing for a return to the traditional division of the work and family devotion schema around strict gendered spheres, but a re-visioning of the structure of work for doing gender within various ways.

Identities change over time as new requirements, from both opportunities and limitations, open and close possibilities. My study on Kachin women allowed me to look into a specific structural issue of work at a particular time and place; thus these conditions and negotiations of re-mapping gender and class are likely to change overtime as new possibilities for identities are presented, whether they be in the context of work or other contexts. The participants presented a view of how the intersection of gender and class informs, and to some extent contradicts, the

possibilities of performing appropriate socially agree upon gender and class requirements. Their renegotiations show this constant movement and necessity to continue to redefine who we are. Kachin women's narratives illustrate our identities are constantly informed by our prior experiences, our current environments and our future possibilities.

4.4 Research Reflection and Further Considerations

My research on the intersection of gender and class of one specific refugee group brings other key issues to light. For instance, Kachin women were/are often single upon migration; this certainly differs from the populations of many prior refugee studies. This specific social location may produce different negotiations of identities and may have impacted the results of the current study (relative to those before it). Often, single women acquire a certain standing within work and the community outside the binds of marital status. As Kachin women in America wait longer to marry than most women do in Burma, according to Hka, how will marital status impact gender and class renegotiations, and family dynamics once married? Marital status, including a need to study how female singleness, affects migration (not only within Kachin but other ethnic groups) is important. This location may alter and impact other areas of resettlement in the host country and deserves further examination.

In addition, the social cohesion of groups within the host country requires greater speculation. Mahler (1995) discussed the potential conflicts and break down in group solidarity among co-ethnics. As Kachin women compete for both gender and class-status, it is important to note how this will affect the social networks within the community, especially given the importance of social relationships within the mayu-dama system. Showing good manners is a concept that upholds social connections within Kachin culture. However, will competition for prior class-status in America change its dynamics? Even the concept of showing good manners has changed in America, as it now means that hospitality is directed at the family first and then, if time allows, to the community. In addition, as cultural negotiations of economic and marital (mayu/dama) connections are made via showing good manners in Burma, how will new requirements of women's paid work (and other requirements) affect larger social structures?

Later, as more 1.5 and second generation Kachin women enter the workforce and create separate families of their own, the renegotiations of first generation women may change even further, as seen with most other Southeast Asian refugees. Therefore, to further this research, a longitudinal study on class and gender of first generation Kachin female refugees across time and the 1.5 and second generation workers, as they begin entering the workforce, is recommended.

Besides time, place is also an important feature to determine if indeed renegotiation of class and gender is reinforced or loosened within other localities in the U.S. or other places of the world. This allows one to examine the other factors that affect current research, which will better determine whether the economic, political, and historical location of the study affected the results. To expand outward, further comparative work on other Burmese refugees could help isolate other factors that may have portrayed middle-class Kachin women's renegotiations of work through a class-based lens.

Secondly, further study should be directed at what is the largest limitation in this study: in order to construct a more complete understanding, further studies should include both working men and non-working women. In researching this topic, I discovered (through discussions with my translator) that women who are out of the workforce come into the workforce with expectations similar to those already in the workforce. As expansion of doing gender and class changed over time, it is worth studying other factors beside work that may influence these boundaries and self-definitions. In addition, the ability to interview men would help to situate the context of inter-family beliefs and behaviors. Furthermore, as women in the workforce draw from their own mother's work experience, whether paid or unpaid, and their conceptions of being a good mother, how do they envision their own daughters showing good manners?

Finally, this paper attempted to analyze the changed identities of refugees, as portrayed by working women in Texas. Kachin refugee women's experiences of work allowed me to explore work at the intersection of class and gender. However, identity is never complete, let alone the study of such an attribute. Refugees will continue to appropriate their identities within the historical, social, and cultural environment of their homeland and host country and all places in

between. There is not one single identity but a situational and multiple aspect of identity that helps define refugees, that is continually created and recreated (Benmayor and Skotnes 2005; Hall 2003). As refugees continue to create and recreate their identity, they recognize the importance of naming or language that culturally constructs self and others (Chambers 1994).

As sociologists, examining these meanings and identities of refugees in terms of their social location (including gender and class) and social contexts will give nuances to refugee experience and identity. As more and more refugee men and women are relocated to the U.S., their confined choices and meanings make an impact not only on their own lives, but in their own community and society as a whole – impacting institutions such as health, education, religion, politics and work. Over time, more and more refugees are forced to migrate throughout the world; it is important to understand the implications of this migration and the impact that the intersection of gender, class, and race makes on the refugee in the community, family and society at large.

APPENDIX A

KACHIN WORK IDENTITY DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

1. Age (Asak) ________ Date of Birth (Shangai Ntoi) _______________

2. What date did you arrive in the United States? (United States kaw du ai shaning) ________________

3. Are you currently employed? (Ya yang bungli lu ai i?)
   _____no (N lu ai)
   _____yes; part-time (Lu ai; Aten chyen)
   _____yes; full-time (Lu ai: Aten hpring)

4. Hours you work per week (Bat mi hta galaw ai hking hkum) ____________

5. What is your occupation? (Hpa baw bungli galaw ai ta?) __________________________

6. Do you have any occupational training or certificate? (Kan bau bungli the seng n na wunkat jawng sh. lekmat ni lu ai i?) ____
   -If yes, list training or certificate? (Lu yang, Hpa baw wunkat jawng sh. lekmat?) _______________
   -Where was training or certificate obtained? (Gara kaw na lu ai lekmat ta?) ____________

7. What is the highest grade of school you have completed? (Hpaji madang tsaw dik tsang kade du hkra lung ngut da sata?)
   _____Less than High School (Lahta tsang jawng n du ai)
   _____High School graduate (Lahta tsang jawng awng da sai)
   _____Some college but no degree (Dakasu 1-3 ning laman lung ga sai)
   _____Bachelors Degree (Jan mau)
   _____Graduate Degree (Lahta Tsang Jan mau)

8. Where did you complete your highest grade of school? (Gara kaw hpaji tsaw dik sharin lai wa sai ta?) ___________

9. What is your marital status? (Dinghku hte i?) ___________

10. If married, spouses date of birth? (Nrum Ntau a Shangai Ntoi) ________
    ----If married and your spouse resides in the United States, please answer questions #11-18. If single, skip to question #19. (Dinghku hte rai n na, na a n rum n tau wa mung United States kaw rai yang, gasan 11-18 hi hpe htai ya u. Sabrang/Mahkawn naw rai yang ga san 19 kaw na matut na bai htai ya rit.)

11. What date did your spouse arrive in the United States? (Na a n rum n tau wa United States kaw galoi du wa ai ta?) ________

12. Is your spouse currently employed? (Na a n rum n tau wa bungli galaw ai i?)
    _____no (n galaw ai)
    _____yes; part-time (galaw ai; aten chyen)
    _____yes; full-time (galaw ai; Aten hpring)

13. How many hours spouse works per week (Bat mi hta galaw ai hking hkum) ____________

14. What is your spouse's occupation? (Na a n rum n tau wa hpa baw bungli galaw ai ta?) ____________________________

15. Does your spouse have any occupational training or certificate? (Na a n rum n tau wa kaga kanbau bungli jawng hkan na lekmat lu ai i?) ____
    -If yes, list training or certificate? (Lu yang, hpa baw wunkat jawng sh. Lekmat lu ai ta? _______________
    -Where was training or certificate obtained?(Gara kaw na jawng/lekmat lu la ai ta?) ____________

16. What is the highest grade of school your spouse completed? (Na a n rum n tau wa hpaji madang tsaw dik kade daram lung ga sa ta?
    _____Less than High School (Lahta tsang jawng n du ai)
    _____High School graduate (Lahta tsang jawng awng da sai)
    _____Some college but no degree (College 1-3 ning daram lung ga sai)
    _____Bachelors Degree (Jan Mau)
    _____Graduate Degree (Lahta tsang hpaji jan mau)

17. Where did your spouse complete their highest grade of school? (Na a n rum n tau wa gara kaw hpaji madang tsaw dik lung lai wa sata?) ___________

18. If your children live in the United States, please list their name, birthdate and birthplace below. (Na a kasha ni America kaw nga yang, chyeju hte shanhte a mying, shangai nhtoi hte dai daw shara ni hpe tsun dan rit).
    Name ____________________Birthdate___________Place of birth______________
    Name ____________________Birthdate___________Place of birth____________
    Name ____________________Birthdate___________Place of birth____________
    Name ____________________Birthdate___________Place of birth______________

----

19. What category is appropriate for your household income last year? (Lai wa sai shaning na na a nta dinghku shang gumhpraw gaw gara laman rai a ta?)
    _____Up to $19,999 _____$20,000-$39,999
    _____$40,000-$59,999 _____$60,000-$79,999
    _____$80,000-$99,999 _____$100,000+

20. What was your personal pay last year? (Na a tingyeng shang gumhpraw gaw gade ta?)
    _____Up to $19,999 _____$20,000-$39,999
    _____$40,000-$59,999 _____$60,000-$79,999
    _____$80,000-$99,999 _____$100,000+

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

(Na a shang lawm ai lam a majaw chyeju gaba sai)

APPENDIX B

KACHIN REFUGEE WORK IDENTITY IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

Question 1: Can you tell me about your coming to America?
(America de gara hku du sa wa ai lam tsun dan lu na kun?)

Probe 1: What was your financial status in Burma?
(Myen mung kaw nang nga ai shaloi matsan ai i?)

Question 2: Can you tell me about your work experience in Burma?
(Myen mung kaw bungli galaw ai mahkrum madut hpe tsun dan lu na kun?)

Probe 1: What different jobs did you have?
(Bungli gade daram galaw ga ai ta?)
Probe 2: How did you obtain your job(s)?
(Bungli gara hku tam la ai ta?)
Probe 3: How did you feel about your job(s) in Burma?
(Myen mung kaw na na a bungli hpe nang gara hku mu mada ai ta?)
Probe 4: How important was work to you in Burma?
(Myen mung kaw na na a bungli gaw na a matu gade daram ahkyak a ta?)

Question 3: Can you tell me about your work experience in America?
(America kaw na bungli mahkrum madup hpe tsun dan lu na kun?)

Probe 1: What was your first job?
(Bungli gade daram galaw lai wa sata?)
Probe 2: How did you obtain your job(s)?
(Na a bungli hpe gara hku lu la ai ta?)
Probe 3: How did you feel about your job(s) in America?
(America na bungli ni hpe gara hku mu mada ai ta?)
Probe 4: How important is work to you in America?
(America kaw bungli gaw na a matu gade daram ahkyak a ta?)
Probe 5: Can you tell me about your current job? How long do you plan to work this job?
(Ya yang na na a bungli a lam hpe tsun dan lu na kun? N dai bungli hpe gade ram na hkra galaw na myit mada da ai rai?)

Question 4: Can you tell me about your contact with family and friends in Burma? (Myen mung kaw nga ai na a nta masha ni the manang ni the matut mahkai ai lam hpe tsun dan lu na i?)

Probe 1: What do you tell your family and friends in Burma about your work? (Myen mung kaw nga ai na dum nta masha hte manang ni hpe na a bungli hte seng n na hpa baw ni tsun dan ai rai?)
Probe 2: Do you send/receive items to/from Burma?
(Myen mung de/kaw n na arai ni shagun/lu la i?

Question 5: What kind of job(s) did you expect to have in America based on your education and skills? (Na a hpaji/atsam madang a majaw kaning re bungli hpe nang America kaw myit mada ai ta?)

Probe 1: What are your education and skills?
(Na a hpaji madang hte atsam ni gaw hpa rai ta?)

Question 6: If you are married, can you talk about your spouse's work experience in Burma? (Dinghku hte rai yang, na a n rum n tau wa a myen mung na bungli mahkrum madup hpe tsun dan lu na kun?)

Probe 1: What jobs spouse held?
(Na a n rum n tau wa hpa baw bungli galaw lai wa sat a?)
Probe 2: What do your children do while you are at work?
(Nang bungli galaw ai ten hta na a kasha ni hpa galaw ai rai?)

Question 7: If you are married, can you talk about your spouse's work experience in America? (Dinghku hte rai yang, na a n rum n tau wa a America kaw na bungli mahkrum madup hpe tsun dan lu na kun?)

Probe 1: What jobs spouse held/holding?
(N rum n tau wa a bungli)
Probe 2: How do you feel about both working?
(Nan lahkawng yen bungli galaw ai hpe gara hku mu mada a ta?)

Question 8: Can you tell me how it is different being a woman in the United States than in Burma? (Myen mung kaw num tai ai hte America kaw num tai ai shai ai lam hpe tsun dan lu na i?)

Probe 1: How are work and family experiences different/same in United States and Burma?
(America hte Myen mung kaw Bungli hte dinghku lam ni gara hku shai ai bung ai rai?)

Question 9: Can you tell me how it is different in America and Burma based on your financial status? (Na a sut madang hku nna America hte Myen mung gara hku shai ai lam nga ai rai, ngai hpe tsun dan lu na i?)

Question 10: Are their other things in America that are important to you?
(Ndai America kaw na a matu ahkyak ai lam ni gaw hpa rai ta?)

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Christie Wright earned a Bachelor's in Sociology from Averett University in Danville, VA. After graduating with her undergraduate degree, she attended Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond to pursue a Master of Divinity. Upon completion of seminary, she desired to explore her sociological roots further. While studying at Virginia Commonwealth University in the Master's Sociology program she enjoyed collegial mentorship, as well as conference and publication opportunities. However, her partner's admission to a Ph.D. program in Texas prompted her into the full-time working force and a sabbatical from study. Sociological inquiry came knocking again through part-time study. Her coursework, mentorship, and personal experience promoted her analysis of migration, women's studies and identity formation found in her thesis work. She plans to continue further exploration of these three areas as she pursues her Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.