# EBHR 43: The Bhutanese Refugee Resettlement Experience
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# EDITORIAL

In the early 1990s, approximately half of the ethnic Nepali population of Bhutan fled or were expelled from their villages in the south of the country. Twenty years later, an estimated 108,000 Bhutanese refugees were still living in bamboo huts in seven camps in south east Nepal. Despite numerous rounds of bilateral talks between the governments of Bhutan and Nepal, none had been repatriated to Bhutan and local integration in Nepal remained a very distant prospect.

In 2006, UNHCR and a core group of member states announced plans to launch a third country resettlement programme for the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. This began in earnest in 2008, when the refugees became eligible for resettlement to one of seven countries: the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands. In 2010, the UK belatedly added itself to this list. The process of third country resettlement is now well advanced, with over 63,000 former refugees resettled in a large number of locations scattered across the USA and smaller numbers in the seven other countries.

The arrival in countries of the global North of a large number of Nepali-speaking Hindu refugees from a country whose international profile is associated primarily with Buddhism and 'Gross National Happiness' raises a whole range of interesting questions. However, research on this very new Himalayan diaspora is in its infancy and most researchers are working in isolation. In May 2013 a workshop was convened at SOAS in London to provide researchers with an opportunity to share their understandings and perspectives. A seedcorn grant from the SOAS Faculty of Languages and Cultures and the generous financial support received for this initiative from the Foundation Open Society Institute enabled the convenors to invite contributors from Nepal, Canada, Australia, the USA and the Netherlands, and also to invite representatives of the UK resettled community in Manchester to share their perspectives. This special issue of the EBHR contains a selection of the papers presented at the workshop.

The content of these articles is largely empirical, reflecting the novelty of this field of research: the data that will provide the basis for theoretical and comparative work is still being gathered. Indeed, most of these articles are reports of work in progress in Australia, Canada, the

Netherlands, the UK and the USA, and we look forward to the completion of the longer term projects from which they emanate. None the less, they provide valuable information on many of the most important political, cultural and socio-economic aspects of Bhutanese refugee resettlement, and several also offer critical analyses of resettlement policies in the host countries.

This workshop was intended to lead to the establishment of an international network of researchers working on Bhutanese refugee resettlement. It is hoped that its success will provide a springboard for the development of further collaborative projects. Questions of cultural and political identity and generational change loomed large in our discussions, and I hope that these and other topics will become the focus for further research among resettled Bhutanese refugees in the years to come.

I am grateful to my colleague Tania Kaiser, and to Roz Evans and Nicole Hoellerer, for joining forces to scour the globe for people who might share our interest in this topic, and to Jane Savory and Rahima Begum of the SOAS Centres and Programmes Office and my erstwhile student, now Dr. Mona Chettri, for providing crucial administrative support. My thanks also to Heleen Plaisier for copy-editing and Arik Moran for another good set of book reviews.

Finally, a personal note. I visited Bhutan in 1992 when the so-called 'southern problem' was at its height and the camps in Nepal contained around 70,000 people. I first stepped into the camps in 1995, and went back three times between 1999 and 2001. My book on the subject, *Unbecoming Citizens,* was published in 2003. I often wonder what became of the group of men I met in Chirang in 1992, in the encounter I recounted in the introduction to my book. I was told by local officials that they had applied to 'emigrate' from Bhutan but had been persuaded to withdraw their applications. I strongly suspect that they ended up in Nepal and maybe they are resettled somewhere now. However, I was unable to discover their names, so I may never know. I do know that the woman I called 'Devi Maya', to whom I dedicated a whole chapter of my book, now lives in Tasmania. How strangely the world can turn.

– Michael Hutt

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Ilse Griek** is a Ph.D candidate at Tilburg Law School, Tilburg University, the Netherlands, where she is writing her thesis on dispute resolution and legal pluralism in the Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal. Over the past ten years, she has conducted field research in Nepal, Kenya and Mexico. Prior to starting her Ph.D, she worked for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Jordan and the Netherlands.

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**Béatrice Halsouet** is a Ph.D student in religious studies at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), in Montréal, Canada. In 2013, she received the Governor General's Academic Medal for her Master's degree thesis on Bhutanese refugees. During the fall of 2011, she and her research director, Mathieu Boisvert, offered a series of lectures throughout the province aiming at increasing awareness of the current difficulties of these newly established refugees in Quebec. Her doctoral research is focused on the various identity strategies used by young Bhutanese refugee girls in order to mediate in school and domestic contexts.

**Eleanor 'Ellie' Ott** holds an MSc in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies from Oxford and is a doctoral candidate and Rhodes Scholar at the Centre for Evidence-Based Intervention at the University of Oxford. Her doctoral research focuses on the economic self-sufficiency of resettled refugees, and includes fieldwork with Bhutanese refugees. Ellie recently completed

a consultancy with UNHCR on the labour market integration of resettled refugees. She previously worked as a Truman-Albright Fellow and social science research analyst in the US Administration for Children and Families, served as a policy editor for the *Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration*, implemented projects with refugees in Pittsburgh and Kala Refugee Camp in Zambia, and contributed to campaigns including anti-refugee warehousing.

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**Joseph Stadler** is currently a Ph.D. candidate in cultural anthropology at the University at Buffalo. His current research focuses on the civic engagements of Nepali-Bhutanese refugees in the United States, concentrating on the ways in which refugees, as long-time recipients of humanitarian aid, make use of humanitarian categories, techniques and technologies as a means of survival in resettlement.

**Heather Hindman** is Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Asian Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. Her recently published book, *Mediating the Global: Expatria's forms and consequences in Kathmandu* (Stanford University Press), explores the bureaucratic constrictures of employment policy on elite transnational labourers in Nepal, as well as their everyday perpetuation of similar forms of 'best practices' regulation. She has recently published work on Nepal's labour and governmental links with South Korea, as well as articles that are part of an extended project on young Nepalis' engagement with entrepreneurship and rejection of politics during the recent period of long-term provisionality in the country.

**Susan Banki** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Sydney. Her research interests lie in

the political, institutional, and legal contexts that explain the roots of and solutions to international human rights violations. In particular, she is interested in the ways that questions of sovereignty, citizenship/membership and humanitarian principles have shaped our understanding of and reactions to various transnational phenomena, such as the international human rights regime, international migration and the provision of international aid. Susan's focus is in the Asia-Pacific region, where she has conducted extensive field research in Thailand, Nepal, Bangladesh and Japan on refugee/migrant protection, statelessness and border control. She is currently engaged in a multi-year research project on populations experiencing 'precarity of place' in Thailand and Nepal. Her publications include 'The paradoxical power of precarity: refugees and homeland activism', *Refugee Review* 1:1 (2013); 'The durable solution discourse and refugee resettlement: the Bhutanese in Nepal' in *Protracted Displacement in Asia: No Place to Call Home,* edited by Howard Adelman (London: Ashgate); and *Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal: Anticipating the impact of resettlement* (Sydney: Austcare, Griffith University, 2008).

**Liana E. Chase** graduated from Dartmouth College in 2011 with a degree in anthropology. She is currently an MSc student in social and cultural psychiatry at McGill University. Liana has worked with asylum seekers in Montréal, QC and Boston, MA and with Tibetan and Bhutanese refugees in Nepal and Vermont. Her research is situated at the intersection of anthropology and psychology, applying methodologies from both fields to advance our understanding of the human capacity for resilience. Her previous publications include Chase, L.E., Welton-Mitchell, C. & Bhattarai, S. 2013. '"Solving tension": coping among Bhutanese refugees in Nepal' *International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care*, 9(2): 71–83; and Craig, S.R., Chase, L. & Lama, T.N., 2010. 'Taking the MINI to Mustang, Nepal: methodological and epistemological translations of an illness narrative interview tool' *Anthropology & Medicine17*(1): 1–26.

**Damayanti Bhattarai** hails from Jhapa, Nepal. She pursued her Master's degree in Sociology at Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, Nepal, for which her thesis focused on Bhutanese refugees living in camps in Jhapa and Morang districts. Since completing her Master's, Damayanti has contributed to numerous research and humanitarian projects in these camps.

# A Daughter Married, a Daughter Lost? The impact of resettlement on Bhutanese refugee marriages

Ilse Griek

## Introduction

As one of UNHCR's three 'durable solutions' for refugee situations,[1] resettlement has received a great deal of academic attention. The majority of these studies have studied the resettlement process after it has been carried out—in the country of resettlement—focusing on such aspects of the programme as post-arrival service provision (Wright 1981), new settlement patterns of resettled refugees (Ott 2011, Singer and Wilson 2006), or the ease (or difficulty) with which refugees secure employment, integrate, or establish new social networks (Hume and Hardwick 2005).

As other studies show, however, the resettlement process begins to affect individuals, families and societies long before they physically move from a country of asylum to a resettlement country (Banki 2008, Guragain 2013, Horst 2006). This paper illustrates some of the impacts of the resettlement process on marriages and refugee families in the camps in Nepal. In particular, it highlights a rising trend in minor marriages in the camps. Unlike the arranged minor marriages of the past, however, these new underage marriages are organised by youths themselves to avoid separation from their sweethearts, and are challenged by parents to avoid the loss of their daughters.[2]

## Minor marriage in context

In 2011, the Washington-based Population Reference Bureau ranked Nepal eighth in its list of top ten countries for child marriage, with 51.4 per cent of the country's population reportedly married before the age of 18 (Hervish and Feldman-Jacobs 2011). Ancient Hindu scriptures encourage marriage at a young age; influential religious texts such as the *Bishnu Sutra* and *Gautam Sutra* enjoin fathers to marry off their daughters within three weeks of their attaining puberty. In the *Manusmriti*, the sage

1 The other two durable solutions are voluntary repatriation and local integration.

2 This article is based on fourteen months of ethnographic field research conducted in Nepal between 2009 and 2011.

Manu declares that if a girl remains unmarried after reaching puberty, her father has failed in his duty towards her (Maharjan et al. 2012, UNICEF 2008: 24). These texts were not without effect on Hindu populations. Social perceptions of women and girls and poverty also contributed to the practice. In the twentieth century, child marriage was firmly established in both India and Nepal, with cross-sectional differences in ages of first marriage when factoring for religion, caste, region of residence, and education completed (Agarwala 1957, Bajracharya and Amin 2010, Choe, Thapa, and Mishra 2005).

Among the Bhutanese in exile in Nepal, parental attitudes toward early marriage slowly shifted and the frequency of arranged child marriages greatly declined. Education is often correlated to the age at which girls first marry; the more education girls complete, the higher the average age at which they are first married (Eruikar and Muthengi 2009, Singh and Samara 1996). In Bhutan, most girls had limited access to education. Schools were often long distances away, and parents often preferred to send their sons, keeping their daughters at home to help with the housework. This changed dramatically in the refugee camps in Nepal, where humanitarian agencies aimed at universal primary school enrolment. In coordination with UNHCR, Caritas Nepal established schools that were free of charge and located in each camp, generally at short distances from refugees' houses. They also advocated gender equality and the importance of education for all children, including girls.

By the time I visited the camps in 2010 and 2011, many adults expressed the preference that children should wait to marry (and have sexual intercourse) until after attaining at least the age of eighteen. One Counselling Board chief even explained that he was against marriage before twenty-five, because he felt it was too great a risk to the life of a girl to have children at a young age. In the sector of the camp where he lived and also worked as Sector Head, two girls who married as minors had died during childbirth: one was sixteen, the other only fourteen. Their bodies, he told me, were not mature enough to be able to cope with birth.[3]

A similar trend was observable among the host population in Nepal at large. In 1854, the marriage of a five-year old was permissible under the Nepali *Muluki Ain* (Country Code). By 1934, the age was raised to eleven for

3 Interview with Counselling Board mediator, Beldangi-2, 5 March 2011.

Brahman and Chhetri castes. By 1976, the minimum legal age for marriage was set at sixteen years of age for girls (of all castes) with parental consent, and eighteen without consent. For boys, these ages were fixed at eighteen and twenty-one, respectively (Onta-Bhatta 2001). Those found legally responsible for arranging the marriage of a minor, whether parents or *pandit* (Hindu priest), were punishable by law and could be fined and/or sentenced to prison. The 11th amendment to the *Muluki Ain* (2002) raised the legal age of marriage for both girls and boys to eighteen with parental consent, or twenty without consent.[4] As prescribed by Article 4c of the Marriage Registration Act, 2028 (1971),[5] a marriage can be registered when both parties have reached the age of twenty.

Although child marriages are still common in Nepal, particularly among girls, the practice is declining (Choe, Thapa, and Mishra 2005). In 1981, nation-wide, 14.3 per cent of women between the ages of ten and fourteen were already married. Twenty years later, this figure was only 1.8 per cent (UN Population Fund 2007: 22). The mean age of marriage for women in Nepal increased from 17.4 to 19.6 between 1981 and 2001. This change has been even more marked among inhabitants of the Tarai, the region where the Bhutanese refugee camps are located. In the Tarai, the mean age of marriage increased from 15.8 years in 1981, to 18.9 in 2001 (UN Population Fund 2007: 21).

The prevalence of arranged marriages in general has also declined among the Bhutanese, and by 2008, it had become so common for men and women to select their own spouses that the International Organization for Migration (IOM) referred to it as a 'cultural habit' of the refugees (IOM 2008). Again, the same trend can be observed in wider Nepal (Choe, Thapa, and Mishra 2005).

Since the advent of resettlement, however, evidence suggests that the trend of a declining minor marriage rate has begun to reverse in the Bhutanese refugee camps, and that underage marriages are once more on the rise. The new type of minor marriage, however, is markedly different from that of the past. For one, UNHCR's Resettlement Officer observed

4 *Muluki Ain* (General Code) 2020, Chapter 17 'On Marriage'. Translation by the Nepal Law Commission, http://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/documents/func-startdown/605/, accessed in August 2013.

5 As amended by the Administration of Justice Act, 2048 (1991) and the Amending Some Nepal Acts Relating to Maintain Gender Equality Act, 2063 (2006).

that 'in most cases, "underage" marriage does not involve a huge age difference. For example, the guy may be twenty-three, and the girl seventeen.'[6] Unlike previous minor marriages, these marriages were no longer arranged by parents, but by youths themselves, who were eloping with their sweethearts so as not to be separated from them during the resettlement process.[7] Some have observed that this is an indirect effect of counselling provided by staff of the IOM—referred to jokingly by some as the 'International Organization for Marriage'[8]—who allegedly advised youths to marry before, rather than after resettlement (Adhikari 2008).

These underage marriages have led to new types of legal disputes in the refugee camps, which centred on the validity of marriage and invoked rules from different legal systems to try to secure a given end. The following section will describe the legal regimes that govern these marriages.

**Resettlement, family unity and the law**

Marriages among Bhutanese refugees in Nepal are governed by several overlapping legal regimes. These include traditions and customary norms (many of which are derived from the Hindu religion), Nepali law, and foreign migration policy. UNHCR's resettlement policy also constitutes an important set of rules. Although these policies and rules are not 'law' in a strict sense, their impact on refugee applicants for resettlement is largely the same. A determination by UNHCR that a given refugee is ineligible for resettlement constitutes a migration bar as hard and decisive as a State decision not to allow entry. In fact, it may be even more far reaching, as it limits not just that refugee's access to one, but to all resettlement states.

UNHCR's Resettlement Handbook (ibid: 209) describes child marriage as a harmful traditional practice, and explicitly states that 'UNHCR does *not* normally submit cases of married children for resettlement unless there are compelling protection risks that warrant resettlement, and

6 Interview with UNHCR Resettlement Officer, Damak, 9 February 2011

7 One Damak-based journalist, who visits the camps on a regular basis and has written many articles on the Bhutanese, alleges that this has been accompanied by an increasing number of parents seeking formal legal annulment of the marriages of their children. Adhikari, C. September 19, 2008. 'Refugee Youths Become Eligible Life Partners,' Ekantipur, accessed from: https://www.ekantipur.com/2008/09/19/related-article/refugee-youths-become-eligible-life-partners/161127.html in May 2013.

8 Discussion with a former volunteer for the Bhutanese Refugee Children's Forum, London, 22 May 2013

resettlement is in the best interest of the child' (ibid: 211). For its operations on Nepali territory, UNHCR is required to work within the Nepali legal context. With respect to minor marriages, this has several consequences. As UNHCR's Resettlement Officer explained:

> In Nepal, the law does not permit marriage below eighteen years. For those under twenty, parental consent is needed. UNHCR can't recognise marriages that don't fulfill these criteria, but it can recognise relationships. A new policy on underage marriage has just been finalised. So far, UNHCR has kept cases on hold involving married minors until they reach the age of eighteen, after which the wife can be transferred to her husband's hut. But so many people were put on hold that the need arose to approach the issue differently.[9]

Fearing that the information would be used to commit resettlement fraud if leaked, the Resettlement Officer would not give me any details about the new policy. He did explain, however, that the previous policy dictated that, as long as either party to a marriage was under age, the resettlement processes of both the minor and his/her family members—as well as those of the other partner and his/her family members—were put on hold. Ration card transfers were only effected in the event that a couple was legally married, and thus above the legal age limit. As a consequence, even if an underage girl had married and physically moved to the hut of her husband and his family, administratively the transfer could not be effected until she was eighteen (assuming that she had parental consent). Until this administrative transfer takes place, a girl is still on her maternal family's ration card, and thus tied to their file, also for resettlement purposes—meaning that she cannot be separated from her parents, even if she has already been living with her husband for years. Her parents will not be resettled without her until the transfer takes place, which can delay the entire case and creates frustration among her relatives, who consider her as having effectively transferred to her husband's household.

The maintenance of administrative links between a girl and her parents does not imply that UNHCR does not, at the same time, recognise her new relationship with her husband. As UNHCR (2011a: 178) defines it,

9 Interview with UNHCR Resettlement Officer, Damak, 9 February 2011.

> [a] nuclear family is generally accepted as consisting of spouses and, their minor or dependent, unmarried children and minor siblings. UNHCR considers not only legally-recognized spouses (including same-sex spouses), but also individuals who are engaged to be married, who have entered a customary marriage (also known as 'common-law' marriages), or who have established long-term partnerships (including same-sex partners), as spouses within the nuclear family.

Assuming that the girl is the one who is underage (which is more common in the camps than the reverse), if she and her husband are recognised under this definition as being either engaged, or having entered into a customary marriage, they are also entitled to preservation of the unity of their (new) family. However, because she cannot be transferred to his file until she is 18, he has to wait too—as do any dependent family members he may have, or any family members upon whom he is dependent.

If UNHCR determines that a couple is eligible for resettlement, an assessment is made of whether they also meet the criteria in place in different resettlement countries. Migration to the United States, the largest resettlement country for Bhutanese refugees, is governed by the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). In addition to describing who qualifies for migration in a general sense, the act spells out what is regarded as a valid 'family' for the purpose of immigration to the U.S., what types of marriages are considered valid, and what constitutes a child or dependant (UNHCR 2011b: 4-5).

UNHCR's Resettlement Handbook specifies that 'for U.S. migration purposes, the validity of a marriage is generally determined by the law in place in the country of asylum' (UNHCR 2011b: 11). A marriage that is considered legally valid in the country where the marriage took place, under this principle, is generally valid for the purpose of migration. However, in recognition of the fact that many people enter into marriages through cohabitation without the involvement of local courts, registrars or even as much as a religious ceremony, common law marriages may also be accepted as valid if lawful in the place of celebration and not contrary to federal public policy (UNHCR 2011b: 11). For Bhutanese refugees transacting a common law marriage in Nepal, this means that if the conditions of the marriage in question are valid under Nepali law, its validity is also established under U.S. migration law (Titshaw 2010).

The fact that Nepali law requires an age of eighteen for marriage with parental consent (or twenty without parental consent), however, suggests that it would be contrary to federal policy to recognise a minor marriage that is transacted 'illegally' in Nepal. According to UNHCR's resettlement officer, in practice parents generally did not refuse consent after their children turned eighteen, because this would delay their procedure even further, although sometimes there were exceptions. Should parental consent be refused, UNHCR has several tools at its disposal. Through dependency assessments, vulnerability assessments, and best interest determinations, staff members try to determine what is in the best interests of children and other family members. Nevertheless, UNHCR is silent on how exactly it deals with the law in this situation, or what (legal) steps it requires if parental consent is refused, and parties are over eighteen but under twenty.

The following sections present two marriage disputes that took place in the camps. Both were mediated by the Counselling Board, which is the top tier of three levels of the camp-based dispute resolution system. The system is centred on mediation, and is run independently by refugees themselves in each of the Bhutanese camps. The first case is a struggle between a daughter, her husband and her parents over the validity of her marriage. The second illustrates the creative solutions through which people tried to maintain family unity, the consequences this can have for their resettlement processes, and the new types of resettlement-centered legal cases that have emerged as a result.

## A 'modern' minor marriage

In March 2011, a minor marriage dispute was mediated by the Counselling Board in Beldangi-2 refugee camp. The case bears resemblance to other minor marriage disputes I observed over the course of 2010 and 2011, and is a typical example of the type of adolescent marriage that is on the rise in the camps today, through which youths choose their own partners and elope (frequently without the consent of their parents) to avoid being separated from each other by the resettlement process.

In March 2011, Man Kumar[10] and Pabitra fell in love and eloped.

10 To protect the identities of those involved, the names of participants to these disputes have been changed.

Pabitra was sixteen, Man Kumar was twenty. Before they were married, Man Kumar brought Pabitra's family wine and flowers, in line with the traditional wedding customs of his ethnic group. Pabitra's parents were concerned that the marriage would affect their resettlement process, and tried to convince their daughter to wait until after resettlement to marry. Pabitra refused and married Man Kumar without the presence of her parents.

When Pabitra's parents found out, they tried once more to convince their daughter to separate from her husband. This strategy proved unsuccessful, so Pabitra's father filed an application against Man Kumar, demanding that he and Pabitra separate until after Pabitra and her family's resettlement. In the application, Pabitra's father stated that he did not have a problem with Man Kumar as a potential husband for his daughter, and that he would agree to the marriage after his family had resettled to the United States, if both Man Kumar and Pabitra still wished to marry at that time.

Later that month, the case reached the Counselling Board. For the duration of the mediation session, the Counselling Board room was full of youths who were watching with great interest. Some of them were Pabitra's friends, who studied at Pancha-oti English School in the camp. Many were likely to be wondering not just how this case would turn out, but also how the ruling might affect them, and the way they looked at marriage.

Like most of the other youths, Man Kumar and Pabitra were dressed in modern garb, not in the traditional *sari*, *daura suruwal* and *kurta suruwal* worn by most of the older people in the room. Man Kumar's jeans were ripped, Pabitra's tight. A row of rubber bangles adorned her wrist, more similar to the glow-in-the-dark bracelets often seen in raves and house music parties than the customary bangles worn by Bhutanese and Nepali married women.

Two major discussions took place during the mediation session. The first addressed the validity of the marriage and the consequences of the law. Different parties pointed to legal provisions and norms that not only differed, but originated from different bodies of law. In order to convince the youths to separate, for instance, the mediator urged Man Kumar to wait to marry Pabitra until she is eighteen, 'as per the law'. To give this statement more force, he later threatened that if Pabitra did not return

to her parents, he would send the couple to the Gender Focal Point—the party in the camp responsible for dealing with cases of sexual and gender-based violence, thus insinuating that the case would be turned into a rape case. A bystander made this insinuation explicit, warning the group that Man Kumar could get a prison sentence ranging from six months to as much as twenty years if he was convicted of rape. Their claims were based on interpretations of Nepali law and UNHCR policy. Pabitra, in turn, tried to counter these arguments by referring to the Hindu ideal of marriage and the traditional norm that 'once a girl is with a husband, she should not separate from him.'

The second major point of contention concerned the consequences Pabtira's marriage would have for her family's resettlement process. Pabitra's parents were afraid that if their daughter married at sixteen, they would have to wait two years to be resettled. Their understanding of UNHCR's policy was fairly accurate—at the time, prevailing policy dictated that Pabitra would not be separated from her parents' file until she turned eighteen.

To resolve this problem, both the mediator and the members of the community present at the mediation session decided that Pabitra should return to her parents' house, where they should come to a compromise together at home. The issue, the Counselling Board determined, should be resolved at family level. Pabitra's wish to stay at her husband's house was overruled. Because she did not appear at all happy with the judgment, the mediator sent her parents home with a warning: to prevent their daughter from getting depressed (and risking suicide, which was a visible phenomenon in the camps), they should allow her and Man Kumar to continue to see each other, although the two were not to live together.

**Suspended! The consequences of strategising for family unity**

Less than a month after Pabitra's minor marriage case was concluded, another case was heard by the Counselling Board. Plaintiff Prakash Chhetri's daughter Sita had eloped with a young man called Anup Khadka shortly before Prakash's brother's funeral. At the funeral, Sita and Anup revealed that they had married. As both families were present, they discussed the matter during the funeral. When the boy's parents asked Prakash whether they should organise wedding formalities, he asked them not to, but rather to wait to hold the cultural ceremony until they reached

the U.S. The elders decided that the youths should wait to be officially married until after Prakash's family had completed his resettlement process, which was at its final stages.

Little did Prakash know that Anup Khadka's parents proceeded to organise the marriage in secret despite Prakash's wishes, and held a wedding ceremony at a local *mandir* (temple). After the ceremony, a letter was drawn up that testified to the marriage, signed by different witnesses, including some of the Sub-Sector Heads and Sector Heads from the camp. Shortly afterwards, Prakash's daughter was resettled to the U.S. along with Prakash's first wife, who travelled ahead of him for health reasons. Prakash claimed that he did not find out that his daughter had formalised the marriage ceremony until after she was already resettled. He lamented that the wedding was not conducted properly; his culture dictated that he should have been present, but Anup's parents had held the ceremony without inviting him. What he also did not know is that the letter testifying that Anup and Sita were married, signed by those present, said something else, too. It accused Prakash of sending off his daughter for resettlement in full knowledge that she was married, and without her husband's permission.

Initially, Anup and Sita agreed that, to avoid adverse consequences for Prakash's family, Anup would wait to show the letter to UNHCR until the rest the family had also been resettled. Unfortunately for Prakash, the boy grew impatient. Hoping that it would lead to the expedition of his resettlement process so that he could join his wife, he showed the letter to UNHCR early—while Prakash and the rest of his family were still in the camp.

In April 2011, Prakash was pulled out of one of the last stages of the resettlement process. He was given the message that his case would be put on hold for two years as punishment for misrepresenting his family's composition—a form of resettlement fraud. The suspension had a big impact on his family. In preparation for their imminent departure, they had already sold most of their belongings, done the shopping needed for their journey, and pulled one of their remaining daughters out of school, as a result of which she missed that year's SLC exams.[11] As a result of the delay, it would be at least two years before Prakash would be reunited with his first wife, or his daughter.

11 The SLC examination marks the end of the 10th grade in Nepal.

As I tried to understand how Prakash was held responsible for a marriage he states he was not aware was ever formalised, I asked him on what laws that decision was based. He answered that his daughter, during her interview with UNHCR, had said that she was unmarried—which, at that stage in the resettlement process, she was. Then he added:

> The different countries have their own laws. Some of the INGOs and NGOs, they have their own law. As per UNHCR's law, my daughter married that boy, and as per the rules and regulations of UNHCR, I had to go and tell them that my daughter married. I did not do that, so I went against the law of UNHCR. UNHCR, later on, found out about this. For that reason, my process was stopped by UNHCR. But during the marriage, the girl's parents should also have been called: I should also have been called...

During the mediation session, the parties present tried to solve two problems. Prakash wanted to undo the damage done to his family as a result of the suspension of his resettlement process. The Khadka family wished to ensure that their son would still be reunited with his wife. No one knew for sure how to achieve either end. As Prakash understood it, his failing lay in not informing UNHCR of his daughter's marriage, which was his duty as head of household. His only defence was that he could not have known, because he was not invited and the ceremony took place at the *mandir* without his knowledge. An elderly bystander suggested that Prakash's problem could be solved if Anup and Sita arranged a divorce, she from the U.S., and he from Nepal, but Prakash was afraid that if it was not 'official' and 'legal', the action would have no impact. Nobody knew the rules with any certainty, and the case was not resolved before my departure from Nepal.

**Transformations in family disputes**

As the cases above have shown, tensions between parents and children resulted largely from the consequences—for both parties—of recognising these marriages. For teenagers, the unions were important because they prevented them from being separated from their boyfriends or girlfriends. Parents, on the other hand, were wary of eloping children, and often went to considerable effort to try to have these marriages annulled. They

wanted to avoid delays to their resettlement processes, which could be lengthy when legal issues were involved. They also sought to avoid further separation of their families during the resettlement process, which was fraught with enough uncertainty as it was. The resettlement process and its promise of a future in an unknown foreign country are challenging, and family separation represents an additional source of anxiety. Worry about family separation is a key source of stress among resettled refugees, with some studies showing that unresolved family reunion issues serve as a contributor to long-term trauma, and compound post-traumatic stress reactions and bereavement (McDonald-Wilmsen 2009: 4).

Nepali Bhutanese society is virilocal; after marriage, a Bhutanese woman leaves her *maiti ghar* (birth home) to join her husband's household. The Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal were at manageable distances from each other, and families dispersed over different camps could see each other without inordinate difficulty. This is not so in the case of resettlement, where people can end up in different states or countries. All of a sudden, families faced the prospect of separation not only by the vast territory of the U.S., but by oceans, continents, and a range of migration laws that deterred them from traveling for specified lengths of time.

Resettlement was both the main reason for these new minor marriages, and the reason they constituted a problem for the families involved. These new consequences—the possibly irreconcilable separation between a girl and her parents, as well as lengthy delays in resettlement procedures, led to a transformation in minor marriage disputes in the refugee camps in Nepal.

By law, the responsibility for a minor marriage is placed on the guardians of the minor. Nepali criminal law dealing with child marriages regards the child as the injured party, and the parents and *pandit* (priest) responsible for arranging the marriage and conducting the ceremony as the perpetrators. Reflecting this expectation, which was mirrored by reality not long ago, the law prescribes punishment for those who arrange the marriage, not for the minor him- or herself. Criminal law did not address this new genre of minor marriages, in which youths were eloping themselves. The new minor marriages that were the subject of mediation discussions in the camps shifted traditional understandings about the roles and responsibilities of parents and their children. Instead of the child-as-victim, parents saw themselves as the injured parties, suffering

delays, difficulties and family separation as a result of the actions of their children.

**Conclusion**

This paper has presented two examples of new marriage disputes resulting from the resettlement process. In the first, a young couple attempted to use the mediation system to convince the community to recognise their marriage so as not to allow the resettlement process to separate them from each other, in opposition to the girl's parents, who wished to convince them to wait to marry until after resettlement. In the second, the father of a girl who had married in secret tried to undo the damage done to his resettlement case, which had been put on hold because of his 'misrepresenting' his daughter as single.

In the absence of alternative venues through which refugees could effectively challenge UNHCR's and resettlement countries' approaches to marriage and family unity, the camp mediation system became a venue that they used to try to interpret and negotiate understandings of conflicting legal rules, and through which they tried to undo, avoid, or seek compensation for adverse impacts on their families or their resettlement processes. Even though the Counselling Board had no jurisdiction over any resettlement-related decisions made by UNHCR, it became the site of a generational tug of war. Children married and chose their new husbands or wives, while parents tried at all costs to keep their children in line, and their families together.

As people made decisions about their lives and tried to solve problems relating both to the resettlement process, and the different rules that governed it, they found themselves walking a tightrope between different bodies of law, the implications of which they did not always fully understand. At the same time, these rules were obscure, untransparent and inaccessible to most refugees. Different rules could be used to advance different arguments. References to 'external' rules were juxtaposed with references to cultural norms. Where youths like Pabitra pointed to elements of tradition to argue for the validity of their marriage, parents did the same in arguing against it, for instance by claiming that a marriage was not valid because they had not been invited to the ceremony, or that it had not been conducted in accordance with custom.

The diverging interests of different generations in these cases are

indicative of a new intergenerational discord within the camp community, brought on in part by the resettlement process. When youths were informed that they should marry before resettlement, they were in essence presented with the possibility of taking their future into their own hands. By marrying and arguing for the validity of their marriages, they exercised independent choice, challenging their parents' authority in a strongly hierarchical society.

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# Uprooted/Rerouted: the Bhutanese resettlement project in North Carolina

Suzanne Shanahan

In the fall of 2009, Fiona Terry was a visiting scholar at the Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Terry is the author of *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (2002), based on her extensive work with humanitarian relief in different parts of the world, including in Northern Iraq, Somalia, Myanmar, the Great Lakes region of Africa, Liberia, and along the Sino-Korean border. Terry came to North Carolina from Kathmandu where she and her family had recently moved. In her first week at Kenan, Terry causally remarked in a faculty seminar how she'd been quite surprised to hear from several people in Kathmandu that there were refugees from Bhutan in eastern Nepal. Neither she nor anyone in the room had realised there were refugees from Bhutan in Nepal. The idea of refugees from 'heaven on earth' was a curiosity to all. Even more surprising was that many Bhutanese were slated to resettle to the United States. Shortly after there was an article in the local paper referencing this resettlement and the fact the Bhutanese were coming to Durham.

It was this informal conversation and the serendipity of resettlement in Durham that sparked a four-year community-based research project in Jhapa, Nepal, and Durham, North Carolina, examining the impact of displacement and resettlement on refugee well-being at the Kenan Institute for Ethics. In this research report, I briefly outline the work of this project over the past three-plus years and offer some suggestive findings. More specifically, I introduce this project—its goals, methods—through the experience of one family who resettled to Durham in the fall of 2010.

## The Tamang family

Late one September evening, the Tamang[1] family arrived after two-plus days in transit at the Raleigh-Durham airport. The resettlement agency

1 All the names and many locations used in this narrative have been changed. The story of this particular family is widely known in North Carolina as it was a source of considerable debate, discussion and some community mobilisation. It is a story the family wanted shared. They have since moved on to another city. That said, as per IRB, all names are pseudonyms randomly assigned.

working with the Tamang family described Susmita Tamang as a thirty-something mother of two girls and two boys ranging from 1-15 years. No other information was provided. Two undergraduates and I met them at the airport. Work with the community is an integral part of the Kenan Institute's Bhutanese Resettlement Project—giving students and faculty an experiential understanding of the ongoing daily challenges of displacement. The Tamangs were, however, the first family the project sponsored.[2] Late one afternoon in September, the resettlement agency had called noting their failure to find accommodation for the family and asking if the project could assist with temporary housing. With their flight due four hours later, I volunteered my home. I suppose that should have been the first warning sign of what was to be six months of chaos—for the Tamang family, for my family and for the entire project team.

*Welcome to Texas*

At just after 9:00 p.m., the Tamangs arrived: Susmita, Shreeni, Gopal, Rita, and Ram glided down the escalator to baggage claim, exhausted and confused. There was a brief attempt at introductions, but it quickly became clear they spoke no English whatsoever. Smiles and 'namastes' were exchanged, and we slowly lead them to a van, with one large and one smallish suitcase in tow. As we reached the car, Gopal handed me a scrap of paper he had held tightly in his hand and said, 'Houston, Texas?' as if to ask a question. One of my students smiled back and said, 'No Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina'. Susmita and Shreeni chimed in again to ask, 'Houston, Texas?' As we drove the 20 minutes to my home, the only words they spoke were 'Houston, Texas.'

We arrived back at my house and began trying to help them settle in. Everything was a curiosity for Rita and Ram—the ice cubes, the light switches, the sound of the flushing toilet, the piano, my daughters' long blonde hair—were all a source of endless delight. The only Nepali undergraduate at Duke came over to help translate while the students, the Tamangs, and my own three children shared some Indian food. The

2 Refugees resettling to the United States all have a sponsor who, together with a case worker, helps in the initial process of resettlement. Individuals, families, and community-based organisations (churches, schools, NGOs) can all serve as sponsors. Many sponsors develop a lifelong relationship with the resettling individuals and families they come to know.

chatter was animated. The only bit I picked up was the repeated question, 'Houston, Texas?' Finally, the student translator turned to me and said, 'You've picked up the wrong family. They are supposed to be in Houston, Texas, and were to be met by their family who resettled there in the spring.' She handed me their resettlement paperwork. There in black and white—destination: Houston, Texas. Panic. I had picked up the wrong Bhutanese family. How could this happen? I began frantically trying to call a caseworker at the resettlement organisation. No answer. I called the airport to see if there was in fact another family waiting for a pickup. No other refugee family had arrived that evening. Through the student translator, Susmita asked me to call her husband in Texas so she could explain the mistake. They talked, and she cried. She handed me the phone. Bijay was irate. They had planned a welcome party: What was I going to do to fix the situation? I promised all would be well. I was sure I could fix things. And so we all fell into bed overwhelmed, confused and exhausted.

Early the next morning, the Tamangs' case worker called to set up a time to meet, do some paperwork, give them some petty cash. I nervously inquired about the mix-up. He was now confused. There was no mix-up, just a last-minute decision to 'divert' them to North Carolina. More confusion followed. Why? How? There was no answer. I pressed, he resisted. Again, the Duke student from Nepal arrived to help translate. This time she assisted the caseworker. Through the student, he struggled to explain that, no, they would not be going to Texas to resettle with family but instead would have to stay in North Carolina. In unison the family of five began to cry, to wail. The caseworker then handed Susmita a $50 bill and asked her to sign a document. Still crying, she signed in the designated spot and asked him what he had handed her. Susmita was illiterate and had rarely used currency. He left flustered, saying he would be back in two days to move the family into an apartment.

The next two days were simultaneously wondrous and harrowing. Wondrous were a bubble bath, a trip to a shopping centre, an afternoon at the playground. Harrowing was the set of confusing and fragmented conversations in translation mostly with Susmita, her 9-year-old son Gopal, and husband Bijay, and a series of pleading calls I made on their behalf to the resettlement agency. Couldn't something be done? Why couldn't they go to Texas? In bits and pieces it became clear that Susmita was not Bijay's only wife. While the U.S. will not resettle families from

a plural marriage in the same home, they do generally resettle them nearby one another so they can maintain their family relations. But while in transit from Kathmandu, the resettlement agency made the decision to send them to North Carolina—a state where they had neither family nor friends. There were unconfirmed rumours that Bijay's first wife had issued threats against Susmita and her children if they resettled nearby. I was told it was a matter of safety. Neither Susmita nor Bijay were told of this change in plan. The resettlement organisation said I could relay the information if I chose. They had no intention of doing so.

*Do something, please*

Two days later I left Susmita and her children at their new apartment. They ran through the small, dark apartment, excited by the idea they had a home of their own with keys, carpet, and, best of all, a freezer. They would wait there until Bijay came and brought them back to Texas. But Bijay never came. And over the next four months, Susmita and Shreeni became increasingly distraught at being so far from family. Susmita had never been the head of a household. She had never been alone in this way. More significantly, Susmita fell gravely ill with an infection in her femur—an infection identified and initially treated before she left Nepal. Her caseworker twice planned to take her to a doctor but never found time. Instead he suggested aspirin. As a result, Susmita had surgery to save her leg from amputation after the infection ate a hole the size of a silver dollar in her leg. In all she spent three weeks in the intensive care unit. Ram was weaned because Susmita was too ill to breastfeed. It was also discovered that Susmita had for more than a decade suffered from a chronic illness and had been on medication prior to leaving Nepal, which never seemed to have been flagged in her state-mandated health check. Shreeni, Gopal, Rita, and Ram were shuttled between my home and the homes of other Bhutanese refugees while Susmita was in the hospital, and Susmita converted to Christianity because 'a nice lady from the church said all Americans love Jesus.' Her caseworker asked that Susmita and I stop contacting him as he could provide no further assistance. Bijay, too, asked that Susmita and I stop calling because, despite his former promises, he had no means to assist. In the middle of all this, and without warning, the resettlement organisation picked up Susmita's children from school and childcare and dropped them at the Department of Social Services, leaving

me a message—which I was to convey to Susmita—that her children were in foster care. She was released early from the hospital to prevent her children from being formally removed by the courts. Indeed, she would forgo the two months recommended in a rehabilitation facility to keep her children. Ram was severely burned in a cooking accident 48 hours after her release from hospital and spent several weeks in a burn unit. Soon thereafter, Susmita was assaulted by a drug addict in her apartment building and severely beaten. Susmita's refrain throughout these difficult months was 'Do something, please.' It was never really directed at me or anyone else. The refrain was just a sign of her helplessness and despair.

**Patterns**

The U.S. resettles more refugees than any other country by a wide margin. In 2012 it resettled 58,170 people from around the world. 15,070 of those individuals were Bhutanese. That same year North Carolina was ranked tenth amongst the fifty American states in the number of refugees resettled. Here, too, the Bhutanese were the most commonly resettled group. In the past decade almost 20,000 refugees have settled in North Carolina. In the past three years more Bhutanese were resettled in North Carolina than any other group: some 2500 Bhutanese have resettled there—mostly in Durham, Guilford, Mecklenburg, and Wake counties. In this broader context, Susmita Tamang's story is certainly unusual. But while not typical, Susmita's case raises three key questions about the dynamics of Bhutanese resettlement in the United States, in general, and in North Carolina, in particular. First is the problem of health vulnerabilities; second is the role of faith-based organisations in the U.S. resettlement process; third is the challenges posed by the public private partnership model the U.S. employs when resettling refugees.

*Health Vulnerabilities*

The medical problems that beset Susmita immediately upon arrival were extraordinary. But the level of care both she and Ram received was also extraordinary. They each spent more than three weeks in two of the world's best hospitals under the care of some of the world's best physicians. Susmita herself attributes her survival to her outstanding medical treatment at Duke University Hospital. 'I know I would have died if I had stayed in Beldangi II (Refugee Camp). No one would have been

able to help me the way they helped me here.' Ram spent three weeks in the University of North Carolina Hospital's burn unit and had six months of physical therapy to rehabilitate his hand after the burn. He now has full use of his right hand, a fact very hard to anticipate in the days immediately following the accident. And in each case with hundreds of thousands of dollars at stake, cost was no object. The eight months of Medicaid (federally funded health care) coverage afforded newly arrived refugees provided for every expense.

But the Tamangs' access to quality health care came only after a foreseeable problem. Susmita's infection had progressed dangerously before she was treated. For the rest of her life she will be on and off antibiotics and will be forever physically limited by her compromised leg. Could it all have been avoided? Should the infection have been identified earlier? And what about her prior health status? Despite being clearly indicated on her records, no attempt was made to manage her serious pre-existing medical condition until her health situation was critical. Report after report decries the critical problem of health care—including assistance with mental health issues—for refugees and yet there are few mechanisms or resources available to redress the problem (Reed, et. al. 2012).

Inevitably, Susmita's story prompts the question of whether refugees and the communities that welcome them can in fact appropriately manage health vulnerabilities. Is the U.S. policy of nondiscrimination based on health status prudent? Refugees with health vulnerabilities are not only welcomed but indeed have priority status for resettlement to the United States. But is this generosity not reckless if resources are not in place to manage even the most extreme circumstances? While the quality of U.S. health care unquestionably saved Susmita's life, it is not clear that this same system will be able to manage what will be a lifetime of health needs.

*Faith-Based Organisations*

The Tamangs' conversion to Christianity remains a puzzle to many on our research team. Indeed, one of the most debated dimensions of our work with the Bhutanese in Durham has been the role of faith-based organisations and the tendency of refugees to convert to Christianity. Refugees resettling to the Durham area are mostly either Hindu or Christian, with equal proportions of both. But six month after arrival, few Hindus in Durham have retained their original religion.

The U.S. relies upon a public-private partnership in the resettlement process. There are eleven voluntary agencies that partner with the Department of Homeland Security to resettle refugees. Eight operate in North Carolina. These organisations receive a grant of approximately $700 per resettled refugee. Additionally, each refugee receives eight months of medical and cash assistance along with access to language and job training. Each refugee also has a caseworker who works with him or her for the first ninety days after arrival. But many of the resources the voluntary organisations are able to provide refugees are based on philanthropic donations and the time and financial resources provided by partner organisations. These partner organisations help provide a warm welcome, a furnished apartment, clothes, school supplies, and other incidentals needed to set up house. They are vital to refugees' ability to become quickly self-sufficient. And self-sustainability is a resettlement agency's core goal—ideally within six months but certainly within a year. While six of the eleven voluntary agencies that partner with the U.S. government have some religious affiliation or tradition, they are strictly prohibited from proselytising. In all our interviews, we are confident that this bright red line is rarely violated. The concern emerges from the organisations and individuals who partner with these agencies in the resettlement process. Faith-based organisations are quite supportive (materially and emotionally) of newly arriving refugees. And in a state like North Carolina in which faith-based organizations, and churches in particular, are the primary actors in civil society, these entities provide the bulk of the supplemental support for refugees. There are simply few other organisations with the resources or desire to support refugees. Thus, while high conversion rates are not especially surprising, it is unclear whether they are desirable.

Indeed, in the context of Durham, membership in a church appears an almost essential mechanism of integration for many refugees. Church membership is a primary social network in many Southern communities. I recall Gopal's excitement the day he was baptised. ''Now we both love Jesus,' he smiled, assuming it signalled a greater bond between him and me. Church membership was a form of belonging. But how voluntary was this membership? Is it acceptable for churches to offer English instruction solely through Bible study? Is it acceptable for churches to house missionaries in housing apartments largely inhabited by refugees to spread the word of Christ? Should church members insist that refugees

pray with them each time they drop off some pre-used clothing or a hot meal? Should churches rearrange the family photos and keepsakes in the Tamang home because they resemble a Hindu shrine too closely? Should church members teach Rita to chastise me and anyone else for using the greeting 'Namaste' because it is a pagan term? When does the generosity of faith-based organisations come at too high a price? These questions are not easily answered but warrant further exploration.

*Public-Private Partnership*

The role of religious organisations calls into question the more general structure of a public-private partnership in regard to refugee resettlement. The U.S. is not highly selective in its resettlement programme. Age, education, work experience, and health status matter little. It is, in this respect, a remarkably generous programme. But the U.S. system also provides minimal resources for each refugee, and the public-private partnership means that refugees are more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of volunteer good will than is ideal. There is an expectation that local communities will support resettling refugees financially and organisationally. Is the U.S. perhaps admitting refugees that communities have no ability to assist effectively?

Social provision in the United States has historically been a mix of public and private initiatives. The particular relationship between faith-based organisations was further institutionalised through the 2001 George W. Bush initiative and the establishment of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Resettlement is, then, no different from many poverty or educational initiatives, and in many ways this partnership is what enables refugees to manage so effectively upon arrival and find ways to integrate into communities across the United States. Like the policy of admitting most anyone in need, it is a laudable principle. But what happens when a refugee has extraordinary needs like Susmita? Should an ill, single mother of four with no formal education and no work experience be expected to become self-sustainable in six months to a year? Does this partnership and the need to rely on the goodwill of others for even the most basic needs make a vulnerable woman even more vulnerable? Is the unpredictability of private assistance not a source of enormous stress? Maybe the problem is not the religious nature of the partners, but rather the private nature of the provision.

**Research design**

The Tamangs' experience has in many ways shaped our research agenda and our focus both on questions of well-being and moral boundaries. 'Uprooted/Rerouted: The Bhutanese Resettlement Project' is a multi-site community-based research project that examines the impact of displacement and resettlement upon refugee well-being, broadly defined. Of particular interest are both how displacement/resettlement affects mental health and moral boundaries. The research is conducted by a vertically integrated team of faculty, post-docs, graduate students, and undergraduates. The team's work is facilitated by a set of local Nepali or Bhutanese research assistants. The methods include participant observation, modified life story interviews, and photo elicitation. Life story interviews are a form of oral history during which the respondent focuses on a few key events, characters, challenges, and ideas in his or her life. The objective of this form of interview is to allow the respondents to provide information in their own terms about their general physical and social well-being, social values, social capital, and culture. Each interview ends with the question, 'If your life were a book, what would its title be?' Interviews run foran average of 2–3 hours, but some go on for as long as eight hours. Of equal importance are the information shared and the subjects' perspective/reflection on that information. It is both about 'their life and how they tell it.'[3] Versions of this interview form have been used extensively with populations, including refugees, who have experienced some significant personal trauma or dislocation.[4] The life story interview protocol we employ begins with a simple mapping exercise where both the interviewer and interviewee draw their childhood homes. After sharing the significant elements of their homes the interviewer asks about the interviewee's most significant life events, a typical day, family and community, health and mental health, and beliefs/religion.

Beginning in 2010 the team has spent 4–6 weeks each spring collecting data at the refugee camps in eastern Nepal. Data collection occurs year round in Durham and is done in conjunction with a series of community engagement projects including a language class for adults, a series of health workshops, a craft circle for women, and a mentoring programme

3 See http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/22/health/psychology/22narr.html for a discussion of Dan McAdams's life story methodology and its benefits. See also McAdams (2006).

4 See http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/foley/instruments/interview.

for youth aged 5–15 years. The project has also served as both formal and informal sponsor to several families resettling locally.

*Limits of Obligation*

'Uprooted/Rerouted' is still very much in the initial phases of data analysis, trying to understand both the dynamics of refugee well-being after displacement and resettlement and how radical displacement and resettlement affect moral boundaries (or what people understand to be right, wrong, fair and just). But our research and engagement with the Bhutanese community has also raised important ethical questions about U.S. resettlement policy and in particular the structural reliance upon a public- private partnership. While the U.S. has clearly articulated a moral responsibility to refugees and annually admits 50–80,000 resettling refugees as a reflection of that responsibility, it is not clear how that responsibility unfolds over time. Is our state obligation to the Tamangs any more or less than that to any other family in need in the United States? And for how long should that obligation be maintained? The contours and limits of this moral obligation remain much more murky, as do the best mechanisms to fulfill it.

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# Nepali-Speaking Bhutanese Refugees in Canada: How to be Hindu in a regional Quebecois city?

Béatrice Halsouet

In May 2007, Canada officially welcomed 5,000 Bhutanese refugees. During autumn 2012, another 500 Bhutanese refugees with relatives in Canada were brought in. In March 2013, Canada began preparations to accept another 1,000 over the next two years.

The refugees find themselves scattered across different provinces. Their exact distribution has not been revealed to date, but according to my informal census,[1] as of 2008 around 2,000 refugees had re-resettled in Quebec, a French-speaking Canadian province with seven million inhabitants. The Quebecois context is a very particular one. On the one hand, regionalisation has been the dominant government policy since the beginning of the 1990s and therefore the resettlement locations are all in regional cities of 20,000 to 517,000 inhabitants, and not in Montreal, the biggest city. On the other hand, the fact that French is the dominant language obliges the refugees to learn it from scratch, which sets up a kind of competition with English. In fact, Quebec's linguistic situation may tempt refugees to move to English-speaking provinces of Canada and renders the resettlement of Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees[2] in Quebec fragile at best.

This study focuses on certain characteristics of the integration of Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees in Saint-Jérôme, a city of 68,456 inhabitants just north of Montreal. This paper presents the place of Hindu religion in the daily lives of the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees in this new context, and argues that Hindu rites and practices form a crucial component of their identity.

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1 Mathieu Boisvert, my research director, and I gave public conferences in Autumn 2011 in the four cities of Quebec in order to inform the local population about the challenges facing these refugees. There, we collected census information through the local integration organisations. I regularly updated these data through the same contacts.

2 I refer to 'Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees' to take into account both their culture and their place of birth (for those over 22 years old). I avoid the expression *Lhotsampa* because of the refugees' general resistance to this Dzongkha name.

**Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees in Saint-Jérôme**

Saint-Jérôme began to welcome refugees in December 2008, and the community now consists of 224 people, with 15 born in the city. Women constitute 55% of the group and the elderly (60 years old and over) represent only around 5% of the total, a figure which may undermine the crucial role these persons usually play in their families and in the community. Most of the adults attend French classes or follow the High School curriculum, and their command of French improves constantly. All families speak Nepali, though some families speak another language, such as the Tibeto-Burman Tamang. In terms of caste, Brahmins are strongly represented[3] along with Chetri, Rai, Biswa and Darji families.

The resettlement process itself is led by the regional NGO Le Coffret, which specialises in accepting and establishing immigrants in the Laurentides region north of Montreal. Since 1990, this non-political and nondenominational NGO has been recognised and financed by Quebec's Department of Immigration and Cultural Communities (MICC). Its responsibilities include regionalising immigration, raising awareness to fight racial discrimination, and welcoming, installing and integrating new arrivals. Its employees, who are few in number, but dedicated, assist refugees during the first five years of resettlement. The NGO distributes families all around the city to avoid ghettoisation and pairs Bhutanese families with Quebecois families as much as possible. Given their very recent migration, no specific services have been given to or have been organised by Bhutanese refugees: there are no newspapers, no websites, and there is just one specialised shop in Quebec city.

Some observers, including Le Coffret, argue that Ontario, Quebec's neighbouring province, and other English provinces remain attractive destinations for Quebec-based refugees because many of them have relatives there they want to join, or friends that have already acquired stable financial situations, specifically because they weren't forced to master an entire second language. In fact, the question of professional integration looms large for many refugees; despite Quebec's low unemployment rate (7.7 % as of May 2013), they lack the language and professional skills that are necessary in the job market.

The majority of the refugees are Hindu, although around 29% of those

3 As of 25 May 2012, 16 of the 41 families in Saint-Jérôme were Brahmins.

in Saint-Jérôme converted to Christianity in camps in Nepal. The two groups nevertheless share similar values and regularly partake in activities together. The only visible traits or attitudes that differentiate the Christians from the Hindus are the absence of *tika* on the Christians' foreheads and the tradition among Christians of using the greeting 'Jymasé' (from the Nepali name of Jesus Christ, *Issā Massīha*).

**Hinduism in the context of migration**

The context of migration has very real consequences for Hindu practitioners. The temple plays an increasingly large role in this context, as it becomes both a religious and a social reference point for migrants and 'allows for a sentiment of continuity between the context of migration and the culture of origin' (Boisvert 2012: 169). The temple, then, has strong social functions in the migration context:

> One of the more common conclusions from research among immigrants to Western countries like Canada and the United states is that those who have arrived in a country relatively recently will often find in their religious faith an important anchor and orientation for their ability and effort to establish themselves in their new homes (Beyer 2008: 29).

It is important to remember that Hindu practitioners among the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees must adapt to a new life context: that of a Quebecois city without a Hindu temple where people are mostly Christian. I conducted a field study from June 2010 to June 2012 which focused on the refugees' way of life and their feasts. Specifically, I sought to ascertain how Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees maintain their Hindu practices and to understand the role of religion in their new life. I asked what rites they maintained and how they have attempted to transmit these to the younger generation.

As I did not want to merely remain an observer, I worked to establish 'a situation where everybody finds his account and where nobody wastes the time and energy of others' (Fortin 1988: 28). As I am a teacher, I helped young people at least once a week in their studies (which ranged from French to High School studies to adult training courses). Moreover, I organised regular tutorial activities between Quebecois pupils and young

refugees studying in the same secondary school. Finally, I am particularly close to two Brahmin families who arrived in 2010 and I share different activities with them. So, my integration resulted in an interactional model in which 'subjectivity is not anymore an obstacle but a contribution' (Jaccoud and Mayer 1997: 220).

The meeting steps recommended by Selltiz, Wrightsman and Cook (1977) were followed: taking mental notes, supplementing with notes on paper when available, and writing a complete description of things learned upon returning home. The resulting log consists of both 'memory and distancing [...] the only way to keep track of conversations, stories, expressions that otherwise we would quickly forget' (Fortin 1988: 30).

Deeper, more specific data collection became possible in autumn 2011 through individual interviews with adults who live in Saint-Jérôme. The interviews were semi-structured, with an average duration of an hour and 45 minutes, and were conducted one-on-one. Six interviews[4] were conducted with three men and three women from three distinct age groups: a couple of over 60 years, representative of people who built a large part of their life in Bhutan; a man and a woman of 35 to 45 years old, who knew their native country as children or teenagers; and two young people of different sexes between the ages of 18 and 22 years, who were either born in the Nepalese camps or arrived there when they were no older than 4 years. The choice of three different generations for this study has helped identify patterns in perceptions of identity and of the new home of the refugees.

In order to focus on the generational differences, the interviews focus on Hindu Brahmins. Most of the respondents are permanent residents (the status Canada gives to the refugees at their arrival). Two of the interviewees were among the first who arrived in Canada and they have already begun the process of pursuing citizenship, an option which opens up to permanent residents after 1065 days of residence in Canada.

As far as education is concerned, the two men around 20 and 40 years old completed university, in Nepal and in India, respectively. The young girl had gone through part of her High School in the camps. The three other respondents (the older couple and the woman of 38) were illiterate.

4 In defense of the small number, Salvador Juan writes 'that an individual may condense a large part of the meaning of a social given phenomenon' (1990: 107), concluding: 'a very small number of representatives is often sufficient' (1990: 108).

They explained that the local school was far from their Bhutanese home and that the refugee camps did not provide literacy classes for adults. The four oldest persons were married and the two youngest were single. Two of the interviews were conducted in French, one in English, and three in Nepali, using an interpreter. This translator himself is Nepali-speaking Bhutanese, and is one of the first 24 people who arrived in Saint-Jérôme in December 2008; he is considered as a leader in his community.

## The place of religion

*Experiencing religion at an individual level*

Defining their religion proved very difficult for our respondents, although they could provide significant examples of the effects their religious choice has on their daily life and decisions. The answers were of the same type: 'It's the continuation of the tradition that we live today', 'My parents are following [Hinduism] and it's the reason why I follow it'. The young man went further back in the generations, declaring: 'For me, being a Hindu is being the descent of my forefathers. Because every Hindu they have got their descent' [*sic*]. Here, he refers to a distant ancestor named Atri, a Vedic and mythical ascendant, and the *rishi* who defines his *gotra*, or ancestral lineage. This reflects the notion which Danielle Hervieu-Léger considers primordial in religion, that of belonging to an immutable order that existed before the individuals and even before the group (Hervieu-Léger 1999: 125). This situation confirms that the most important landmarks are those of lineage and of transmission (Tardan-Masquelier 1999: 78). This characteristic becomes even more encompassing here, as it is the very definition of religion for five of the six respondents. The pattern also agrees with Marcaurelle's assertion that since we must make do with an approximate definition of the religion, the Hindu is above all a person born in a Hindu family who does not renounce his religious lineage (Marcaurelle 1999: 10-11). The approximate definition refers here to the one that spontaneously comes to the interviewed persons' mind.

As far as beliefs are concerned, all respondents mentioned 'uncountable numbers of gods and goddesses'. The adult male added: 'It's the reason why it's so difficult to understand our religion'. Some names of gods appeared many times, mainly Vishnu, Krishna and Rāma, and, in some cases, Śiva and Ganeśa. The adult woman noted: 'Vishnu is the most

important', which makes sense considering the majority of Vaisnavas noticed during the participant observation. The young man stood out from this lineage, saying that he adhered to *sanātana* and that, according to him, *sanātana dharma*, or 'eternal dharma', is a generic type of Hinduism, not adhering to any particular branch or deity. Still, based on appearances, choices of deities and holy books used, the majority of the interviewed refugees seem to be Vaisnava.

Half of the respondents referred to the Om sound as 'the greatest *mantra*', and the older woman mentioned a belief that cows must be treated like gods, corresponding with the *pūjā* she described later. The older man was the only one to mention important books like the *Rāmāyana*, *Bhagavad-Gītā*, *Mahābhārata* and *Krishna Charitra*.

The respondents' definitions of religion and their beliefs seem rather cursory, omitting many notions that are often identified as the core of Hinduism: the individual and cosmic force, *atman-brahman*; the reincarnation cycle, *samsara*; the consequences of our actions, *karma*; spiritual liberation, *mokṣa*; and the individual and cosmic Law, *dharma* (Lambert 2007). But, even if their beliefs often seem implicit and their descriptions minimal, the refugees' practices are numerous and regular, supporting Boisvert's theoretical explanation of Hinduism as *henopraxy* rather than as orthodoxy (Boisvert 2013).

Numerous practices were observed and spoken of during the interviews, which aimed to identify the respondents' daily rites, or any actions they perform that are regulated, usual, minimally variable and executed with the solemnity which underlines an important, distinct moment (Ménard 1999: 77-78). All of the respondents referred to the daily *pūjā* made after washing their bodies in the morning: 'Every individual in the house has his prayer in the morning and in the evening. It's the most essential thing for individuals'. The young girl added: 'Every morning I have a bath and I pray to God. [...] My grandfather [who remains in Nepal] taught it to me'. In traditional Hindu households, this rite is usually conducted by the oldest man of the house, and the rest of the family join him at least for part of the ritual.

The older woman described a daily morning *pūjā* to the cow, with the application of *tika*, the singing of songs, the recitation of religious texts and finally an offering of food to the gods, while the oldest man described a daily ritual of which even the translator had never heard: when he rises,

he goes outside to pray to the sun, 'which is part of God in our religion'. He then pours a glass of water in the palm of his hand and gives it to Surya, the god of the sun; afterwards, he reads *Bhagavad-Gītā* passages before his domestic temple. Many of these rituals are performed in front of domestic shrines, supporting Louis Renou's thesis that 'the center of [Hinduism] is the home rather than the temple' (Renou 2004 [1951]: 81). The shrines seen in homes in St-Jérôme often house *shāligrām* stones as precious objects of worship. These stones, venerated by Hindus as divinities, symbolize Vishnu and were said to come from the Ganges or, as an old refugee told me, from the Nepalese rivers of Vishnumati, Gandaki and Bagmati. Regardless of its nature, the *pūjā* is highly important: 'all our daily activities [...] will prove successful if we make *pūjā* in the morning'.

The three women specifically mentioned fasting, or the *vrat*, 'periodic votive days and fasts which punctuate the Hindu religious year' (McGee 1996: 146) which is undertaken 'to realize a wish concerning childhood, their children's health, long life for their husbands or the well-being of their homes' (St-Germain Lefebvre 2008: 118). The regularity of this ritual varied from once a year for the young girl to once every two weeks for the two other women.

The intensity of each practice depends on the respondent's age. Indeed, the young man affirmed:

> 'The younger generations [...] still don't know what the value of the religion is, we don't know about our religion at the present time but our parents they know the value of our religion [...]. The day will come for us and we'll carry on what our parents have done in the past'.

The influence of age on religious practice is confirmed by the assertion that religion gains importance as years pass, a question of maturity for one respondent, which is often linked to family responsibilities. But, regardless of age, all the refugees realise the importance of religion in their decisions. The effects of religion seem particularly clear in two realms: the relationship between castes and the notion of an ideal marriage.

Caste belongs to the eight elements of the common background of Hinduism or the core of beliefs specific to the religion.[5] Interestingly, this

5 Lambert distinguishes eight core elements of Hinduism: the Holy books (particularly

background updates itself in the context of resettlement in Quebec. The topic also proves a delicate one, as people wish to keep up appearances with their answers, which may not be fully representative of their daily actions. The responses, therefore, remained very general and consensual, not unlike this example: 'Every Nepalese is equal, but Brahmins, Chhetri, and Tamang form a more ancient class system, which is no longer current. We have to respect everyone equally'. Even so, participant observation revealed that some respondents do not adhere to such a mentality. As trust grew between the community and myself, more reliable information was obtained at different moments. Out of respect for certain traditions, a Brahmin cannot go to the house of a less pure caste family, welcome them at his own home, or accept food or drinks from them. This caste hierarchy is still strictly applied by several of Saint-Jérôme's inhabitants; mostly by older people, but also by persons of a slightly younger age who find themselves heavily emotionally invested in the tradition.

Ideas regarding marriage further reveal the effects of religion on actions and decisions. Adhering to an essential Hindu tradition, the young girl asserted: 'as a Hindu woman, I cannot marry a person of another culture'. She reveals her belief with striking honesty, since most of the respondents might feel uncomfortable affirming this same belief, which they do appear to share.

For every respondent an ideal marriage is necessarily religious and therefore Hindu. The ideal potential spouse is not just Hindu, she is Bhutanese Hindu, and she speaks Nepali. Even if the promised wife or husband had to be found in Halifax, Nova-Scotia, or in the deep South of the United States, these criteria were relevant for every marriage the refugees organized in Saint-Jérôme. Other conditions must also be fulfilled. For instance, an ideal spouse must belong to the same caste as her potential husband (Brahmin for the six respondents). Moreover, the spouse must not belong to the same *gotra*, or ancestral lineage, since '*gotra* endogamy is banned because it is seen as a kind of incest' (Bennett 1983:

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*Veda* and *Upaniṣad*); the epics (*Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana*); the pantheon; the main celebrations (for example, *Dīwali* in October); the domestic rites derived from Vedism (mainly, the initiation rites, *samskāra*); notions that, according to the author, derive from the first *Upaniṣad*; the four paths to salvation (such as *Jñana-yoga* and *Bhakti-yoga*) and their combinations; and the *varṇa* system, which holds society together and gives a particular role to each person (Lambert 2007: 430).

17). Lastly, each potential young couple must obtain their parents' permission: 'If [my parents] accept, I will get married with her. If they do not accept I will not marry her. It is important for us to respect our family and to discuss before with our family'. Not every young person agrees with their parents' opinion, decisions may even involve both young people and their parents: 'We will choose together'. Compared to previous generations, young people are given more freedom when choosing partners, but the role of the parents still holds a crucial importance.

As for the ideal age of marriage, this age increased as the age of the respondents decreased. The oldest woman got married at the age of 7 (and moved into her husband's house when she was around 18 years old) and the adult woman got married at the age of 16. Even though one marriage took place for a younger girl of 16 years old, the refugees agree on an ideal age. Today, everyone seems to agree that 20 years of age or older is ideal for marriage.

We observed that ancient conventions are still observed during a wedding ceremony, though there are some adaptations to the new environment. When two newlyweds arrived from Montreal (the husband bringing his new wife from Halifax to his town, Saint-Jérôme), the young man stopped near the local river and threw in a one dollar coin, some wood taken from the platform where the couple ritually met during the ceremony, and the *mahur*, the paper which crowned the *beula*[6]*'s* head and on which *mantra* are written. The young husband explained that he did this just as his ancestors would have done, for the protection of his new union and to make an offering to the Ganges, as any river can symbolically take the place of the Ganges:

> 'The Ganges is the holiest river of India, called our "Mother Gangâ," and its invisible course supposedly borders heaven and hell. But every type of water properly called upon as a substitute for the Ganges, *is* the Ganges' (Renou 2004 [1951]): 73).

The river in Saint-Jérôme did need a proper invocation to become a holy river and to substitute for the Ganges in order to become 'Mother Gangâ'.

6 The word *beula* is not translated here because it has no equivalent in the Christian tradition; it refers to the newlywed on the day of his marriage.

The perception of marriage has evolved with each generation: the age of marrying has increased, and choices may now be made by young people and are not as strictly imposed by parents, even if parents still play an important role in the final decision and do sometimes entirely assume control. Furthermore, the concept of dowry appeared neither during the interviews nor during the participant observation (during which several people were asked about the subject). However, the woman will always follow the Hindu tradition of leaving her family to join her husband's. Some young girls are already married to Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees who resettled in the United States, and they await the citizenship they need to live in their husband's family. Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees who have converted to Christianity also partake in this tradition, as was seen with the marriage of two young people in Saint-Jérôme in 2011.

By studying marriage, we can deduce that the criteria for endogamous marriage are both religious and ethnic. Most of the unions[7] are between Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees. Religion and religious books clearly do not constitute a 'patrie portative', or portable homeland, as Heine describes the Torah for Jewish people (Heine 1853); instead, a mutual life story proves an essential determinant of ethnicity. The collective religious practices of the refugees, though, must constantly adapt to their new life context.

*The religious experience in a collective sphere*

The minority status which the Hindu Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees experience in Quebec and which mirrors the predicament faced by the oldest refugees in Bhutan, is generally very new for the migrants. In Nepal and Bhutan, the Dasain festival meant ten days of holiday, which gave them a chance to visit relatives, even those who lived far away, so that elders could offer *ṭika* and blessings to their children and family. In Quebec, these rituals are more difficult to organise because the festival days are not holidays for people attending language classes[8] and because family

7 I have heard of three instances of Nepali-speaking Bhutanese marrying people from other communities: two with a Quebecois partner, in Quebec city, and one with a Nepalese Toronto resident, in St-Jérôme.

8 In Saint-Jérôme, they made an exception in October 2012: the school where most of the adult refugees were studying gave one day off to everyone in the community during the festival of Daśain.

members may live all over the world. Nevertheless, families do gather in the Quebecois city: in their first year of marriage the brides come back to their original family's home (*maiti*) to honour their parents and the parents may offer *ṭika* and blessings to all their children who are present, to their *dharma putri* or *putra* (adoptive daughter or son) if they have some, and even to the Quebecois surrogate family they may have in the city.

Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees in Saint-Jérôme organised a festive evening featuring the application of *ṭika*, singing, dancing, talking and enjoying a meal. Both Hindus and Christians were present, although only Hindus received the *ṭika*. The celebration aimed to bring together Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees, but also to invite Quebecois people who were selected among the relatives of people present. As one respondent put it:

> 'We want to show our uniqueness to the people in Saint-Jérôme. We want to show that our culture is a unique one, is a different one,; we want to display our peculiarity, our differentness to the people here'.[9]

Given this goal, many people from Saint-Jérôme were invited to the celebration: some were involved in the Le Coffret association, others helped refugees in school or were members of a twin family. During the meal, elders and guests were always served first. More regularly, since spring 2010, the migrants have organised collective *bhajan* or hymn-singing in Saint-Jérôme. These rituals generally take place twice a month. At the beginning of the resettlement, the rituals took place at homes, were conducted by the hosts (either women or men), and were always followed by a snack shared by everybody. Since June 2011, the community has rented a room on the ground floor in the building in which Le Coffret has its office. Each family takes turns in being responsible for conducting the ceremony and provides an adequate amount of money for ritual materials. But some materials cannot be acquired:

> 'Scarcity of elements, different kinds of material for making *pūjā*, everything. For example, we used to use bell, that is called *tchonka*,

9 During the first celebration in October 2012, this particularity had participants sing the Bhutanese anthem, as captured in Julie Corbeil's documentary (2012). They didn't sing the anthem in October 2011.

> but it's not available here. In the time of our prayer, we used *damaru*, a small music instrument, to be played just with the hands, just like *madar*. Two small stones in a thread and you move them to get a sound. [...] People tried to bring them but as it was a fossil, the government didn't allow them to bring them'.

One major problem faced by the migrants has been the absence of a *pūjāri*, a Brahmin who can organise collective rituals. According to my informants, not every Brahmin can celebrate rites and a Brahmin cannot be a *pūjāri* if one of his male ascendants married twice. The only Brahmins that can serve as *pūjāri* are the *Upādhvāya* (e.g. Bennett 1983: 11) and the first *Upādhvāya* Brahmin family only arrived in Saint-Jérôme in March 2011. The community asked the man to become their *pūjāri*, because of his birth and his training in Varanasi when he was young. He accepted, even though he did not have this function in Nepal and ran a shop in Damak, Nepal. This *pūjāri* now takes charge of the birth rituals (fifteen births had taken place in Saint-Jérôme as of June 2013). He also officiates during marriages and the initiation rituals of young Brahmin boys.

In June 2011, I saw an *upanayana* rite, in which a young boy of 11 years old received *mantra.* This secret formula must be directly transmitted via uninterrupted oral tradition in order to be effective, from the seer who first originated them (Daniélou 1992: 505). Here, the *pūjāri* is the *mantra*'s recipient and has become its transmitter. The boy's grandfather also has an important role and will begin to teach the sacred books to his grandson. This young boy was born from a mixed marriage between a Brahmin man and a Chhetri woman but he still received his Brahmin cord and had his head shaved, except for a braid at the rear base of the neck. According to the father, this would have been the same in the refugee camps of Nepal. In Saint-Jérôme, the ceremony, which lasted one entire day, took place in the family's apartment.

The biggest issue for the refugees is the absence of a city temple. Several respondents enthusiastically expressed a desire to build a temple to replace the makeshift room they temporarily employ for temple functions. Many of the refugees even mentioned the issue to the Immigration Ministry agent when she still worked in Saint-Jérôme[10] for three days a

10 Due to recent provincial decisions, this Ministry agent no longer works in Saint-Jérôme

week. She would answer, according to one respondent: 'We'll have to wait a little'. Of course, given Saint-Jérôme's context of a mainly Christian, French-speaking population, its previous inhabitants would need to be mentally prepared for the arrival of a Hindu temple.

While waiting for a temple, some Hindu refugees, headed by an organiser, turned to the Indian temples of Montreal. Accounting for this initiative allows for the observation of ethnicity and its boundaries, since it reveals the mesosocial dimension of the community, which could be considered an ethnic group (Barth 2000). A young Brahmin of around 30 years of age who arrived in Saint-Jérôme in March 2010 made arrangements with Montreal's Indian temples to make it easier for his relatives to go there the following autumn, saving them the trouble of crowding buses and metros. From January 2011 to June 2012, he himself organised a monthly bus to the city, asking each of the 48 passengers for the small fee of five dollars. The temple's organisation covered the remaining costs of the journeys. The bus also began serving Hindu refugees from other cities. The bus has given even those Hindus who resettled in two quite distant cities the opportunity to go to the Montreal temple, which is significant considering that no Hindu temple exists in either of these towns. The service was stopped in June 2012, as the temple's Board of Directors claimed to have no money left to finance it.

Why is having a temple of such importance? As Beyer emphasises, the temple is a place for socialization that can define a migration context (Beyer 2008). Respondents shared this idea: 'Many people are present, not only Bhutanese. We can meet priests, sing the *bhajan* together and meet other persons from Montreal'. The temple is thus a place for social exchange between people of similar cultures, metaphorically immersing partakers in their original contexts: 'When I arrive at the temple, I believe I'm in Nepal. Everybody speaks Nepali, the priest gives information ... I miss something when I come back [home]'. This account agrees with the happenings observed in other Hindu communities in Montreal: 'The temple allows people to establish a feeling of continuity between a migration context and their original culture' (Boisvert 2012: 169). It is a place for memories, or perhaps for nostalgia, but also for networking and for

since autumn 2012. The federal Ministry will provide services for Quebec and the Maritimes only in Montreal.

perspectives. One temple goer claimed to have met people who talked to him of a job opportunity if he mastered the French language. Still, some respondents do not share the same vision of the temple:

> 'There is some kind of difference in the way of practising the religion in between the people of India and the people of Nepal. We have seen that one, we experience that one. In Nepal we could carry our *puja*, our *bhajan*, it's not the same way as them. We do not follow so much the feasts they celebrate. For example, we were Hinduists in Bhutan and we didn't know what is Holi. We never played Holi in Bhutan'.

The feelings of physical remoteness and the manifestations of differences expressed here cause even more people to wish for a temple in Saint-Jérôme. It is a long-term project, since the feasibility of a building must be evaluated, a *pūjāri* must be hired, the financial means of Saint-Jérôme's small Hindu community must be considered, and it remains unknown how receptive the local population will be to this project.

**Conclusion**

Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees appreciate the peace, justice, and safety they have found in their welcoming new land, Canada. To resettle in Quebec nonetheless implies learning French, a language that is very foreign to the migrants, and accepting new conditions of Hindu practice. Hindu elders are conscious of the importance of the transmission of their religion. Marriages are mostly endogamous for Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees but, to face the dispersal of relatives all over the world, spouses often use surrogate family to substitute for missing fathers or elders and remote relatives, in-laws or even friends take the role of the missing relatives. All these collective rituals take place in houses or rented venues, because the absence of a temple in each of the Quebecois cities remains a big issue.

My own PhD research aims to increase our understanding of the integration methods of these refugees, focusing on young girls between 15 and 21 years of age in two different Quebecois cities. Such a focus will help study identity strategies (Camilleri 1990) as these refugee teenagers face two different cultures: their culture of origin and the culture of the Quebecois High School. On the one hand, the teenagers acquired their

culture of origin in the refugee camps in Nepal where they were born, and they want to be called Nepalese because they have never known Bhutan. Nepali is their mother tongue and Hindu norms invite them, for instance, to practise the *vrat* regularly. On the other hand, these young girls are now immersed in Quebec schools where the educational system focuses on mastering French and English and advocates the values of gender equality and academic success. It remains to be seen how these young Nepali-speaking Bhutanese girls build their identity amongst all these influences.

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# Conceptualising employment services for resettled Bhutanese refugees: A case study in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Eleanor Ott

During a focus group discussion with adult Bhutanese refugees in Pittsburgh, an older woman stated: 'Government should understand the nature of the refugees arriving and put us with the jobs that ... allow the life to sustain.' For Bhutanese refugees,[1] the nature of the resettlement experience is the result of the design of the national resettlement system and the local services received upon arrival. In the US, economic self-sufficiency and employment form the fundamental objectives of the resettlement programme for new arrivals. Refugees' sentiments about the difficulties experienced and the government's lack of understanding of these experiences appear in parallel in reports prepared for the government. One report finds that 'resettlement efforts in some US cities are underfunded, overstretched, and failing to meet the basic needs of the refugee populations they are currently asked to assist' (US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations 2010: vii). Another report notes that although there exists short-term monitoring of employment outcomes, 'there has been less focus on making evaluation, on a broader scale, a part of the refugee program' (Nightingale 2008: 2). Nonetheless, Bhutanese refugees and others are assumed by the resettlement system to be receiving employment services leading to economic self-sufficiency and broader wellbeing. Amidst the negative rhetoric and scant research, conceptualising the employment services Bhutanese refugees receive serves as a basis for understanding the relationship between resettlement policy, service delivery, and refugees' experiences.

In this paper, I first situate the importance of Bhutanese refugee resettlement and economic self-sufficiency within the broader refugee studies

1 This population is often referred to as 'Bhutanese Nepalis' or 'Lhotshampas', although each term has political undertones (Hutt 2011). I have chosen to use the term 'Bhutanese refugees' in alignment with the preference of community leaders in Pittsburgh, although many now prefer not to be referred to as 'refugees' because they have permanent residency.

field and discuss the research methodology. Then, I present preliminary findings on the theoretical framework and programme delivery. Finally, I discuss the implications of the employment programming's 'theory of change' for the Bhutanese refugee community in Pittsburgh and for refugee resettlement.

**Contextualising Bhutanese refugee resettlement in the US**

Globally, twenty-seven countries have resettlement programmes associated with UNHCR—representing domestic commitments to those individuals resettled and commitments to the international refugee framework (Lim-Kabaa 2012). These resettlement programmes vary in size and in the populations they resettle. Of the 10.5 million refugees of concern to UNHCR, less than 1% are ever formally resettled to a third country - 62,000 individuals in 2011 (UNHCR 2013). In the UNHCR resettlement handbook (2011), resettlement is said to:

> ...serve three equally important functions. First, it is a tool to provide international protection and meet the specific needs of individual refugees whose life, liberty, safety, health or other fundamental rights are at risk in the country where they have sought refuge. Second, it is a durable solution for larger numbers or groups of refugees, alongside the other durable solutions of voluntary repatriation and local integration. Third, it can be a tangible expression of international solidarity and a responsibility sharing mechanism, allowing States to help share responsibility for refugee protection, and reduce problems impacting the country of asylum.

The Bhutanese refugee resettlement initiative ostensibly serves all three functions: it provides particular protection to those in need first, it serves as a durable solution for the Bhutanese refugee population caught in a protracted situation in camps for 15-20 years, and it acknowledges international responsibility. As widely discussed in the literature on the resettlement programme out of Nepal, the Bhutanese resettlement programme is an expression of solidarity between countries, with over 100,000 Bhutanese refugees referred for resettlement and over 80,000 already resettled in eight countries since 2007 (Gurung 2013).

The US resettlement programme is held up as an archetype of this commitment to durable solutions and refugees globally. Since 1975, the US

has resettled over three million refugees, including over 60,000 Bhutanese refugees since 2008—more than all other countries combined on both accounts (US Department of State 2013). The government invests over $1 billion per year in the resettlement programme (US Department of State *et al.* 2012). However, the role resettlement plays as a 'durable solution' hinges on the programming of the domestic system itself. The US 1980 Refugee Act states that the Director of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) shall 'make available sufficient resources for employment training and placement in order to *achieve economic self-sufficiency among refugees as quickly as possible*' (emphasis added).

This paper examines economic self-sufficiency interventions for Bhutanese refugees, their theories of change, and perceptions of effectiveness in an archetypal city: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania has received more Bhutanese refugees than any other state, and was the top receiving state in FY2011 and FY2012 (US Department of State 2013). Pittsburgh accounts for much of these arrivals, receives many Bhutanese secondary migrants, and is postulated by Bhutanese community leaders as the city with the highest Bhutanese refugee population in the US (Ott 2011, interviews 2013).

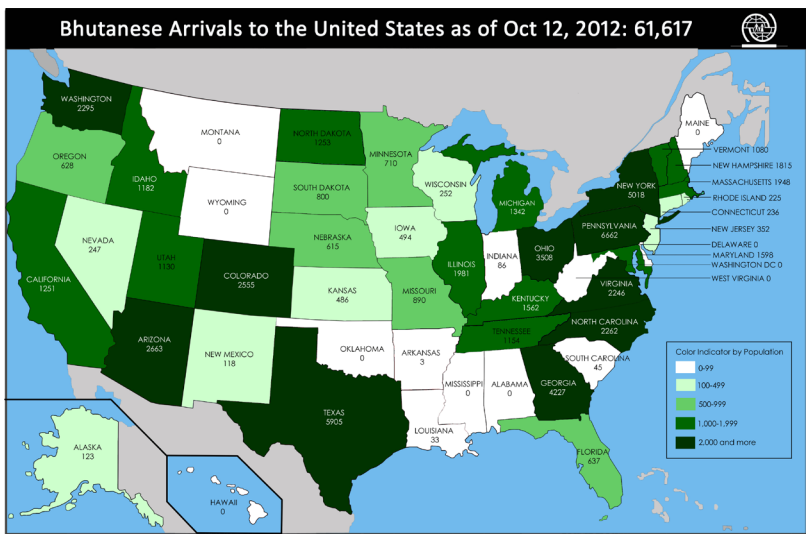


**Figure 1: International Organization for Migration Image of Bhutanese Arrivals showing Pennsylvania with the highest number of arrivals as of October 12, 2012**

**Research approach**

The design of my research project design is flexible, in line with critical realist epistemological orientations (Bloch 1999). Whilst this orientation acknowledges that there is no one 'authentic' voice to represent the individuals or populations in this study, it attempts to continually improve concepts to understand the mechanisms at play behind human behaviour and outcomes and to glean knowledge from the world in a systematic, evidence-based manner (Guerin and Guerin 2007). This approach has aptly been classified as a 'disciplined lack of clarity', allowing for that which is unknowable before the research begins (Law 2003: 3). At times, the literature, my observations, practitioners' interviews, and the refugees' communications challenged each other (on matters such as the importance of English courses, or the prevalence of the caste system amongst Bhutanese refugees being central to some and unimportant to others) and at other times, these sources substantiated each other, as is the ideal in 'triangulation'.

In its essence, qualitative research depends on 'astute pattern recognition' (Patton 1999: 1191). My extensive training in refugee research and eight years spent working with, advocating for, and doing research about resettled refugees in the US, specifically in Pittsburgh, have enhanced my ability to recognise patterns (Holloway and Wheeler 2009). However, these experiences have also created predispositions and biases, with my own positionality as a researcher within but outside of the community. The analysis strives to balance the effects of the researcher's positionality on the findings.

Detailed knowledge of and familiarity with the community is often cited as critical to research with refugees, as are positive relations with 'gatekeeper' organisations such as the resettlement agencies and community groups who have access to the refugee population (Benson *et al.* 2012, Bloch 2004). In addition to the concrete methods and activities described below, my time spent in Pittsburgh over the years—from assisting the resettlement of some of the first Bhutanese refugees in 2008-2009 to research in April 2011, August-September 2012, January-April 2013, and July 2013—allowed for informal trust building and familiarity.

**Research process**

To begin this research, I established a formal agreement to observe the services of and carry out research with the assistance of the two largest

resettlement agencies in the city.[2] I had volunteered extensively with a third resettlement agency from 2008 to 2009, but it now receives a smaller number of refugees. Each resettlement organisation assists new arrivals using federal funds from the Department of State and Office of Refugee Resettlement in the Department of Health and Human Services. I also established a working relationship with the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh (BCAP) - an elected body with the stated mission '*To ensure* a high quality of life for all members of the Bhutanese community in Pittsburgh and to support their integration into American society through culturally-informed services and activities' (original emphasis, Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh 2013). BCAP operates with a small budget but offers activities and services through a network of volunteers and one Americorps member, including English classes for elders, cultural programming, and weekly videos posted on a website (bhutanesecap.org). Although the leaders initially estimated the Bhutanese population at 3,500-4,000+, the census data collected from BCAP indicates the organisation aims to serve a population that is still sizeable but more likely around 2,000-2,500 individuals.

The bulk of the research took place during two months of observational research at the two major resettlement agencies and five months of surveys completed through face-to-face interviews in refugees' homes. However, in accordance with the research design, a listing of the mixed-methods is shown in the table below. In this paper, I will focus on my findings on employment programming for resettled Bhutanese refugees.

**Conceptualising service delivery and outcomes**

Two distinct, complementary concepts serve as bases for examining the programming Bhutanese refugees receive to improve their self-sufficiency and wellbeing: these are the theoretical framework and the theory of change. The theoretical framework offers a general lens through which to see the world; this is often a psychosocial theory explaining the ways in which individuals and their surroundings interact. The theory of change or logic model explains the way in which an intervention, including

2 The information presented does not necessarily represent the viewpoints of collaborating entities.

| Method | Participants | Details |
|---|---|---|
| Observation, discussions, and semi-structured Interviews | Two refugee resettlement agencies (focus on employment - eight staff members) | For two months, shadowed 'regular services' & attended ORR National Conference |
| Interviews with other service providers | Four staff - service providers | Avg. 1 hour; one man, three women |
| Interviews and phone calls with employers | Talked with two employers | Attempted to contact additional four major employers |
| Semi-structured interviews | Eight People identified as 'Bhutanese leaders' | 30 min - 2.5 hours; seven men, one woman |
| Focus groups | 1 - 33 Bhutanese adults in one neighbourhood<br>2 - 10 adults in a different neighbourhood | 1 - 3 hours; 16 men, 17 women; Seven arrived in Pittsburgh first, 26 in other cities; 2—1 hour; 8 men, 2 women, all arrived in Pittsburgh |
| Document analysis | Documents from service agencies and BCAP | e.g. Meeting agendas, client handbook |
| Phone discussions/ Expert interviews | Numerous in the field, seven very project-specific | Includes researchers & national ORR staff |
| New representative survey on economic self-sufficiency and wellbeing | 146 randomly-selected Bhutanese adults (aged 18-65) in ten 'neighbourhoods' | Randomly selected half of households and one working-age adult from each household, face-to-face surveys and discussions lasting 20 min - 2.5 hours |

**Figure 2: Summary of research methods**

its components, creates a causal pathway to the desired outcome. This explains how and why an intervention works and shows the connections between activities, outcomes, and contexts (Connell and Kubisch 1998, Weiss 1995).

Together, the theoretical framework and the theory of change explain programme development and reveal the assumptions therein (Weiss 1995, 2001). To improve and change policy, it is advantageous to explain the way a programme works and to monitor change by measuring mediators and final outcomes to see whether and how an intervention is working

(Weiss 1995). Turton (2003: 17) explains the importance of understanding theoretical frameworks:

> First, we need to encourage research that aims to understand the situation of forced migrants at the local level, as purposive actors, embedded in particular social and historical circumstances. Second, we need to recognise that such research will inevitably call into question the adequacy and usefulness of existing conceptualisations of forced migrants. And third, we need to recognise that it is by the questioning of taken for granted assumptions that research can have its most beneficial impact on policy and practice.

Examining the theoretical framework can both help understand the context and challenge existing assumptions.

**Theoretical framework**

Before developing a theory of change, I began by situating refugees in the environment which influences them—with individuals at the centre, then the microsystems of families and peers, then the community, and finally the macrosystem of national cultural values, customs, and laws—following Bronfenbrenner's 'ecological model', the theoretical framework of the levels on which programming acts (Bronfenbrenner 1994, 1999). Policies and programmes aim to change behaviour by influencing different levels: individual, proximate (micro/interpersonal), intermediate (meso/community), and fundamental (macro). I mapped the employment and economic self-sufficiency programmes observed, their general emphases and their outcomes onto these levels. Although these services are intended for all refugees resettled by the agencies, Bhutanese refugees accounted for almost all of the clientele in the interactions observed. Rather than presenting complex frameworks or the details of programmatic delivery in this paper, I focus on core activities and concepts. The figure below shows a simplified version of the ecological model for this service delivery, incorporating recent programmatic design thinking of fundamental, intermediate, and proximate spheres of influence.

Importantly, multiple orientations, one-on-one meetings with employment specialists, and job readiness workshops or employment English classes emphasised changing refugees' cultural norms and

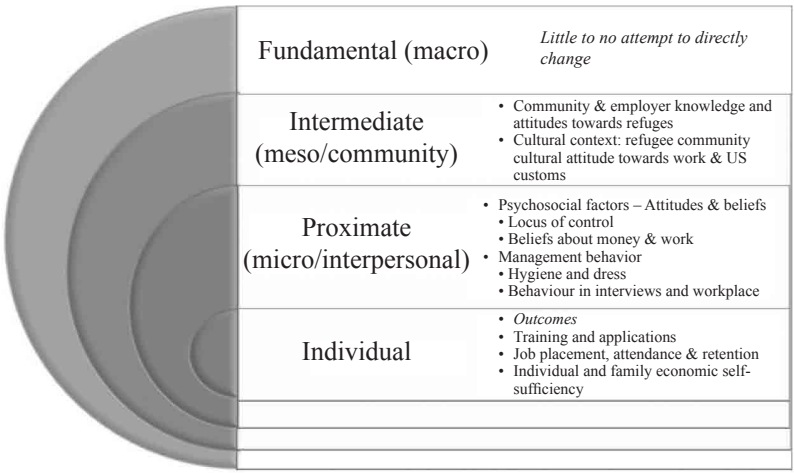


Figure 3: **Theoretical framework highlighting levels targeted for agencies' work**

public interpersonal interactions, including attitudes and beliefs about the importance of accepting any low-level employment as well as behaviours such as hygiene, timeliness, and direct communication in English. Although attempting to change individual and cultural norms may sound didactic, in practice this theoretical framework sought to empower refugees about the available array of options and the way they are perceived by others in the US to understand their current situation. Accordingly, Bhutanese were taught not only macro-concepts such as the importance of relationships between employers, the resettlement agency, and the refugee community, but also minutiae such as the sensitivity of many native-born Americans to strong smells and standard workplace safety regulations. Resettlement agency employment specialists explained employers' cost-benefit analyses, indicating that employers may cease working with the resettlement agency and the Bhutanese population if individuals quit without communication and that employers initially had to invest a lot in training employees so it was expected that individuals would stay at least three to six months. This theoretical framework and mapping of emphases flowed into the theory of change developed, thereby examining the interactions between the resettlement agency, refugees, and employers.

**Theory of change (logic model)**

In observing programme delivery, I looked at how the different individuals and entities interacted and developed the following logic model. From this logic model, one can reexamine approaches and begin to monitor service delivery.

The agencies roughly split their workers into those involved in reception and placement services (e.g. housing, cultural orientations, health appointments) and employment services (e.g. employment orientation, job search, interviews). However, these entities reinforced the same ideas, such as cultural competency in understanding the US system. The employment services team also communicated with hiring agencies and employers and sought to connect the employers and agencies in hopes of achieving the primary initial (proximal) outcomes of employment and retention, leading to eventual (distal) outcomes of economic self-sufficiency, well-being, and integration. Rather than providing detail of all services and how they map onto the federal service requirements in this paper, I will note three overarching observations.

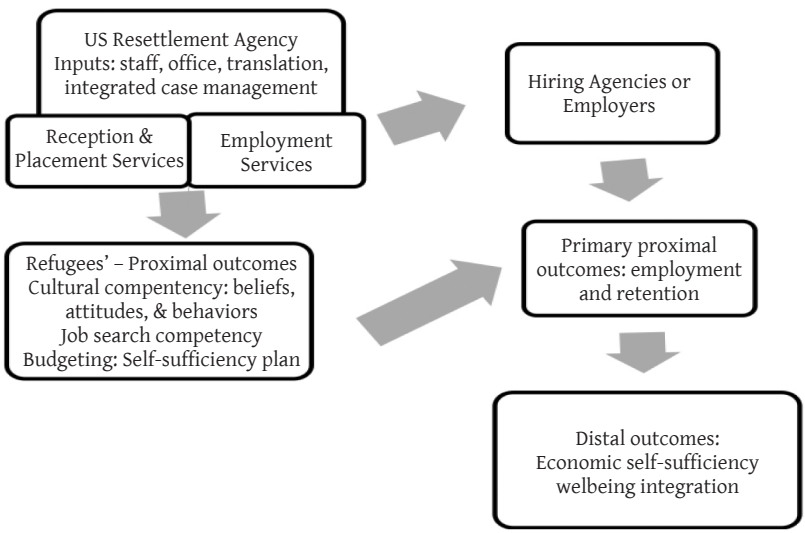


Figure 4: **Simple logic model highlighting different actors and outcomes; Potential mediators: age, gender, ethnic group; moderators: English and education levels.**

**Observation 1: Separating employers and refugees**

First of all, both agencies separately focused on changing the beliefs and behaviours of potential employers or hiring agencies and of the refugee community. I did not observe any forums where community members and employers were brought together before the hiring process or a time where potential employers came in to discuss job and self-sufficiency skills and cultural competency with refugees. This is not inherently negative, as resettlement agency staff could interact as a 'broker', communicating for refugees while initial proximal outcomes of cultural competency and job search competency were still being developed. Additionally, many staff in both resettlement agencies had refugee and immigrant backgrounds, including six resettled Bhutanese refugees. Employment staff spoke of the importance of their ongoing relationships with employers to assist when issues arose and help maintain employment.

Although it seemed that the standard modus operandi was to use resettlement agency staff as 'brokers' and trusted contacts, other arrangements have been made. In the past, some employers held initial explanatory sessions with the Bhutanese refugee population, and certain employers preferred to communicate directly with the potential refugee employees. One employment specialist commented that some employers might have been put off by a greater fanfare or 'special treatment' for refugees. Refugees were encouraged to use their own skills and networks to find employment, bypassing agencies' employer contacts and either directly going to employers or using friends or family members as intermediaries. Future research could focus on which relationships were best at obtaining and maintaining employment.

**Observation 2: Leap from proximal to distal outcomes**

Secondly, I observed a gap in the logic model, which assumed that the primary proximal outcome of employment and retention would lead to broader distal outcomes. This leap may be attributed to the structure of the resettlement system rather than to the agencies themselves. The funding streams focused on refugees in their initial months after arrival and assumed they would progress to economic self-sufficiency, wellbeing, and integration as time passed or access mainstream services as needed. Although both agencies offered referrals and help with upgrading or finding second employment, one agency provided more ad-hoc help for wellbeing,

self-sufficiency, and integration—including supporting BCAP, offering weekly neighbourhood office hours with paperwork and other assistance in Nepali, and providing emergency case management for specific cases long after funds and contractual obligations for that family had expired. The other agency offered 'bonus checks' for early employment for those in their Matching Grant employment programme, hoping that quicker proximal outcomes and extra cash would lead to quicker distal outcomes. The question for an agency over which levels to target—federal policies, community norms, interpersonal interactions, or other levels, and in what timeframe—relates to nuanced theories of change.

**Observation 3: Little attempt to directly change macro-policies or receiving communities**

Most of the agencies' employment staff time was spent directly with refugees and paperwork. Staff focused on providing resources and targeting change to attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours through group workshops and one-on-one training. Agency staff relied on national resettlement agencies to focus on changing macro federal polities and broader American norms about refugees. In selected instances, there was outreach to city councilmen, police, or non-profit workers who they viewed as representative of the broader community and support for events which would celebrate community diversity.

Despite the lack of direct attempt change macro federal policies, there was a great consensus on the need to change macro-policy, particularly the mainstream governmental self-sufficiency programme 'Temporary Assistance for Needy Families' (TANF), commonly called 'welfare'. At one resettlement agency, a job placement specialist had 'around 85 clients' receiving welfare money, for whom she was helping to navigate the welfare system. She said, 'they give us less money per client, but expect us to have better outcomes', compared to agencies working with non-refugee clients.

Adult TANF recipients generally have to attend a certain number of hours per week of allowed activities, generally 20-35 hours depending on family composition. Refugees are permitted one year of vocational English as a Second Language (ESL) to count towards these hours, but generally fewer than the required number of ESL hours are offered per week, so they must supplement these hours with additional official hours.

Locations offering permitted activities are not equipped to assist individuals with low levels of English, so some refugees may attend job search sessions or other activities where they do not understand anything, and they must switch activities every four weeks to retain eligibility if they are not in their one year of ESL. Another employment specialist said, '...with the job search, just kind of a farce; it's keeping track of the paperwork. They want to see them slip up so they can close cash. And, the attitude is well, tough, the clients need to do that [even if it doesn't fit them].' Despite dissatisfaction with these and other programming requirements and levels of federal and state support, I observed no attempt to change macro policies by the agencies, although I know they are in contact with their national agencies which do some information campaigns and lobbying.

The US government and resettlement agencies could also place greater emphasis on community consultation, as highlighted in recent reports (Nezer 2013, US Government Accountability Office 2012). There were collaborative forums between different refugee-serving agencies, but broad outreach to change the attitudes and beliefs of the general community was not part of the key logic model. Both agencies had ad-hoc outreach to employers or other entities as conflict arose, and one agency was more adroit at using the media to highlight the refugee employment assistance and needs. This same agency received a contract to train teachers in local schools about refugees, a programme working to change a micro-community's cultural attitudes with positive initial evaluations. Both agencies viewed their programmes as holistic, as *all* programming leads to greater acculturation, which in turn allowed for improved economic self-sufficiency and wellbeing. However, individuals I spoke with in Pittsburgh, including in the neighbourhoods where the Bhutanese were densely concentrated, had no idea that there were any Bhutanese refugees in Pittsburgh, let alone their strengths, the challenges they faced, or their history.

The two-way nature of resettlement and the role of the receiving community as well as the refugee community is perhaps becoming more salient nationally and locally, with visible an anti-refugee sentiment and city or state-wide efforts to restrict resettlement present in other locations, including in Georgia, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Tennessee (Goodnan 2013, Nezer 2012). The US Office of Refugee Resettlement

funded Welcoming America in 2012 to support refugee resettlement community engagement. Additionally, the 'Linking Communities Project: Creating Welcome for Refugees' pilot project was recently launched in Pennsylvania and Ohio to 'building and supporting capacity at the national and local levels to generate and maintain broad-based commitment to resettlement in local communities' (HIAS 2013). These efforts will affect agencies' work in Pittsburgh and may affect the welcome and community support for Bhutanese refugees, particularly for the large numbers in Pennsylvania and Ohio.

**The overall picture of employment service delivery for Bhutanese refugees**

Employment services for resettled Bhutanese refugees have been criticised as often 'dependency-based' and 'oppressive' (Grigsby 2013), but the agencies' work revealed itself as heartfelt and nuanced, with resettlement caseworkers working as a 'pivotal link' to initiate Bhutanese refugees 'into the societal processes and networks within which they take up new roles, and exercise the citizen's repertoire of rights and duties in the "new" social context' as desired in anti-oppressive practice in the labour market programmes for resettled refugees (Valtonen 2001). The theory of change in Pittsburgh revealed an employment services design that echoed legislative requirements to promote economic independence and 'to achieve economic self-sufficiency among refugees as quickly as possible'. The delivery of employment services was decidedly practical—with meetings and detailed discussions within the agencies to decide which funding stream would allow families the best chance of being able to pay their bills by the time their funding ran out, given specific demographics like family size, physical health, and mental health. In both focus groups, without prompting, the individuals stated that they had nothing negative to say about the resettlement agencies' services. Individuals suggested macro ways in which resettlement could be improved, such as allowing for longer support to allow for more education, training, finding jobs that match and 'allow that life to sustain', and greater support for occupational mobility. Services were constrained by funding, administrative requirements, local variables such as employment opportunities, and the individual characteristics of the Bhutanese refugees and the resettlement agency staff.

On paper, the services for a resettled Bhutanese refugee are identical to

those of any other resettled refugee passing through that agency. However, resettlement workers repeated that they found each population had its own set of exceptions, needs, and capacities and that pre-existing communities played a role in support and expectations. Employment services are thus affected by community culture and past experiences. A Bhutanese community has requested to be settled in the Pittsburgh metro area and coalesced in neighbourhoods in and around the city—they span castes, education levels, English language levels, and Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and Kirat religions, though there appeared to be some separation between neighbourhoods based on these variables. Experiences with employment services may be affected not only by the more generic theory of change, but also by interactions between the Bhutanese community at large and the receiving community, as well as micro-interactions based on demographics and other characteristics. This differentiation is a subject for future analyses.

Although there was a distinct sense of a 'Bhutanese community' and micro-Bhutanese communities in greater Pittsburgh, the services and jobs accessed did not distinctly build on 'Himalayan' tradition or skills. Occupations were common to other resettled refugee populations and individuals with low English proficiency in the city. Occupations in Bhutan and Nepal—including farming, sewing, teaching, and traditional crafts—did not repeat as common occupations in Pittsburgh. These included housekeeping, cleaning, moving boxes, food packaging, and factory work, as well as, to a lesser degree, cheque processing, interpretation, nursing, and working at gas stations. The community was interested in preserving traditional skills and livelihoods and BCAP was beginning livelihood activities, including small-plot farming and traditional crafts. Many shops opened, mimicking shops in the refugee camps in Nepal, and some individuals created or sold traditional crafts or items out of their apartments.

Although the employment services received and occupations practices were not distinctly Bhutanese or traditional to this population, these factors did not define the individuals or the community. Employment may serve as a crucial aspect of the domestic resettlement in the US, but not as a crucial aspect of identity.

**The overall picture for Bhutanese refugees in Pittsburgh**

A picture emerged of a Bhutanese population where some individuals are excelling and others are struggling—indicating perhaps the need for

additional or modified services targeting certain community members. An initial analysis of the surveys showed that 42% of households indicated they could always pay the bills, and that 58% sometimes had trouble paying all of the bills. Economic success in different realms was apparent in the community. The community members own five grocery and bazaar stores and one gas station; no one knew how many families had bought houses—likely well over a dozen. Preliminary statistical analyses of initial surveys did not indicate any differentiation in economic outcome based on caste, although interview reports and overall observation indicated neighbourhoods and employment splits based on caste, suggesting that higher caste members were more likely to have arrived earlier, purchased a house or live in slightly more expensive neighbourhoods. These remain hypotheses, and discussions of economic wellbeing and correlations with better employment and wellbeing outcomes will be the focus of forthcoming analyses.

Beyond economic indicators, signs of a thriving community and well-being abound. The Bhutanese refugee community includes more than ten Hindu priests, one Buddhist lama, and four Christian pastors. There are Bhutanese dancing and singing groups and many soccer teams. A great emphasis was placed on education, with many individuals graduating from high school and college, and high interest in technical training programmes including the Certified Nursing Assistance programme. Some randomly selected interviewees reported strong functional health and wellbeing, contrary to the literature's focus on mental health concerns (Ao et al 2013, Benson *et al.* 2012, Chase 2012, Dutton 2011, Nelson 2012, Thapa *et al.* 2003, Van Ommerman *et al.* 2001). One important picture emerged: that of the resilience of much of the population.

## Conclusion

The Bhutanese refugee population do not fall into a binary of poor and in-need or self-sufficient, of vulnerable or resilient; likewise the service provision does not fall into deficient or sufficient. Rather, the service provision is imbued with broad ideas like changing cultural norms and tangible knowledge about the US job search and interview process but also shows variation based on individual refugees, individual service providers, labour markets, and neighbourhood resources. Continued data collection and analysis will aim to clarify these initial findings whilst

showing their complexity and contextuality, building towards the 'dual imperative in refugee research' of academically and policy-relevant research, with careful scientific and ethical considerations (Jacobsen and Landau 2003).

The onus on improving service delivery and outcomes for refugees does not fall squarely on the service providers, or on the government, or on the refugee community. Service providers may improve their services more broadly by reaching out to local communities and by lobbying for federal changes. Just as a Bhutanese refugee said that 'governments should understand the nature of refugees arriving', so too should the broader city community, including employers. In doing so, governments, receiving communities, refugee communities, and individual refugees can communicate and reach out to understand each other in the concentric spheres of influence of the theoretical framework. Understanding the employment services and perspectives of economic self-sufficiency and wellbeing for Bhutanese refugees in Pittsburgh provides a frame to see not only the challenges and successes of this population and resettlement, but also national and international obligations.

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# Refugee Resettlement in the UK: Bhutanese refugees in Greater Manchester

Nicole I.J. Hoellerer

Refugee resettlement is one of three so-called durable solutions[1] promoted by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), and entails the organised migration of recognised refugees from their country of first asylum (in this case, Nepal) to a third country for permanent settlement (Wright *et al.* 2004: 6). In summer and autumn 2010, the first group of Bhutanese refugees arrived in the UK under the so-called Gateway Protection Programme (GPP). To date, 350-450 Bhutanese refugees have been resettled to the North West of England. The following paper is based on my current (on-going) PhD research with Bhutanese refugees in Greater Manchester UK, and draws on qualitative, ethnographic data obtained during participant observation with members of the Bhutanese refugee community in the UK.

## The resettlement process in the UK

In 2004, the UK initiated the Gateway Protection Programme (GPP), which facilitates refugee resettlement to Great Britain. The GPP is funded by the British Home Office, and operated by the UK Border Agency (UKBA) in cooperation with various organisations, such as the UNHCR, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Refugee Action (RAUK), and other governmental and voluntary organisations. Each financial year, the British government sets a quota, depending on international resettlement needs and available national resources. Initially, the UK limited resettlement places to 500 people, but it has since increased the number to 750 per year (RC 2004, Platts-Fowler *et al.* 2011: 4, Wright, 2004: 13-4, UNHCR 2001: 2-3). Similar to other resettlement nations, the UK conducts interviews, as well as security and health screenings, prior to offering individual places to refugees[2]. Once the assessment is complete,

1 The other two are: (a) repatriation to the refugees' county of origin; and (b) local integration in the county of first asylum (Wright et al. 2004: 6).

2 In addition to being a 'recognized refugee' according to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, the individual may not (a) be in a polygamous marriage; (b) have

and applications approved, the UK too offers Cultural Orientation and English Language Training (COELT) seminars run by the IOM in the Nepalese refugee camps. These provide refugees with background information on the UK and its systems of employment, finance, health and education (Wright 2004: 8 and 37, RAUK *et al.* 2008: 10, UNHCR 2001: 8). Moreover, local service providers and the general public in areas of resettlement in the UK are supposed to be informed about the arrival of refugees. Once all preparations are complete, IOM caseworkers escort applicants from Nepal to the UK with special travel documents (EU UFF) outside the regular UK Immigration Rules[3]. On arrival, resettled refugees receive Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), which allows them to stay in the UK indefinitely. The ILR status means that resettled refugees enjoy the same rights to live, work and study in the UK as any other citizen, including the right to claim benefits and welfare payments[4]. Moreover, the ILR allows individuals to apply for citizenship after five years of permanent residence in the UK (UNHCR 2001: 8-9, Wright *et al.* 2004: 15).

Once in the UK, refugees are welcomed by IOM and RAUK support workers, who transport new arrivals to their new accommodation (provided by local services, which can be either government-owned council housing or privately rented accommodation), and ensure that their primary basic needs (e.g. food, clothing, toiletries) are met. The first period of intensive support (see below) is followed by a second, forward-looking period of support, in order to address long-term needs. After approximately six to twelve months, organisations adopt an exit strategy, in which support is gradually withdrawn and support is outsourced to mainstream (public) services.

The UK adopts a Front-End (or Front) Loading (FEL) approach, which

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committed political or non-political crimes, or (c) have a dangerous medical condition (UNHCR 2001: 8, Wright 2004: 14-5).

3 Refugees arriving in the UK under the GPP travel on a one-way European Union Uniform Format Form (EU UUF), which has been prepared and approved by local British diplomatic posts prior to resettlement (UNHCR 2001: 8-9), and which is a completely separate procedure from the standard application for asylum (or immigration) in the UK.

4 Most Bhutanese refugees in the UK are entitled to claim Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), which is a state benefit for people who are out of work (but able to work), and meet several conditions, such as demonstrating an active interest in looking for employment (also see below).

aims to provide support and resources only during the first stages of resettlement, 'in the expectation that less support [....] would be needed in later stages as (economic) self-sufficiency is attained' (Duke *et al.* 1999: 166). The underlying principle of FEL is that if enough initial support is provided, refugees avoid dependency and obtain self-sufficiency shortly after arrival, in order to successfully integrate[5] into the mainstream society (Wright *et al.* 2004: 25). It is expected that after approximately twelve months, resettled refugees will have obtained sufficient language and socio-cultural skills in order to operate independently, seek employment or further education, and communicate with mainstream (public) services. This should ensure a smooth transition, and ultimately the full 'integration' of refugees into the host community.

**Bhutanese refugees' experience of FEL**

My research so far has revealed that Bhutanese refugees struggle to cope with the far-reaching changes and challenges posed by resettlement to the UK. The arrival to the UK is an important moment, as most Bhutanese refugees have never travelled by plane, not to mention visiting Europe. The rushed welcome was criticised by a long-established Bhutanese refugee, referring to the initial period of support as an 'assembly line system':

> 'These people arrive after a 15 hour flight; they are exhausted [...] and jet-lagged. But [the support workers] don't give them a break. [The refugees] know nothing when they arrive'. (female informant; fieldnotes April 2012)

RAUK offers a time-line of support in their Good Practice Guide on resettlement, and have an exacting and full timetable for the refugees'

5 The UK Home Office defines integration as (a) individuals obtaining employment, housing, education and health services similar to the host population; (b) individuals being 'socially connected with members' of their own and other communities, services and the state; and (c) individuals having satisfactory competence in the local language and culture, a sense of security, and 'confidently engage in that society in a manner consistent with shares notions of nationhood and citizenship' (Ager et al. 2004). The concept and definition of integration is widely debated in Social Sciences, and is referred to as 'integration' (with inverted commas) in this paper, in order to highlight the problematic nature of the term and related notions.

first week in the UK (RA *et al.* 2008). On the first day, the new arrivals are received and given a housing orientation and a health and safety brief: 'clients are shown how to use central heating, hot water and home security devices', and are informed about rubbish collection. The following day, they receive local orientation, being shown local shops and informed on how to buy groceries. On the third day after arrival, new arrivals receive a demonstration of public transport and are shown local health facilities, as well as signing tenancy agreements and other documents. On day four they visit the Job Centre Plus, and are provided with more useful information. One of my informants described this first week as 'completely crazy', and 'exhausting', and mentioned that he was hardly able to take in all the information, as he was jet-lagged and tired (male informant, fieldnotes October 2012). A Bhutanese refugee living in the UK for more than ten years shared this view and mentioned:

> '[The social workers] do everything quick. They tick all the boxes – "yes, we have showed and explained them all of this" – and then they go home and get paid. [The new arrivals] don't even know what a kettle is, so simply saying 'push this button' won't do – they [new arrivals] don't even know what a button is! [....] In the camps, they heat and cook with firewood – they have no idea how an electric stove works. Most are uneducated, and have never seen something like this before. Some people didn't eat for three days, because they did not know how a stove works! [.....] But they are too shy to tell the [case worker], but call me or others in the [Bhutanese refugee] community, to ask for help. They are like children, but the [case workers] don't care, they just want to get it over with and go home' (female informant; fieldnotes April 2012).

The logic behind the support organisations' timetable is to assure quick self-sufficiency. But in most instances, the initial period of welcome and introduction overwhelms new arrivals, and they rely heavily on established refugees to visit them – notably after support workers have left – in order to repeat information in a more relaxed environment. The refugee community has to come together to visit new arrivals, and provide clothes, crockery, food and other basic essentials. Most established refugees comment negatively on the support provided in the first week,

and agree that the pace of welcome and introduction should be better adapted to the refugees' needs, and should consider their physical and emotional state on arrival.

However, it is also very important to highlight the difficulties NGOs are currently facing, especially in terms of funding. Even if support groups plan projects to improve services to refugees and asylum seekers in Greater Manchester, they are often hindered or cancelled due to funding difficulties. In the course of my current research, many support and NGO workers complained about the decrease of government funding:

> 'We had our budget cut by almost 80 per cent. How should we continue to provide services to these vulnerable people? We had to let [one support worker] go, but she is still coming in to volunteer, because we need the manpower. Honestly, if the financial situation does no improve, we might as well close down' (male support worker of refugee support network, fieldnotes June 2013).

> 'They cut our hours from 40 [hours per week] to only 15 [hours per week], but I still come in every day, and work, because people in need still come in en masse. We already had to cancel some courses [for refugees and asylum seekers] [....], and might have to close down [the community centre] for most of the week, to save on overhead costs. But then where will they [refugees and asylum seekers] go if they need help? [....] I feel bad when we have to turn them down' (female support worker of community support service, fieldnotes April 2013).

Government sources suggest that funding should be subsidised with public donations, but, as one support worker pointed out, the public seems weary of donating to NGOs working with refugees and asylum seekers (male support worker of refugee support network, fieldnotes March 2013). Charities, support and community groups are struggling to attract the funding needed to continue to provide and improve their services to refugees and asylum seekers. Therefore, vulnerable people are often left without adequate support, exacerbating problems such as unemployment, marginalisation and language difficulties, which directly affect the Bhutanese refugee community.

**Unemployment in the UK context: 'I just want a job'.**

One of the main measures of successful 'integration' in the second stage of GPP is employment. However, my fieldwork thus far has revealed that more than 90 per cent of Bhutanese refugees settling in Greater Manchester are unemployed. Young people are under especially severe pressure to enter the labour market, as they are expected to provide for their family. Some guidance literature argues that refugees often have 'unrealistic expectations about life in the UK' (RA *et al.* 2008: 15), and hopes are not met due to the 'extremely competitive labour market' in the UK (RA *et al.* 2008: 11). My informants are well aware of the current economic crisis in the UK (and in Europe), and lowered their expectations accordingly. When probed what area they would like to work in, most refugees mentioned that they would take 'any job':

It is important to view the Bhutanese refugees' employment situation in light of the current economic crisis, which has a major impact on their employment prospects. Since autumn 2008, the UK's unemployment increased from 5.5 to 8.5 per cent. Recent statistics reveal that in April 2013 the unemployment rate was 7.9 per cent, with a total of 2.56m people looking for employment. The rate is even higher for 16 to 24 year-olds: more than 21 per cent of young people – more than 1m - are out of work (ONS 2013a and 2013b). According to economists, the 'unemployment levels across Greater Manchester remain higher than the national average' (Begum 2013). Neither the UNHCR nor the UKBA could foresee the persistence of recession across the UK, and in this regard, the GPP-programme cannot be held responsible for the high rate of unemployment among Bhutanese refugees. Some refugees follow the British media keenly, and are aware of these issues:

> 'I hope [the labour market] will change soon. But I know it's very difficult. My family in America can have many jobs. Here we get nothing. I really want to [work], and I write many applications, but [employers] always reject me. So what can I do? I go to school, to improve my English, I volunteer, I hope I can go to university. So I can make something in my life'. (male informant, fieldnotes December 2012)

Despite great efforts, most job applications are unsuccessful, leading to frustration and anxiety within families and the community as a whole.

Pressure has been further increased by the recent benefit reforms of the British government[6]. Currently, UK residents[7] (including refugees with ILR status) receive a minimum of about £56 per week in Job Seekers Allowance (JSA). In order to continue to receive these benefits, individuals have to attend the Jobcentre Plus once every two weeks (usually referred to as 'signing on'), in order to demonstrate to the case workers that s/he is actively looking for employment. That is, receivers of benefit payments have to apply for a certain number of jobs per week, and are not allowed to turn down any job, training or work programme offered to them. The exact conditions of an individual's JSA depends on their Jobseeker's Agreement, which job seekers receive from their individual case worker after their initial interview (HM Department of Work and Pensions, 2013: 4-6). If job seekers (a) miss a signing on session; (b) refuse to take part in work programmes and trainings by the Jobcentre Plus; and (c) do not apply for the minimum number of jobs per week, they will lose their benefits for one to three months. If individuals not comply with these rules, they may lose benefits all together, and are not allowed to re-apply for up to three years (HM Department of Work and Pensions 2013: 8-9).

Especially during the first months after arrival, Bhutanese refugees find it difficult to cope with the rules and regulations, as well as applying for suitable employment. The language gap (see below) aggravates the issue, as many refugees (especially those aged 50+) are not able to apply for jobs. There is a real possibility that some refugees may lose their Job Seekers Allowance altogether. Although community members support each other in times of hardship, and therefore reduce the likelihood of homelessness, for example, there is a serious threat that some may slip into poverty. Funding and support bodies are limited, and the rhetoric spun by the British tabloid media often portrays job seekers on benefits as 'scroungers' who do not want to work. This is far removed from the perspective of the refugees who regard JSA as necessary whilst gaining access

6 These issues are further complicated by the Welfare Reform Act 2012, which introduced the so-called 'bedroom tax', which has a significant impact on housing benefits (i.e. support with rent). Due to the limited scope of this paper, I am not able to discuss this in detail.

7 In order to be eligible for the UK's JSA, an individual must (a) be resident in Great Britain; (b) be between 18-64 (state pension age) years old; (c) not be in full-time education; (d) must be able and available for employment, and (e) demonstrate an active interest in looking for employment (HM Department of Work and Pensions 2013:4).

to the labour market. Most are not happy to receive benefits, and would rather have a job:

> 'I don't like benefits. It's not enough money. You can't do anything. And it's boring also. I sit at home, do nothing. I want to work and do something for my future and get some money. I want to be independent, I want to travel and visit my family [abroad]'. (male informant, fieldnotes December 2012)

One of the few employed young people in the refugee community remarked:

> 'Sometimes my job is not good, and I am not happy. But if I [quit the job] and go back to benefits, how should I live? I [earn] £800 [per month], but I would only get £250 pounds benefits [per month]. Why would I do that? It's so little money. I [would be] stupid to leave my job'. (male informant, fieldnotes January 2013)

However, two of the barriers limiting access to the labour market are (a) that even if refugees have job experience (from Nepal or Bhutan) or have qualifications from Bhutan, Nepal or India, they are not accepted in the UK, and (b) the severe language gap. The latter is directly linked to insufficient provision of English instruction prior to resettlement, and to limited access to language classes during the first stage of GPP. The lack of English proficiency has a major impact on the refugees' job prospects. As one of my informants' put it:

'The Job Centre is stupid. They stop paying job seekers allowance sometimes, and say we have to work. But so many people are made redundant. If English people and people who speak English well can't work, how should I get a job?' (male informant, fieldnotes December 2012)

**The language gap and marginalisation**

The lack of English language skills has an impact on both employment prospects and 'integration' with the local population. Research with other refugee groups in the UK demonstrates that the language gap is the main factor leading to unemployment, marginalisation, isolation and dependency (Platts-Fowler *et al.* 2001, Wright *et al.* 2004). Almost all

refugees criticised resettlement bodies that should have provided more language instruction while in the refugee camps and argued that more intensive language instruction is needed during the first year in the UK. For example:

> 'When we arrived in 2010, we got some English classes, but the people that arrived after us they did not give them anything. They had a caseworker for six months, and then it was 'goodbye', and they are gone. They don't give them English classes – only one hour a week. That's not enough to learn. Some cannot even read the alphabet. But [the caseworkers] only give us translators and interpreters, and say that this must be enough. When the interpreters leave, they are all by themselves'. (male informant, fieldnotes February 2013)

Illiteracy and lack of proficiency in English creates an almost insurmountable barrier for Bhutanese refugees, especially when seeking employment:

> 'I can speak English, but if people speak fast, I can't keep up. It's not the grammar, but I cannot speak freely [....]. [In the Job Centre training] they taught us how to talk in interviews and [how to] find work [....] but I still can't get a job'. (male informant, fieldnotes November 2012)

The language gap also leads to isolation and marginalisation from the local population. Most refugees hardly have any contact with people outside of their community, which some of them directly link to the lack of English. Most feel shy speaking with people outside of their community (female informant, fieldnotes October 2012). Their low self-esteem (with regard to their language skills) leads to further marginalisation and a vicious circle. Refugees do not communicate with the local population due to their lack of language skill – but because they do not speak English with anyone outside of their community (and thus, only speak Nepali), they cannot improve their English. Some refugees acknowledge that they themselves have to work on improving their skills, and criticise some community members' attitudes towards English classes:

> '[Manchester University] offered to teach us English [....], but after two months they didn't pay [travel costs] anymore, and we have to

> pay ourselves. So people say "we have no money, we can't go". But it's only three or four pounds [for the travel ticket], and I say to [the other refugees] "but we are learning something – they [ESOL classes providers] try to help us!" How can we move on, if people don't go [to ESOL classes]? It's not so much money, and we can still go to learn. We have to learn, so we become better here'. (male informant, fieldnotes November 2012)

Older members of the community find it particularly difficult to acquire sufficient language skills, and rely heavily on children and young people, which puts further pressure on the young generation. One of the older refugees in the community remarked:

> 'The kids are in a learning age. But my brain is old, and I cannot learn very well anymore. They [children] learn English very quickly, and make friends. But we [parents] have problems learning the language, and we make many mistakes'. (female informant, fieldnotes May 2013)

Furthermore, a high percentage of Bhutanese refugees are in fact illiterate: most refugees over the age of 50, as well as some younger community members, are not able to read the Latin (i.e. English) alphabet. Some never learnt Devanagari, the Nepali script, and are thus completely reliant on family and community members for dissemination of information both in English and Nepali.

Because ESOL classes include refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants from all corners of the world, individual levels of literacy are not considered. This makes it very difficult for students to follow language classes, and acquire sufficient language skills:

> 'My parents go to ESOL classes for two years. But they cannot read the English alphabet. So they don't understand what the teacher says or writes down. They have learnt nothing in classes'. (male informant, fieldnotes January 2013)

Some older community members face difficulties reading and using (Arabic) numerals, as they exclusively use the Nepali numeral system. This complicates the use of many household goods and gadgets, such as household appliances and phones:

> 'My mother cannot read English numbers. So she cannot use the phone. We cannot leave her alone, because if something happens, she cannot even call me'. (male informant, fieldnotes December 2012)

This means that older community members must be continuously supported, and families have to plan their lives around care for the elderly. The refugees' socio-cultural obligation to care for their elders puts pressure on the younger generation. Children and young people have to serve not only as sole income providers, but also as translators. Elderly community members rely on the youth to access health care and employment, and young refugees have to assist older refugees with the dissemination of information. In turn, some young people struggle to cope with the burden of providing for their families and the community as a whole. However, most young people regard this as their duty:

> 'This is family. I care for my family, because family is the most important thing in the world. Without family, you are nothing [....]'. (male informant, fieldnotes July 2013)

Family and community are important aspects of the Bhutanese refugees' lives, and continue to play a major role even for established members. Households almost always span three generations, and the elderly are treated with respect and care. Relationships between families and community members are continuously fostered, and established refugees do their best to support new arrivals. Community and family support replaces governmental support, and by establishing community charities, Bhutanese refugees are beginning to realize their own projects to improve the lives of community members. My research reveals a high level of agency amongst Bhutanese refugees in Greater Manchester, which is often ignored by refugee support groups.

**Agency amongst Bhutanese refugees**

As a final remark, it has to be highlighted that despite the many issues faced by the Bhutanese refugee community in the UK, they are not passive recipients of services. However, support workers sometimes perceive Bhutanese refugees as highly dependent on external support. My own research does not support this view, but highlights the exact opposite.

Most Bhutanese refugees display a high level of agency, and adapt quickly to their new environment. They prove to be exceptionally resourceful: for example, in order to lower costs for public transport, travel tickets are shared amongst families. Community support replaces governmental support, and established refugees seek to help new arrivals. Moreover, the large South Asian community in the UK (according to the UK Census 2011 (ONS 2011) more than 15 per cent of people living in the UK are South Asian or of South Asian-descent) allows Bhutanese refugees to access facilities (e.g. Hindu or Buddhist temples), and enables them to purchase familiar products (e.g. groceries, etc.).

Most young refugees are avid followers of British news, and have a good knowledge of Britain and British bureaucracy. Access to the internet and mobile devices allows them to maintain relationships with their family members in other resettlement countries. Most are happy to be in the UK (although some would have preferred to live in the USA) and all of them have high expectations and hopes for their future. Parents urge their children to seek higher education and most young people strive to go to university. This is especially relevant for female community members who regard education as a stepping stone towards empowerment.

> 'My husband sees pictures of Nepal on Facebook, and says 'oh, it's so nice, it's home, I want to go back to Nepal'. Then I say 'I am happy here [....]: here I can go to college and learn. In Nepal, when you are married [as a woman], you cannot go to school. You have to care for your family, for your in-laws. You are not allowed to go to college. You are not allowed to work. But here, I can go to college and do what I like'. (female informant, fieldnotes December 2012)

> 'My husband says, we should not have children now. We have to make our own future first [...]. I want to go to school, and have my own job. I want to earn my own money, and not depend [on my husband]. Here women are free [...], I am young, I want to enjoy it'. (female informant, fieldnotes August 2013)

But agency is not only relevant for women: all community members emphasise the freedom they enjoy here in the UK.

> 'The UK is a free country. Here I can be free: I can work, I can study, I can practice my own religion. I lived twenty years in refugee camps, and before we were oppressed by the Bhutanese government. But now we have freedom'. (male informant, fieldnotes August 2013)

Despite unemployment, marginalisation, and difficulties with language and English bureaucracy, most community members are very positive about their future. Some refugees are planning to establish their own businesses or become entrepreneurs. They look forward to receive British citizenship in order to be able to travel and visit their families and friends abroad. Most refugees are actively engaged in community development, and support each other on a daily basis. In conclusion, Bhutanese refugees display a high level of agency and resourcefulness, and encourage each other to improve their situation.

**Concluding remarks**

It would be unfair to regard the UK's GPP as a failed project. However, there are flaws and issues which need to be addressed in greater detail. It is disappointing that organisations involved in GPP do not follow-up with their clients to assess the successes and failures of their service provision. The findings of my research thus far suggest that FEL and GPP need to be extended and improved in order to guarantee a successful resettlement of refugees in the UK. However, as I have outlined, useful projects often fail due to lack of funding and resources. The current economic situation in the UK not only limits funding and the establishment of better services, but also leads to unemployment amongst Bhutanese refugees. Organisations and governmental institutions in the UK could not foresee these external issues, and FEL is not directly responsible for them. Nevertheless, marginalisation of Bhutanese refugees is linked to a lack of English language proficiency, which is a direct consequence of inadequate preparation prior to resettlement and insufficient language instruction on arrival and thereafter. This is particularly problematic for elderly community members, who are dependent on younger family members for support and care. This puts further pressures on young people, who already struggle to cope with education, employment and community support.

Nonetheless, Bhutanese refugees display a high level of agency and resourcefulness in their daily lives, which is often overlooked by case

and support workers. Therefore it is all the more important to engage in research, and to view Bhutanese refugee resettlement on a global scale. Workshops and meetings such as the SOAS project may provide valuable insights in order to assess refugee resettlement. More importantly, the active involvement of refugees in these research projects allows them to voice their views and experiences, rather than being treated them as passive recipients of services.

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# Refugees and Advocates: Bhutanese refugees, resettlement NGOs and the co-construction of a social memory of victimhood

Joseph Stadler

It might not normally occur to us to that a past in which someone suffered could be something worth remembering. However, when that past becomes an important part of a person's identity, or the way in which they narrate themselves, it is quite possible to look back upon it and utilise it as a significant resource. This past of suffering has achieved just such a status for the community of Bhutanese refugees in Erie, Pennsylvania I have been working with since late 2010. In 2008, the United States began a resettlement process that would see at least 60,000 Bhutanese refugees enter the country as permanent residents, with a view to citizenship in five-years time. Erie, Pennsylvania, a small rust belt city with a population of around 100,000, has, to this date, received roughly 5,000 Bhutanese refugees.

Bhutanese refugees have brought with them to Erie memories of religious and linguistic persecution, the loss of citizenship, mental and physical torture, and two decades of refugee camp living. These memories stretch across several generations of Bhutanese refugees that now call Erie home and inform their current community projects as well as their presentation of self. Implicated in their projects and self-presentations is the work of NGOs who have been a ubiquitous presence and major factor in their lives for the past twenty-plus years, both in exile and in resettlement. A further factor of major importance to Bhutanese refugees in Erie is the way in which their new community has welcomed them.

Here, I analyse the uses of memory by resettled Nepali-Bhutanese refugees in Erie, Pennsylvania. Through human rights discourses surrounding refugees, propagated both by NGOs and others who advocate on their behalf, Bhutanese refugees construct social memories that both inform their current projects and allow them to foster stability in resettlement. A social memory of victimhood, which integrally points to religious and linguistic persecution as a violation of their human rights to remain culturally distinct, echoes and reflects multicultural notions of citizenship

celebrated by those persons and institutions most vital to the wellbeing of their community. Bhutanese refugee community leaders in Erie are utilising this co-constructed social memory of victimhood and persecution along linguistic and religious lines to fuel two complementary projects: a 'Bhutanese Community Centre' and a 'Bhutanese Cultural Centre'. The aims of each of these projects are different: the former seeks to ease social integration to the new American environment while the latter looks to preserve cultural heritage. While their aims differ, however, these projects are complementary for Bhutanese refugees and the resettlement NGOs, as we will see in what follows.

**Locality: Erie and the Bhutanese refugees**

Bhutanese refugees' memories—or, at least, the stories they tell about their past—and political projects in Erie are produced within an environment of advocacy. This environment of advocacy has taken root in a city that has lost its traditional economic base in manufacturing and nearly thirty percent of its population since 1960. And, unlike larger gateway cities, Erie does not attract many economic immigrants. Refugee immigrants have, thus, become potentially valuable assets to the city, albeit projects. The city in which they now reside is fashioning itself more and more as a multicultural place. The Bhutanese refugee boom has been facilitated by a large sector of charitable organisations, many of which have been in existence for close to a century, originating when the city experienced its first major influx of immigrants. These organisations have been expanding their services, especially since the 1990s, to serve refugee populations. Since the 1960s, Erie has experienced a 27% drop in its total population. However, after sizable numbers of refugees began arriving in the 1990s, the population loss has slowed. If refugee arrival trends continue, Erie may in the 2020 census post its first increase in population since 1960.

At the same time, the Nepali-Bhutanese community in Erie has concerns about the preservation of cultural heritage that mirror those expressed by other Asian immigrant groups in the United States, such as Vietnamese and Korean populations in other cities with predominantly Black and White populations (Lee 2005, 2009). The 'Americanness' that this newly arrived population encounters can appear quite monolithic and establishing links with other refugee or immigrant populations from

countries such as Sudan, Somalia, Iraq or Bosnia proves difficult because of language barriers.

With as many as 5,000 currently residing in the city, the Nepali-Bhutanese now make up almost 5% of the city's population. Erie's Asian population in the 2000 census was only 776 individuals, or 0.75% of the population. At the time of the 2010 census, the city's total Asian population was only 1,115 or 1.5% of the total population (US Census Bureau). With the rapid influx of Bhutanese refugees in the past few years, the Asian population could be estimated at around 6,000 people, or around 6% of the total population. The rapidly growing Bhutanese community has not only surpassed the representation of any other Asian population in the city, they are quite literally the most visible Asian population, as many people in the community do not drive and are conspicuously present, walking the streets of the eastern part of town. There have been, perhaps as a result of this suddenly omnipresent appearance of the 'other', a number of random assaults against Nepali-Bhutanese in the city.

**Remembering and forgetting in refugee communities**

For many refugee communities, and certainly for the Nepali-Bhutanese, social memory begins with a politicisation of cultural heritage. Nepali-Bhutanese refugees, who have been made refugees through the enactment of ethnonationalist policies by the Bhutanese government, find the very foundations of their identity as a community in this moment. The states, organisations, and actors who control refugees' destinies also powerfully shape their social memories.

According to Halbwachs (1992: 47), memories are preserved through their continual reproduction. And through this continual social relationship a sense of identity is perpetuated. The production of social memory, however, is not only repetitive; it is also highly selective. In fact, those events purged from social memory may have the most to reveal about the constructive process of social memory. Paul Ricoeur sees forgetting, or perhaps suppression, as inhering in the construction of plots, or, rather, the elaboration of narratives concerning identity. He asserts, 'We cannot tell a story without eliminating or dropping some important event according to the kind of plot we intend to build' (Ricoeur 1999: 9).

Adding to these insights, David C. Harvey contends that researchers should look to understand 'the meaning and nature of what people tell

each other about their past; about what they forget, remember, memorialise and/or fake' in order to more usefully analyse heritage—and, for our purposes, we could also say memory—processes (Harvey 2001: 320). Graham also echoes Harvey in saying that the importance of what is selected from the past as being worthy of preservation does not lie in the object itself but within the interpretation of the object (Graham 1994: 135).

Boyarin describes memory as 'a potential for creative collaboration between present consciousness and the experience or expression of the past' (Boyarin 1994: 22). Stuart Hall further emphasises the creative aspects of memory work and memory's relation to identity. In his words, 'identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being.... Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation' (Hall 1996: 4). Malkki's analysis of the processes through which refugees construct a national past, as a people with a moral attachment to a particular motherland (Malkki 1995), provides insight into refugees' production and representation of collective memories. Malkki refers to refugees' oral narratives as 'mythico-history' since they 'cannot accurately be described as history or myth', but rather as a 'subversive recasting and re-interpretation of it in fundamentally moral terms' (Malkki 1995: 54).

The symbolic contents of refugee identities are not static by any means. The meaning of their past, how it speaks, constantly changes within an unfolding present—a process of becoming, rather than simply being. Social memories are the products of interpretive, creative and moralistic social processes. Moreover, I want to draw attention to the practical nature of social memory. Participating in discussing the past—'our past'—is foundational in producing communal identity. Refugees must make a substantial investment in the past, if we consider the immediacy and relative weight of the past along with their vulnerable subject positions. Refugees construct social memories and identities in environments in which find they find themselves subject to the whims of more powerful actors—the stories refugees tell about themselves are never solely theirs.

**Remembering exile in resettlement**

The primary story narrated by Nepali-Bhutanese refugees is of a people who experienced not only an attack on their cultural traditions, but were also expelled from their homes by an immoral government. There is no

room in this mythico-history for the violence perpetrated by the Nepali-Bhutanese and political parties such as the Bhutan People's Party (BPP) against the Bhutanese Government or other Nepali-Bhutanese (Evans 2009: 130). The refugees' desire to return to Bhutan or to become citizens in places such as the United States has influenced their representations of the past, given that publicising the violence perpetrated by the Nepali-Bhutanese would not further these goals. Evans points out that, in Nepal, many accounts of the refugee exodus are also authored by human rights organisations, which 'tend to focus on the refugees' victimhood and political innocence, as they attempt to exert moral pressure on the Bhutanese Government to take the refugees back' (Evans 2009: 130-1). I contend that this mythico-history, aided by NGOs and refugee advocates, imagining Bhutanese refugee subjects as innocent victims, is a crucial aspect of their construction of social memory and representation of self. I understand, moreover, this aspect of Bhutanese refugees' practices of representation to be crucial not just in the sense that it constructs a marketable population to receiving countries and communities; it is also crucial for grounding the refugees themselves in a foundational origin, for constructing themselves as moral subjects, and for producing a replicable representation of themselves, supplying a singular national identity to a stateless population.

I asked 'Aditya', a Bhutanese community leader and employee at a local resettlement NGO in Erie, about his father, who, as he had previously mentioned to me, had been imprisoned in Bhutan. Aditya explained to me that his father was arrested because the Bhutanese government wanted to 'forcefully evict' Nepali ethnics, and 'compel' them to leave Bhutan. Describing how his family came to leave Bhutan after his father's detainment by the Royal Army, Aditya said:

> 'My father knew neither how to read English nor Dzongkha. There was a paper in Dzongkha, and my father signed it. My father didn't know how to sign, so he just gave a thumbprint. That paper said that my father and his family would leave Bhutan willingly, voluntarily. But, the army personnel had said, "If you want to leave, you'll sign this paper. If you want to die, you will go to the ground, and I will shoot you with this bullet". He signed the paper. After signing the paper, they said, "Oh. Good! You are willing to leave Bhutan!"' [He laughs].

Regarding the reasoning for this abhorrent treatment by the Bhutanese state, Aditya said:

> 'The Bhutanese government adopted this "One Nation, One People" policy. So, we were two types of people: Nepali people and Drukpa people.[1] The King wanted a single nation. Though, we were different... We spoke out, but the government didn't want that. They didn't want diversified cultures, only one! The government wanted to make our country Drukpa only.'

This was one of my first encounters with the quite graphic, animated stories Bhutanese refugees tell about their experience of exile. I was struck by the one-sided violence, on the part of the Bhutanese state, contained within his tale. While the violent actions contained within his story are completely inexcusable, the events that led to this brutal treatment of Nepali-Bhutanese citizens were not as one-sided as his narration might make them out to be. Aditya, for instance, glosses over the sometimes-violent public demonstrations organised by Nepali-Bhutanese citizens in the early 1990s.[2] As we will see later, he is, however, not alone in this.

'Tirtha', a 25-year-old recent college graduate who is currently studying for his MCATs, related to me his own, slightly different, narrative of Bhutanese exile. He explained that until 'the revolution started', the King was actually quite good to the southerners. However, when his people wanted democracy, started rallies and staged demonstrations, 'the government decided to get rid of the people causing the problem'. Although, he says, the southerners were 'trying to get democracy for all people and trying to make the country more open', the government felt it was 'a challenge to the regime and tried to get rid of the southerners'. Tirtha, who was only a small child when he and his family left Bhutan, does not feel the need to downplay his people's politics in the lead-up to their exile. He openly refers to his people's actions as a 'revolution'. Statements like this, from the often more politically outspoken youth, are not found in the discourse of their elders. It is telling that I have never

1 The term 'Drukpa' is used by Nepali-Bhutanese to refer collectively to the ruling Ngalong ethnic group. The Ngalong and Bhutanese state subscribe to the Drukpa Kagyu school of Buddhism.

2 See Hutt (2003: 200-210) for a discussion of Nepali-Bhutanese demonstrations.

heard anyone else use the word revolution to describe the protests and demonstrations that led to Nepali-Bhutanese exile.

As pointed out earlier, politics have been noticeably absent from narratives of Nepali-Bhutanese exile. Similar to what Evans (2009) found in Nepal, in Erie, Bhutanese refugees' stories are largely authored by their advocates. The myriad resettlement NGOs and refugee assistance services in this small city of around 100,000 people have proven excellent ambassadors and publicists for the Bhutanese community. The presence of the Bhutanese community in the local paper certainly cannot be ignored, as community members have graced the front page of several Sunday editions. And, the Bhutanese never appear without at least one quote from a higher-level employee of one of the local NGOs.

The fostering of compassion from the community is perhaps the broad aim of the vast majority of articles written about the Bhutanese community in Erie. No story about the Bhutanese forgoes mentioning the story of their exile. In an article entitled 'Refugee relates to royals', which details the story of Nar Sapkota, a former malaria inspector in Bhutan who claims to have shaken hands with Princess Diana during a visit to the Nepalese refugee camps in 1993,[3] the author asks her readers to empathise with Bhutanese refugees in Erie (Allen 2011: 1B). The author says, 'It's easy to fantasize about becoming a princess and living happily ever after. It's much harder to think about trading places with Nar or his classmates at the Multicultural Community Resource Center…' (Allen 2011: 1B). Allen says of the exile of Nepali-Bhutanese: 'Because of violence against members of their ethnic group and crackdowns on their dress and language', the Nepali-Bhutanese could no longer live within Bhutanese culture, so Nar's family was 'forced into a refugee camp in Nepal. For 18 years, they lived in a building resembling a military barracks' (Allen 2011: 1B).

One article, advertising World Refugee Day celebrations in Erie mentions how 'everything changed' for Nepali-Bhutanese in the late 1980s when an

3 I can find no proof that Princess Diana actually visited the camps while in Nepal in 1993. Perhaps there was a miscommunication here. This meeting may have taken place elsewhere, as many Bhutanese refugees found it relatively easy to move around within Nepal.

> anti-Nepali campaign, which had been years in the making, erupted. The Bhutanese government shunned the parts of society it didn't control, and among the unacceptable was the Subedis' (a prominent Bhutanese family in town, with two brothers who are both caseworkers and community leaders) practice of Hindu religion. People of their culture were arrested, beaten and sometimes killed. (Smith 2009: 1-2B)

Devi, one of my collaborators and the Bhutanese Community Association of Erie's president-to-be, is quoted as saying, 'We requested, "Please King, allow us to live as we are living. Allow us to follow our culture, our dress, speak our language."... We were not able to live there. Some of the families started to run away from there'. 'If they didn't run', Smith explains, 'they were exiled' (Smith 2009: 2B). As is evident in the co-authoring of this tale of exile, both Devi and Smith, the author—along with a community services coordinator from a local NGO, who also appears throughout—construct a vision of Bhutanese refugees as the helpless, powerless, and voiceless victims of a tyrannical king. The story Devi tells fits neatly into the narrative the author—as a refugee advocate—and the community services coordinator wish to tell about refugees. As the community services coordinator explains later in the article: 'They were driven out like cattle' (2009: 2B).

As we saw earlier, Aditya's and Tirtha's memories of exile made mention of the unwillingness of the Nepali-Bhutanese to passively accept, and their open opposition to, the Bhutanese government's ethnonationalist policies which led to their refugeehood. Thus, there is, at least in the privacy of their homes, an intimate knowledge of their own people's role in their story. In public, however, as it may be obvious from the exile stories shared by refugees and others in the local newspaper, it may be detrimental for a refugee to present themselves as responsible for their own fate. It is of utmost importance to resettlement NGOs and refugees that narratives of exile appear as one-sided tales of victimhood, as this legitimises refugees' presence in their new locale and constructs, for locals, a non-threatening population.

The same self-censorship appears in refugees' narratives of camp life. Recently, I was discussing the state of camp life with Aditya and Devi, together in Devi's office at a local NGO. Both Aditya and Devi lamented to

me that Bhutanese refugees in Nepal have no rights to work and cannot leave the camp. When I replied —knowing that both Aditya and Devi lived and worked outside of the camps as teachers— 'Except for you!' Aditya and Devi together burst out into laughter. Devi then admitted that he only ever lived in the camp for a short period of time and spent years living at the school where he taught, even bringing his son to live with him and attend the school. The everyday lives of these two men were hardly as harsh as the more 'official' narrative they had initially given to me.

The reality remains, however, that Bhutanese refugees are refugees. And, from a vulnerable subject position such as that, there are only certain avenues available to them to make claims. To receive the aid they desperately need, as stateless persons, they must prove themselves as refugees. As refugees, subject to the support provided to them by NGOs and other refugee advocates, they must negotiate and frame their narratives within the boundaries that are set by these other, more powerful actors. Even in resettlement, their stories must not falter, as this could have detrimental effects for those still living in the camps. Further, if those in resettlement are unable to adapt, they, themselves, risk losing everything once again. The work of Bhutanese community leaders in Erie seeks to ensure that this does not happen.

**The work of the Bhutanese Community Association of Erie (BCAE)**

According to Halbwachs 'memories occur in the form of systems' (1992: 53). Nepali-Bhutanese memory work is shaped in engagement with a very powerful system: the human rights-centred discourses and practices of resettlement NGOs and local refugee advocates. Erie's resettlement NGOs employ dozens of Bhutanese refugees as caseworkers, job developers, instructors, and interpreters, among other positions. The BCAE bylaws, seen in this context, reveal reveal two complimentary sets of goals. First, the BCAE looks to 'conserve promote and protect cultural heritage, social and traditional values within a dynamic environment'. Second, they hope to 'orient the community on the policies and system of the United States' and 'facilitate and promote unity, and a sense of belonging to the United States'. The narratives in the previous section depicted Bhutanese refugees in Erie as passive, gentle people, victims of malevolent forces beyond their control. Their cultural difference—or, their ethnic difference—is presented and understood as essential in why they became refugees. This

clearly resonates with resettlement NGOs and other advocates in Erie, and it finds certain expression in the projects of the BCAE which, in seeking the preservation of cultural heritage, also fix a narrative of exile. Because the projects of the BCAE take, as a foundational starting point, the unjust one-sided violation of Nepali-Bhutanese cultural heritage, they may also serve to fix a social memory in which not only historical particularities, but the voices of the Nepali-Bhutanese, themselves, are lost.

The BCAE, essentially set up as an NGO, is currently focused on case management and empowerment. With the community centre, BCAE leaders, of whom several are employed at local NGOs, hope to serve these aims both by facilitating integration to the host society and preserving Nepali-Bhutanese cultural heritage. The community centre will act, for case management purposes, as an NGO office. Having a permanent office people in the Bhutanese community can locate will allow the BCAE to better handle the needs of their community. By helping with formalities, ranging from registering changes of address with the Department of Homeland Security to helping elderly Bhutanese refill their prescriptions at local pharmacies, the BCAE figures their case management focus to fill an important void left by their community when the resettlement NGO assistance dries up after six months. The case management focus of the Bhutanese Community Centre allows BCAE leaders to utilise the practical knowledge they have gained, as caseworkers and job developers at local NGOs, to service their community, exclusively.

The BCAE's focus on empowerment incorporates the aims of social integration and cultural preservation by looking to teach a variety of classes and by helping community members access new forms of cultural and social capital. The classes the BCAE intends to teach in the community centre range from English and Nepali language classes to computer skills classes. Regarding the classes, one BCAE leader said their intent is to teach children Nepali in order to preserve 'our Nepali language; and impart our customs, social values, ethics, language, traditions and culture'. The English classes, he said, will be offered to the 'older folks', who 'need English'. BCAE leaders also want to utilise the centre to facilitate educational opportunities, especially for those members of their community aged 18-25 who have the language skills and education to succeed in the US. These young people have entered the country with a high school diploma that will go unrecognised and are too old to be admitted to high

schools. In assisting them in attaining a GED and applying for colleges or trade schools, BCAE leaders reason that these young people can help the community achieve more, and 'reap the market benefits in the future'.

The goals of the BCAE, regarding the building of a Bhutanese Cultural Centre that will function as a locus of cultural heritage preservation, follow from a social memory in which they see a politicisation of their heritage. However, BCAE leaders' definitions of their cultural heritage have shifted within the past few years. In addition to adopting the platform of local resettlement NGOs, focusing on case management and the empowerment of their community through a Bhutanese Community Centre, BCAE leaders have expanded their definition of culture.

As one BCAE leader related to me, the BCAE is no longer looking to build a 'temple', because by that word, he says, his people will only understand the place as Hindu. They have opted, instead, to call the building a 'Bhutanese Cultural Centre'. They are now using 'the broader definition of Omkar Family'. This signifies a more inclusive community where Hindu, Kirat, and Buddhist religious and ethnic groups can belong as equal members to the Bhutanese refugee community. The Bhutanese Cultural Centre project will, as I am told, include separate religious rooms for Hindus, Kiratis, and Buddhists. The small group of Christians in the Bhutanese community has already established its own church. What the transformation from temple to cultural centre also signifies is the concretion of a Bhutanese refugee social memory of exile in which their loosely Nepali ethnic group has come to be seen as more cohesive and unified.

## Learning from the past

As noted earlier, it is clear that the BCAE has taken on the human-rights-centred rhetorical platform of resettlement NGOs. One feature of global human rights discourses since the early 1990s has been a focus on a right to culture (Irina 2011). This is not without problems for Nepali-Bhutanese refugees. The BCAE's objective of conserving, promoting and protecting cultural heritage, social and traditional values within a 'dynamic environment' is both product of NGO interaction and a past in which the Nepali-Bhutanese felt alien cultural heritage, social and traditional values imposed upon them. Further these are the types of culturalist (Bayart 2005) configurations put into action by the Bhutanese

government that the Nepali-Bhutanese so vehemently opposed.[4] The Bhutanese government's policies, as well its rationales, which led to their exodus mirror well exactly those things the BCAE is looking to do.

We saw above how the BCAE wishes to instill Nepali-Bhutanese customs, social values, ethics, language, traditions and culture into the youth in order to preserve their unique cultural heritage. The Bhutanese government had similarly stressed inculcating the meaning and significance of Bhutan's national heritage. The cultural classes that the BCAE wishes to teach, as has been observed, are based around the preservation of the Nepali language. A similar promotion of Dzongkha was seen in the late 1980s in Bhutan. The proceedings from the 68th National Assembly of Bhutan, held in 1989, reveal a similar project. The proceedings show that the government felt the promotion of national identity, inculcating Bhutanese-ness through Dzongkha, Driglam Namzha and national dress, was vital in securing the health and longevity of the nation. Trying to avoid the fates of Sikkim or Tibet, it was said that 'a small country such as Bhutan should have a distinct national identity that would always stand as a proud and common symbol of strength to promote and safeguard the wellbeing of the people and sovereignty of the nation'.

The irony deepens when we take into account a pamphlet entitled 'Bhutan: We Want Justice'. This pamphlet, cited by Hutt (2003: 178), was written in 1989 by The People's Forum For Human Rights, founded by Nepali-Bhutanese activist Tek Nath Rizal, who, within a month, was imprisoned on charges of treason:

> Another great lie turns around the word 'national identity'. ...The dress, the language, the religion are the part of every man's identity. Bakhu (gho/kira)[5] does not make a Bhutanese.... Identity is primarily the core, the soul of a person or nation. It is sheer ignorance to identify it with dress or language.... Identity is something deeper than a piece of cloth....

4 Bayart (2011: 65) understands culturalism to be 'the explanation of social phenomena as the products of... a homogeneous "culture".' Bayart notes that it 'always ratifies a relationship of power and inequality'. Worse, he says, 'it contributes to...reproducing this relationship, assigning an identity ...to the person whom it designates' and attributes or refuses 'material and symbolic resources to him or her' (Bayart 2011: 67).

5 *Bakhu* is a Nepali term for the Bhutanese national costume.

Here, the authors of the pamphlet deny importance to the very things that the BCAE promotes for the protection of Nepali-Bhutanese cultural heritage in resettlement.

In the following passage from the same pamphlet, we can see just how ambivalent Nepali-Bhutanese feelings have been, concerning cultural heritage, and just how much the revolutionary fervor of the past has been silenced in their narratives of exile. It is cited in Hutt (1996: 405):

> The hour has struck for the historic conflict. We the Bhutanese Nepalese have a culture we cherish, a language we speak, a dress we wear, a religion we follow. They are all ours. They are part of our identity. We shall not allow any power to take them away from us. We shall resist, we shall fight to the last man of our race all repressive laws intended to wipe out our racial identity.

As we saw in the exile narratives both given to me and printed in the local paper, there is a lack of open aggression on the part of the Nepali-Bhutanese—though we can perceive the refugees' lingering anger and frustration, especially in the memories narrated to me by Aditya and Tirtha.

The BCAE, however, as the representative body for Bhutanese refugees in Erie, has not formulated its goals in terms of this anger and frustration. Nor is their formulation of cultural heritage quite as exclusivist as that which they had experienced in Bhutan. As we saw in the shift from 'temple' to 'community centre' —from 'Hindu' to the more general 'Omkar Family'—BCAE leaders are attempting a more progressive, inclusive approach. Determined not to repeat the past, they aim to strike a balance between cultural preservation and social integration.

**Conclusion**

Malkki, referring to memory work in the refugee camp experience, says, 'The experiential reality of the refugee camp was powerfully shaped by the narrative memory of relationships and antagonisms located in the past' (Malkki 1996: 383). Perhaps, in light of the memory work done by the BCAE, we can turn this statement on its head. It seems that the narrative memory of relationships and antagonisms located in the past are powerfully shaped by the experiential reality of the resettlement

community. As we have seen, BCAE leaders have been profoundly affected by working with resettlement NGOs. First, their empowerment and case management goals epitomise the practices of resettlement NGOs. Second, their aims to preserve cultural heritage and the ways in which they narrate their exile also mirror the concerns and practices of resettlement NGOs. 'Even at the moment of reproducing the past', Halbwachs says, 'our imagination remains under the influence of the present social milieu' (Halbwachs 1992: 49). BCAE memory work is, in essence, a product of practical knowledge gained through constant association with NGOs and a long-term dependence on NGOs in their present social milieu.

In the co-constructed memory work of the BCAE we find that Nepali-Bhutanese political action is absent from the ways they narrate their past. This, to me, reflects silencing measures in the Bhutanese refugee community. According to McGranahan (2005: 571), 'unofficial bans' on telling a history of violent resistance arise because of 'issues of internal difference and national dissent in the exile...community'. There are a few reasons for this. First, exile politics are greatly affected by relations of power, both inside and outside the community. Regarding outside power relations, the organisations and government actors who support the exile community do so on the basis of a human rights discourse. To tell a violent version of the past, in which the refugees were also major actors in their history, is to deny them the role of victim —a designation, whose importance cannot be underestimated; their livelihood very much depends on it.

Second, infra-group power relations serve to preserve this telling of exile history as one of victimisation. McGranahan notes, '[...]events, arrested histories [of the violent resistance] would challenge the order of things [for Tibetans in exile], if not change them. Hence, the defusing of resistance history into the category of "nonevent" means that the national past remains a simplified version of history with room only for external and not internal conflict' (McGranahan 2005: 582). For McGranahan, Tibetan exile government actors and the Dalai Lama, whose powers have only increased in exile, exert their influence on members of the Tibetan diaspora in everyday life by authorising a single, non-violent, history and asking that the alternative tellings wait (McGranahan 2005: 582).

In the case of Bhutanese refugees in Erie, this direct relationship between refugee leaders and the unofficial bans on highlighting resistance in their social memory of exile is not so clear for several reasons.

First, infra-group power relations take a different form in the Bhutanese community. There is no government in exile to which Bhutanese refugees must acquiesce. Thus, social pressures from within the Bhutanese community are, in a sense, more diffuse. The BCAE, after all, is not a governing body, but a representative body. Second, outside power relations, namely those with resettlement NGOs, have a much greater effect upon how Bhutanese refugees narrate their pasts. Only a few years into their resettlement, their lives are still intimately intertwined with the much-needed assistance of NGOs. As we have seen in the BCAE's practices and in the ways Bhutanese refugees' pasts are narrated in the local media, the NGOs are not merely entities which lurk in the shadows: they are inescapable and their constant presence is impossible to miss.

Ricoeur says that we have a 'duty to remember'. He describes this duty to remember as an 'ethico-political' problem, because it has to do with the relating of the meaning of the past to future generations. This duty, an 'imperative' to Ricoeur, is the opposite of the 'traumatic character of the humiliations and wounds of history' (Ricoeur 1999: 10). The duty to remember is thus, for him, a 'duty to tell' ( Ricoeur 1999: 10). However, Ricoeur does not give attention to the ambivalent, often conflicting versions of the past within a community; he does not recognise the disconnect between the duty to tell and the problem of constructing a coherent narrative. In other words, he forgets about power. Ricoeur says the duty to remember should be cherished for the sake of the subjugated—that we need a parallel history of victimisation—so that, along with forgetting, we may construct a 'just memory' (Ricoeur 1999: 10). As noble as this idea is, it is not without its problems. As McGranahan (2005) showed in her study of the politics of memory in the Tibetan diaspora, constructing a history of victimisation—one that Ricoeur might consider just—causes its own subjugated memories. The same can be said for Bhutanese refugees in Erie. It remains to be seen whether the subjugated memories of resistance are only temporarily set aside or if the post-memories of the next generation will be fully dissociated from the muddy ambivalence of the past.

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# Social Service Provider Perceptions of 'Nepali-ness' among Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Austin, Texas

Heather Hindman

While united by a common language, those Nepalis who are currently in Austin pursuing asylum status as a result of violence during Nepal's civil war and Bhutanese-Nepalis brought to Texas through the refugee system face very different concerns. This paper explores how these two groups are thrust together by the limitations of immigrant services organisations in the United States. While the asylum seekers are often better educated, speak English more fluently and have been in the US longer than the refugees, they often reside in the US in a more liminal legal status. This temporariness can last for many years, although not for as long as most refugees spent in the camps in Nepal. Conversely, refugees often are given a clearer path to documentation and greater support by formal government institutions, though these services are constricted by a six-month window during which time refugees are expected to adapt to life in the US, find housing, employment and navigate the bureaucracy. Yet this is as much a story of bureaucracy as refugees or asylees. Its ethnographic subjects are the school teachers, ESL (English as a Second Language) instructors and social service providers as much as those they serve. I ground this study in concerns particular to the city of Austin.

As the capital city of a large U.S. state with low unemployment and a large university, the city provides many conditions amenable to the resettlement of new populations, and as such was declared a 'refugee resettlement city', in 2013.[1] In 2012 Texas received the largest number of new refugee arrivals of any state in the US, with Austin receiving approximately 20 percent of those.[2] Although the US government, through the Department of State, nominally selects refugees and supports them through their initial six months of resettlement, much of the day-to-day

1 This declaration was made at a 2013 conference held at the University of Texas, entitled 'Resettlement City? Austin's Refugee Communities'. Although appearing as a question in the title, many of the presenters restated this motto as a declaration of truth, rather than a query.

2 http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/resource/fiscal-year-2012-refugee-arrivals

work is delegated to private agencies or takes place in public institutions not expressly oriented towards refugee support, let alone the particular needs of Bhutanese-Nepali refugees. Thus, I wish to discuss the way in which service providers are restricted — by money, law, their own lack of knowledge and the bureaucracies that constrain them — in what support they can provide Bhutanese-Nepalis. The result is often well-intentioned service providers who must scramble to support a population that does not fit well into the programs that have been developed to serve Austin's large community of Spanish-speaking migrants. Agencies seek out whomever they can find to help them to understand, literally and figuratively, the experience of Bhutanese-Nepalis, sometimes with problematic results.

My own adventures as an under-informed supporter of the refugee services organisations in Austin began over a year ago, when the South Asia Institute at the University of Texas was contacted by the local public school system asking if the University had an expert on Bhutan who could help them with issues they were having with a rapidly expanding population of Bhutanese students in the school system. Teachers had reached out to both the school psychology staff for the district as well as their refugee coordinator with concerns about behavior problems, tensions between students and language problems. The teachers were sure that some of these must be cultural issues and hoped that someone at UT would be able to help them. The Institute staff noted that although there was no one who worked on Bhutan in particular, they did have someone who worked on Nepal and the Himalayan region who might be able to help them. After several phone calls and emails, I learned that many of the students they were concerned about were Bhutanese-Nepali refugees, but it took several weeks to help them understand why these people were refugees from Bhutan, but that they spoke Nepali, had lived in Nepal in refugee camps and traced their family histories to Nepal. Many of the service providers I spoke with in this period were unsure how to put these unfamiliar places, names, histories and *jats* into a story that would fit their narratives of difference and conflict, let alone how these people ended up in Texas, and they were still unsure if these descriptors attached to the refugees were countries, 'tribal groups', religions or Indian territories.

In this paper, I contextualise my own experience as an expert on Nepal within the configuration of migrant service and support organisations in Austin and the challenges and misunderstandings of those seeking

to provide help to Bhutanese-Nepalis in Texas. This is based mainly on my own work with refugees, asylees, undocumented migrants and those who want to provide them with resources to negotiate resettlement but are often hindered by both bureaucratic pressures and their own lack of knowledge about culture and history, despite valiant efforts and good intentions. The key tensions that I wish to highlight are linguistic, religious and temporal ones, as service providers find themselves exacerbating community problems, especially between different groups of Nepalis, without ever knowing that this is what is happening. The turn to culture as an explanatory framework, and how institutions engage refugees as cultural subjects, also encodes important lessons for what difference is allowed to make a difference in these settings. Finally, I want to suggest some of the ways in which Austin is both well-positioned, and poorly prepared, to be the refugee city it has been proclaimed to be.

To begin, I need to turn back to 2006, before Bhutanese-Nepalis started coming to Austin in any significant numbers, at a moment when there was a developing circuit of Nepalis seeking asylum from the Maoist conflict. At that point in time, I began getting calls from local supporters of asylum seekers through connections at the South Asia Institute: law offices doing pro-bono work and law schools in Texas were all calling looking for Nepal experts. While most had found Nepali translators, they needed people with the letters PhD behind their name and an outsider status to the community to do a different form of translation: to mediate between the stories of asylees, the U.S. legal system and craft a legible (to the bureaucracy) history of Nepal's stories of conflict and difference. These groups had received cases of Nepalis, often couples, seeking asylum in the U.S. and in need of expert witness testimony about their cases as well as general statements about the nature of the Maoist conflict in Nepal. Coming amidst the successful elections of the CPN-M and in the conservative state of Texas, I had difficulty explaining to lawyers and asylum advocates that although the Maoists were listed on the US State Department's list of terrorist organisations, that they had also won a popular vote in Nepal and were currently leaders of the country. I was initially unfamiliar with the expert witness system, and spent hours talking to lawyers and their associates about cases, eventually meeting the asylees themselves. After writing statements about the general history of politics in Nepal, often with very little attention to the particularities of

the individual cases, I was struck by the similarities in the cases. It became clear that although the journeys and struggles described in the official statements were undoubtedly real, and horrific, they were also shaped by the demands of the US asylum system. The changing political situation in Nepal and the arduous journey made crafting an asylum claim difficult. In Texas, many of those who arrived had travelled through as many five different countries—moving from Nepal to India, through South and Central America, eventually to Mexico and the US—thus requiring them to have the capacity to argue for their inability to settle in any of these intervening countries. Applicants needed to be prepared for many possibilities, including the changing US attitude toward the Nepali Maoist government. They prepared information that might prove claims of religious or gender-based threats. Through their travels, they carried large collections of the bureaucratic materials that might make such varied claims legitimate within the U.S. legal system including marriage certificates, SLC documents as well as police reports and notarised statements from relatives about threats received in their absence. Most had been coached before departure on what to bring and some knew people who were already in the asylum system in the US. Many were well-educated and wealthy, not inconsistent with potential targets of Maoist violence, and spoke excellent English. Several had received 'plus 2' degrees or more, and travelled abroad on work or education before seeking asylum.[3]

After a dozen or so cases in the mid-2000s, I let it be known that I would not be doing these statements any more (although I have made a few exceptions). I continue to get calls about these five to seven year old cases though, as many still linger in the US legal system, having been delayed and shifted around over the years. This has placed many of the would-be asylees in a difficult position. The US restricts the ability of asylum seekers to work legally in the US, and although after a period of delay in their case, asylum seekers can apply for work permits. Many find this difficult and remain in documentation limbo for years, without any official status other than waiting. This is in part a well-known migrant story, that of new arrivals to the US working in poorly paid, insecure jobs despite having held lucrative and respected positions in their home country. Yet, the

3 This level of documentation has itself become a source of scepticism, in large part because of the case of Khagendra Khadka, a US asylum seeker from Nepal whose relative printed an article about his persecution in a newspaper he controlled.

story of how Nepali asylees became part of Austin's precariat has distinctive twists and turns; in part having to do with the abundance of undocumented workers in Texas, and the near monopoly on positions open to people without official status held by Spanish speakers. Furthermore, the predominance of Christian organisations that provide the social services and legal support for which state and national government agencies have curtailed funding generates pressures upon new arrivals of other religious traditions. Yet there is an unusual shift that occurred in the position of these liminial Nepali asylum applicants who found unexpected positions with the arrival of Bhutanese-Nepali refugees to Texas.

Texas is currently the second largest receiver of Bhutanese-Nepali refugees in the United States, and Bhutanese-Nepalis are the second largest population of refugees currently arriving to Austin.[4] The service provider community in Austin has been at a loss in how to address this influx because the stories of Bhutanese-Nepalis hold little similarity to those populations they are most used to supporting. In this section of the paper, I want to provide some background, not on the Bhutanese-Nepali refugee situation, which is addressed by others in this volume, but about how the pathway many Bhutanese-Nepali refugees (henceforth Refugees) have followed to the US intersects with the limitations on service agencies and US laws to create distinct problems for this population. I also want to talk about how 'culture' is a significant rhetoric for refugee service providers and the challenges in presenting Bhutanese-Nepali refugee culture in a way that is both palatable and usable by service providers.

It was while living in Baluwatar in the summer of 2012 that I learned more about the pathways that bring many Refugees to Austin. Nearly every day, on the partially dismantled streets around the Prime Minister's house, large blue buses would struggle to find a space between the road construction equipment, the high rise buildings paused by economic circumstance and the normal chaos of Kathmandu traffic. The buses, filled with Bhutanese-Nepali refugees recently picked up from the camps,

4 This is according to the United State Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). Pennsylvania currently receives more Bhutanese-Nepalis and Burmese refugees are currently the largest incoming refugee population in Texas. Most direct services to refugees are administered through public-private partnerships, the organisations that are providing services beyond the moment of immediate arrival in Austin are nearly exclusively Christian-affiliated.

were on their way to a UNHCR office where they were prepared for their journey to another country. Most were given little notice that they were to be taken from the camps and their time in Kathmandu was brief as well. The temporal and spatial experience of the typical Refugee has been one of the most difficult things to explain to service providers in Austin. The Refugees in Austin, like most, have spent many years in the camps, and for most school-aged children, camp life had been the only life they knew. What I was asked to share with service providers was not ethnographic stories or personal journeys, but the life of a typical Refugee, which was assumed to be outside the camps. While such narratives likely did not do justice to the complexity of experiences that Refugees endured and often seemed contrary to my own impulses as an anthropologist , it was the format given, and the dearth of knowledge that service providers and school teachers had justified my hope that any information was better than what they had at present.

Through the auspices of the South Asia Institute, using a format that we had deployed in the past to lead required continuing education seminars for teachers, we held a day-long event that included presentations by Austin service providers, a UT professor (myself, assisted by a colleague from a nearby university)[5] and school officials, all of whom sought to provide information to teachers about the Bhutatese-Nepali refugee community, refugee services and historical and cultural background. In collecting questions from participants before the seminar, many of the queries were quite basic, 'Why are these people both Bhutanese and Nepali?' 'What language do they speak?', 'Can we try some Nepali food?'. There were inquiries about phenotypes and bodily gestures, 'How close do people like to be when they talk?'. Also, there were many inquires about what schooling had been like in the camps and in Nepal (or did they mean Bhutan) in general. Many teachers were curious about religion, a topic that turned out to be more contentious than I anticipated, as well as gender and family relationships. Refugee services agencies also had their own confusions, ones that they frequently disseminated to other support providers as well as the public, as is seen in the City of Austin website on refugees that states, 'In the last few years, most of the refugees

5 Many thanks to Dr. Andrew Nelson of the University of North Texas for his support in this seminar. Any inaccuracies and offences are my own, but the event would not have happened without his wisdom.

who settled in Austin hail from Burma, Bhutan, Cuba, Iraq, and Africa (DR Congo, Nepal, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritea [sic!])'.[6]

The day of the seminar began with a school administrator passing out to the attendees forms that had been created with dual English/Nepali information about key Austin Independent School District (AISD) policies. These included lists of vaccinations required before the first day of school, school trip permission slips, absence notices and invitations to parents' day at the school. Translated by a local Nepali Asylee who worked on-and-off for the district on an informal basis, the documents, to my eyes, were clear and accurately translated, if unnecessarily precise and often utilising more Sanskritised words. When these were passed out to teachers, my colleague and I raised the issue of the likelihood that some parents, particularly mothers, may not read Nepali, which I had found to be the case among some of those I had met thus far. This had not occurred to the school staff, who chastised the asylee in the midst of the presentation for not discussing this possibility with them. The school administrative staff also offered posters, albeit in English, Spanish and Arabic, on domestic violence for teachers to post, which included information about a hotline for victims. Family violence had been an issue that the school district had found with previous refugee families and thus was a regular part of their presentations to teachers about this student population. As teachers asked questions of the two administrative staffers, they learned that there was no official Nepali language support, but the district hoped to be able to provide some soon. One teacher was particularly focused on this issue, as she worked with English as a Second Language programmes, and was having difficulty with the Refugee students in her course. She noted that they were vastly outnumbered by Spanish speakers in her class and that she worried that in explaining things in Spanish she further confused the few students in her class who spoke other languages at home, yet she had few good alternatives.

The next section of the presentation focused on resources available to refugees in Austin. US law provides three to six months of financial support for new refugee arrivals, in the form of health care, education, legal guidance and other assistance. Yet the US Department of State's Reception and Placement programme concretely consists of nine private agencies,

6 http://austintexas.gov/department/refugee-services. Accessed September 23, 2013.

delegated to select which refugees their regional agencies will settle and to directly administer services and support using State Department funds, often supplemented by their own. With official Reception and Placement services and many state resources limited to a ninety day period, refugees were left to seek help from private agencies and non-profits after this period. This was a system that was particularly confusing to many Bhutanese-Nepali refugees I spoke with as the organisations that the State Department outsourced Reception and Placement services to were the same organisations that helped a wide range of refugees and migrants after the formal period. Thus, Refugees who became used to the help and support of not only a particular agency but a particular individual became confused when after three to six months that person was less available to them and began to withdraw support. For example, one woman feared that she had failed her English as a Second Language Programme, as despite her friends' continued attendance, she was told that she could not participate anymore. This short cut-off period was a particular problem with health care concerns—including mental health issues—as it often took Refugees several months to gain enough stability to seek medical care for what were, for many, long-standing issues. Several Refugees described stories of receiving diagnoses for their own or their children's health problems in their fifth or sixth month of residency, at a time when their medical costs were no longer paid for.

Presentations by myself as well as local service agency leaders and refugees who now worked for one of the two resettlement programs (in this case a Somali) described the complexity faced by refugees in navigating the opportunities available to them and doing so in a timely manner. In what was initially a side-discussion between myself and a colleague, but became part of the central conversation, we mentioned the unpleasant irony that what had caused difficulty for many Refugees in Bhutan was a paperwork regime that seemed always trying to take away their status, rights and land. Amassing papers that might give one's presence in Bhutan legitimacy by documenting their landholdings and history was one that many refugees had chased as the rules changed or were applied unevenly in the late 20th Century in Bhutan (see Hutt 2003). Now in the US, collecting papers similarly proved a full-time job for both Nepali asylees and Bhutanese-Nepali refugees; both populations came to this investment in paper with different appreciations of the grammar of documentation

and traumas about having the right status (see Riles ed. 2006, Hull 2012, Cabot 2012). That filling out forms might have traumatic implications for Refugees came as a surprise for nearly all those present. Although at this point, there were no Nepali Asylees or Refugees present, the Somali interjected that this was an important issue to highlight to the school teachers. He described his own difficulties hiding his identity and avoiding the same formal paperwork that had been a survival mechanism for him before coming to the US. Once there, his first six months seemed to consist of nothing but people asking him questions, and recording his answers, the very questions that would have gotten him killed in his homeland. He also found keeping track of this new form of documentation a constant challenge and remembered his own struggles, ones he had seen Bhutanese-Nepalis experience as well, when he travelled for hours on the bus to an appointment only to find that he was missing some document or form and would have to return another day.

As we were discussing the various service providers—a section of the day's events that was intended to be merely informational—what was to be one of the most difficult topics of the day came to the fore. The two refugee services agencies in Austin that are officially sanctioned to provide services in the initial six months resettlement are both Christian-affiliated, one more explicitly than the other, furthermore, many of the agencies that actually provide services are directly administered through churches.[7] This led to a cacophony of discussion among the teachers: 'I thought most Nepalis were Hindu' 'Yes, but most of my Refugee students belong to the same Christian Church'. My colleague and I chimed in that we would be talking about religion in Nepal amongst the Refugee population in a later portion of the event.

Yet, the collective concerns had erupted, soon many of the teachers were comparing notes about a local lay minister who was Nepali and had provided translation support to many Refugees, coming with parents to conferences or to discuss student issues. 'I don't think he is telling me what they are really saying', noted one teacher. She was concerned that this man was dominating the visiting parents and directing the conversation,

7 The Department of State notes that although the majority of the 'voluntary agencies' charged with the actual resettlement program 'have religious affiliations, they are not allowed to proselytize'. http://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/receptionplacement/index.htm Accessed September 23, 2013.

neglecting the concerns of the parents or the teachers. Soon, questions were being asked about how many people in Nepal were Christian, and if the Refugees had converted before arriving to the US or after. Based upon the information I had at the time, which I have now been able to confirm a bit more strongly, about half of the Refugees who self-described as Christian had converted in the camps, often at the behest of religious organisations providing services, especially English instruction, in the camps in Nepal. The other half had converted in Austin, often all belonging to the same church. Those I spoke to noted that they liked the church, but were not deeply invested in the religion. More important was the community of Nepali speakers and the services they received through the church. One woman mentioned how she really appreciated the church for the things that church members were willing to do that were often lacking from the system of Refugee services, especially when she was able to get a ride to a doctor's appointment or training class that would have otherwise meant hours on the bus. For the teachers, the issue of when and why Refugees converted was of concern, as well as the role of this one particular church leader, who it took their presence in the same room to discover that many of them had encountered. Yet, it was necessary to curtail these speculations, both as they were merely speculations and due to our schedule, furthermore the representatives of the Christian service providers had to leave at this point, and they seemed eager to do so after this debate.

The majority of the day was to be focused on understanding the conditions of Bhutanese-Nepali Refugees themselves—a project that entailed everything from finding Nepal and Bhutan on a map to much more detailed information about how 'Nepalis' came to live in Bhutan in the early 20th century and what precipitated their departure in the 21st. Culture was what the teachers most wanted to learn about, over history and politics (distinct categories in their estimation), as many of the teachers hoped that 'culture' would unlock many of their confusions and misunderstandings, as well as to feed a general fascination and exoticism about the Himalayas that is quite familiar to most who work in the area. The turn to culture, especially novel and fetishised aspects of culture, as an explanatory frame was seen in a conversation one of the South Asia Institute staff members had when fielding questions from an Austin school system official, who was questioning the content of the seminar

and attempting to direct our presentation to concerns that were pertinent to the teachers. She has received early training in Southeast Asian religions and cultures as an undergraduate and was initially determined that she and her Burmese co-worker in the school system would have no problem understanding the experience of Bhutanese-Nepalis - as they are all Buddhist. She needed outside help though with one parent who was being particularly difficult to deal with and was hassling teachers and berating other parents publicly. The school administrator asked my SAI colleague: 'Do you think this is a caste issue?', pointing out that she had recently learned that Nepal had a caste system. The SAI staffer's response, coming at the end of a long day and a conversation she had wanted to end some time ago, was both flippant and yet in the end more accurate than she knew at the time: 'Did you ever think he might just be a jerk?'.

With the outside presentations out of the way, my colleague and I turned to address the cultural information that had been requested as the central focus of this educational program. During an hour long session, we presented information about the history of Nepal focusing particularly on Central and Eastern Nepal. While trying to provide some basic information about Hinduism, Buddhism and indigenous religions in the area, we also discussed communities like the Rais and Gurungs, groups that made up the majority of those who moved, at least initially, to Bhutan. Much of the information that teachers desired seemed to stem as much from their curiosity as from classroom-based challenges. The presentation covered vary basic material, as requested by the school administration, on everyday diet, kinds of labour, gender relations and the like. With copious visual aids and slides, what we were able to offer was likely little more than a National Geographic-style introduction, but most seemed happy with this, and the presentation was well-received, with questions mainly asking for more information. Such tourbook-like information was similar to seminars that had been conducted on other geographic areas, but participants had not yet begun to connect this demographic data and visual display to the troubled students and parents in their classes.

After a brief break, which we had hoped would include momos, but were disappointed by a last minute cancellation by the caterer, the presentation shifted to a history of how Nepalis were recruited to Bhutan as part of British labour needs, the agricultural conditions of Southern Bhutan and the long, troubled and ever-shifting relationship between Nepali

migrants living in Bhutan and the Bhutanese government and people. This discussion proved far more difficult—in part as the story is a complex one—but also because many of the teachers seemed to distrust that what we were telling them was possible. That Nepalis had been more or less isolated from other populations, that they were given limited rights which changed over time, that the Bhutanese government would be so harsh, etc., all seemed unbelievable. The Gross National Happiness policies of Bhutan were well-known to many and that the same government could be responsible for expelling and discriminating against a non-violent population was not plausible, 'after all, they are Buddhist!' proclaimed one teacher about Bhutan. This session left the teachers unsettled, and it was the intervention of a Bhutanese-Nepali student of mine who was helping with the session that enabled some of the teachers to be convinced by our narratives. While they had been provided with readings in advance detailing the basic chronology of Nepali movement to Bhutan and then their flight to Nepal, both the trauma of the story and the complexity of ethnic interaction seemed to be unbelievable to them, to be chalked up merely to the overanalysis and politicisation of University faculty. With a team of us now gathering, including two professors, a student Refugee, a current Refugee community leader and an Asylee who had arrived early for the lunch, we were able to field many of the questions and continue the workshop to describe the long period that many Refugees spent in the camps. Our agenda was tossed aside in favour of a back and forth of questions, with different forms of authority supporting others when needed.

Two things troubled teachers about our stories of UNHCR camps; first, that although undoubtedly unpleasant, the conditions described in the camp were at times better than those in proximate places in Nepal. That education, food and even recreation were available within the camps was unbelievable to many, yet what they were more shocked by is that many Refugees spent a decade or more in the camps and that many of their students were born in the camps, having never known life in either Bhutan or Nepal outside the camps. One Refusee had been a teacher in the camps and was able to offer up the required authority of authenticity, of both the good and the bad of camp life, that placated the teachers. Rather than continue to rehearse what shocked the teachers, I want to turn now to what I learned from this culture clash of service providers and academia as well as to the structures of US refugee programs

and their implementation in Austin, which has led to some challenging conversations.

Austin's Nepali community contains a diverse population: from a 20-something internet millionaire whose company recently went public, to a former Tribhuvan University professor now working illegally as a taxi driver, to the burgeoning Bhutanese-Nepali refugee population. In working with Austin agencies who are seeking to provide support to the incoming Refugees, I have learned a great deal about how little I knew about the structure of refugee support and how little they knew about Nepal. One of the greatest challenges has been to explain an issue that is familiar to all of us who work on Nepal. The oft-sited claims about Nepal's 100+ languages and similarly astounding number of different ethnic groups provides fodder for contemporary political tension in Nepal as well as a challenge to service providers in the US to seeking to understand the country. Even beyond these Wikipedia-able distinctions, I have been surprised by how important it has been to introduce that classic of social science—class—as a element in the negotiations of difference that service providers often misunderstand. Nepal's status as one of the world's poorest countries leaves many presuming that everyone coming to the US, particularly under refugee and asylum tracks, shares similar economic and social conditions. This has certainly not be the case in Austin.

While the Asylees in Austin are by and large well-educated, often English-speaking and having had (and in some cases still have) significant wealth in Nepal, their legal status in the US is extremely problematic. Most face a many-year long battle to attain any sort of conclusion to their application and as a result are often stuck in Austin, and have difficulty finding work. Refugees, on the other hand, have had their long period of liminality in the camps and are quickly rushed through legal and adaptation systems in Kathmandu and the US, only to be 'set free' after six months. They are encouraged, even required, to find work as soon as possible and given support (which also is pressure) to assimilate into 'normal' life in Austin as soon as possible. In Austin, the dominant focus of service providers is on support for Spanish-speaking refugees and migrants, and the commonality of Nepali provides a reason for bringing Asylees and Refugees together, with the former often having an upper hand in seeming more adapted to American life through their English skills, while the latter has stronger legal standing. In Austin, the language issue can

prove a barrier to getting outside of small networks, such as the Christian Church discussed above, or other social circles and networks.

I want to end with one more ethnographic anecdote, in part because as an anthropologist it is where I feel my strengths are, but also because the stakes of this case and the inability to find space within the system for this crisis makes clear the importance of understanding the structures the confine and codify Bhutanese-Nepali refugees (and Nepali asylees) in the US and likely beyond. In March 2013, I received an email from the frantic director of a San Antonio school system, which is a city just one hour from Austin. She could not contain her emotion about this case and asked that I speak with her supervisor. I eventually spoke for more than an hour on the phone to one of the heads of school psychology in the district about a situation she did not know how to address and in which she had taken a personal interest. A young Bhutanese-Nepali refugee girl was being threatened with being kicked out of the school system just a few months before her graduation. The young woman faced numerous medical, behavioural, language problems and most of all, domestic tensions. While her younger siblings had been adapting to life in San Antonio with moderate success, Sophie, a pseudonym by which the psychologist referred to her, was constantly in trouble. In part, the administrator confessed, the problem was the emphasis in Texas on testing. Sophie had consistently done poorly on the standardised tests that are the main means of evaluating students (as well as teachers and schools) and the repercussions for having a substantial number of students score poorly impacts on the school budget and teacher salaries. As a result, no teacher wanted to have Sophie in their class and she had been bounced around, not only to different teachers but through different special programs, some ESL, some remedial, some behavioural or alternative schooling. No one seemed to have a grasp on her problem or her personality, as occasionally she showed signs of intelligence, if not brilliance, and yet by and large seemed uncommitted to the entire challenge of education. Her teachers were quick to conclude that the problem must be cultural; the analysis that had been passed around was that in her culture education was not expected or encouraged in girls. The woman who called me was unsatisfied with this analysis, especially as her sister was a good student. We spoke for a brief period about gender and education in Nepal, and she revealed that Sophie's mother had been a school teacher in the camps. Thus, we both doubted this being a cultural

devaluation of female education. The question of why this young Refugee was not doing well in school was one of considerable temporal crisis. She was about to age out of the school system, which would give the district the right to let her go without a diploma or additional support, whereas if some cause could be found for her difficulties, she would be retained in the schools continuing to receive support, inside and outside the classroom, until she graduated, regardless of age.

In speaking to Sophie, the school psychologist, whom I'll call Judy, found her a nice young woman, most of the time. When they would interact in ways that did not require linguistic communication, working on puzzles together or on some math homework, Sophie would often become quite engaged. At other moments she became quite truculent and standoffish, a behaviour that Judy was quick to attribute to normal teen behaviour. We had an inconclusive conversation about if teen rebellion was a relevant category in Nepal in general, let alone something that this young woman might be exhibiting as part of her assimilation to American culture.

Then we came to the event that was at the crux of Judy's concern. She was deeply invested in keeping Sophie in some form of schooling and had visited her parents, something she did not do regularly but had found often illuminates where a student's problems lie. Sophie's father appeared visibly inebriated when she visited the house, and her mother was quite shy and reserved. She had brought the translator used by the school system to talk to the parents, the siblings and Sophie in their home environment and in Nepali. The mother quickly vanished from the room and the two men sat down as Judy stood near by asking questions about family life. She was concerned that her questions were not being conveyed correctly but could do little but persist with the investigation she normally conducted. The men seemed engrossed in a conversation that had little to do with her questions. Later, Sophie's sister was brought into the room and asked about her school life. She responded to some questions in English and others in Nepali. Judy stopped short though at one word, Sophie's sister had mentioned something about 'aama', and the translator's interpretation had mentioned nothing about mother. Thanks to *Nepali Aama* and *Aama in America* (Coburn 1991, 1995), the conversation had hit upon the one word of Nepali that Judy knew. When she queried the translator, he noted that many Nepalis use aama to mean

any female relative, and Judy responded that his translation had not mentioned female relatives, only her father. Judy continued her interview, although with a great deal of scepticism about what she was learning, which was very little. Later, Judy sought more information about the translator and was told that he and Sophie's father were drinking buddies. She learned that Sophie's father was unemployed and that the translator would sometimes help him get work at the auto repair shop he worked at, although that was rare. The rumour that was going around the community was that Sophie's father was abusing the family, particularly Sophie, and she suspected she would find out little about this with his best friend as translator. I was able to put Judy together with other translators in the area, as well as some community groups but have no happy ending to share to this story, as of yet.

Like Sophie's story, this paper does not have a conclusion. Yet, what I want to bring attention to are the structures that bring Bhutanese-Nepalis to their resettlement homes, and the way those structures interact with distinctly local bureaucracies, histories and institutions. In Austin, service providers press Nepali Asylees into hierarchical relationships with Bhutanese-Nepali Refugees that threaten to replicate caste and class-based anxieties from Nepal as well as ones particular to the US. Yet the legal and temporal experience of the two groups give them very different experiences of the transition to life in the US, differences that often undercut the presumed cultural and linguistic similarities perceived by school and private sector service providers. All this is juxtaposed by a state system that suffers under testing based performance schools, attempts to turn public services over to private, preferably religious, organisations and finally the divergence of experience and opportunity between Bhutanese-Nepali refugees and Nepali asylees, within a system that cannot decide what continent Nepal is in. The numerical domination of Central and South American migrants coming to the region, many of whom have endured months if not years of travel, presents one set of challenges to service providers with which they are struggling to cope. The idea of a few thousand refugees from a country they have difficulty finding on a map, and at times can't figure out which country they are dealing with, is providing an entirely different challenge. While well-intentioned supporters such as Judy are eager to try and understand the Refugee experience and how to provide support, the resources they have in the area are limited.

All they can look to are an overworked and under-informed University professor, a local drinking buddy, a Nepali lay preacher and an undocumented PhD taxi driver, all of whom have their own difficulties to discern motives.

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# The Transformation of Homeland Politics in the Era of Resettlement: Bhutanese refugees in Nepal and the diaspora

Susan Banki

## Introduction

Refugees who flee across borders are generally dissatisfied with aspects of the country from which they have fled, whether these elements are political, economic, or ethno-social. It is not surprising to imagine that refugees would then have good reasons for engaging in homeland politics—activism specifically devoted to reforming aspects of the home country. While not all refugees engage in homeland politics, those that do are well positioned to play that role by virtue of their continued proximity to their country of origin, their exilic status and their local cultural and linguistic knowledge. But what happens when these refugees resettle to a new country?

This article will describe the theoretical basis and preliminary findings of a project that examines the political activism of refugees from Bhutan who continue to live near their country of exile in Nepal and those who have resettled to countries of the Global North. Relying on elements from transnational understandings of politics and from the social movement literature, the article delineates the theoretical differences between neighbouring countries of refuge (NCR)[1] and countries of resettlement. Then, drawing on field work in Nepal and Australia, the article locates Bhutanese refugees' past and current political activism and analyses how homeland activism has been shaped and re-shaped as the site of activism is altered.

1 While the term 'country of first asylum' has been used widely to describe those refugees who have fled across borders and have not found a durable solution to their plight, I suggest that the term 'neighbouring country of refuge' (NCR) is preferable, first because the country in question is very often not the first country to which refugees flee (the refugees from Bhutan offer a case in point, as they all transited through India), and second, in many situations these countries do not offer asylum. The terms 'protracted refugee situations' and 'warehoused refugees' have also been used in the literature, but these terms lack precision for other reasons (Banki, 2013). NCR is a term with greater clarity and offers a clear spatial, if not theoretical, distinction between these two types of spaces.

## The nexus of social movements, transnationalism and refugee activism

The literature on social movements—a 'constituency lacking formal representation... that make(s) publicly-visible demands for changes in the distribution or exercise of power' (Tilly 1982: 26)—has recently recognised the significant role of transnationalism in shaping the mechanisms and messages of the politics of contention. Anderson's 'long-distance nationalist', for example, relies on transnational resources such as currency and propaganda to ignite change at home (Anderson 1992: 13). One important contribution of the political transnational literature has been to acknowledge the role of refugees in particular (as opposed to all migrants) in creating a political space 'over and beyond' national borders (Wahlbeck 2002: 122). As noted, refugees who have conflictual relationships with their home governments are uniquely positioned for participation in homeland politics. Their opposition to current policies or power structures often stems from first-hand evidence of persecution, which provides both an impetus and instrument for promoting change at home (Shain 1993: 114). Further, refugees with uncertain legal status have an additional incentive to engage in public activism if they believe that it will help support their asylum claims (Shah 1999). At the same time, impermanent legal status in countries near the conflict zone (NCRs) can impact the choices that refugees make about mobilisation (Banki 2013, Brees 2010).

While recognising refugees as important political actors, the transnational literature has not developed separate theoretical frameworks for refugees who remain in NCRs and those who resettle in third countries. Scholars are, of course, aware of the distinction, but virtually no theoretical work has been done on differences in the degree and nature of transnational political activism between NCRs and resettlement countries. Yet the distinction is important because of their significant inherent differences. In NCRs, refugees are closer to home, and therefore possess a strong localised understanding of current events in the home country (Landau 2003: 33). Because of uncertain legal status, their movement is often restricted to camps or other settlements, which keeps refugees physically close together and may impact local communication and community bonds (Jacobsen 2001). Because NCRs generally host humanitarian aid organisations that provide shelter and food, the cost of living is lower, but so, too, is the ability to earn hard currency as formal employment

is generally prohibited (Hyndman 2000). Finally, and to the crux of the issue, host governments in NCRs often discourage or ban outright refugee political activity because they do not want to damage relations with home country governments (see, for example, Castles 2004).

By contrast, in resettlement countries, refugees nearly always arrive from significant distances, which may affect their ability to obtain information about the home country in a timely fashion. Even in resettlement countries with ethnic enclaves, refugees still find themselves more spread out geographically than in NCRs, and the affluence of resettlement countries increases refugees' level of education and social capital and hence their ability to earn money and mobilise resources (Van Hear 2006). Finally, resettlement countries place restrictions neither on movement nor on political activity, although refugee priorities may conflict with dominant political mores (Zucker and Zucker 1989).

Given the more restrictive environment in NCRs, one might expect to find a lack of political activism on the part of refugees there, and the fact that there is a significant body of literature about refugees in NCRs in general (under the terminology 'Protracted Refugee Situations', for example, see Crisp 2003, Loescher, Milner, Newman and Troeller 2008) and very little about specific political activities seems to indicate a widespread assumption that NCRs do not provide a conducive environment for political mobilisation. While 'homeland politics' yields more than 1,600 references in Google Scholar, a careful canvassing of the literature reveals that less than fifty articles specifically attend to homeland activism as practised in the NCR. Yet even within the constrained context of NCRs, refugees do mobilise politically: empirical work cataloguing the activities of Tibetans in India (Houston and Wright 2003), Burmese in Thailand (Banki forthcoming 2013, Brees 2010), and Sudanese in Egypt (Hausermann Fabos 2002) confirms this.

The theoretical-empirical divide reinforces a critical need to theorise the NCR as its own political space. At the same time, because refugee activism directed toward the home country takes place in the transnational arena—where resources, strategies, and messages are shared across borders—it is valuable to understand not only how refugee communities interact with elements in the home country, but also how, as refugees move from NCRs to resettlement countries, they manage increasingly complex relationships across several different borders.

As refugees move to resettlement countries, four general possibilities present themselves. First, theories of assimilation, acculturation and incorporation suggest that resettlement's dual traits of permanence and opportunity would shift refugees' priorities to 'starting over', and thus discourage activism. The literature behind these theories is extensive and well-developed, although most of it focuses on migrant processes (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001, Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002, Portes, Escobar and Arana 2008). A subset, however, examines refugee integration (Kauffer Michel 2002, Kuhlman 1991), including in Australia (for example, Forrest, Paulsen and Johnston 2006).

Second, ethnonationalist concepts in the nationalism and diaspora literatures suggest that collective claims fuelled by non-territorial identities would sustain homeland activism even for refugees who cannot return 'home'. The well-tread homage to Anderson's work (1991, 1998) has been applied to several refugee contexts to support this argument (Sheffer 2003, Wayland 2004).

Third, the concept of strategic essentialism found in subaltern studies suggests that activists would retain their essential political identities as mobilisers but, as a response to new hierarchies present in the place of residence, would shift their attention to politics in the resettlement country. While there is contestation around the meaning and use of Spivak's terminology, it retains explanatory power when applied to refugees whose voices would not otherwise be heard (McPherson 2010).

Fourth, political process theory suggests that as access to nodes of power shift in the country of resettlement and resources change, homeland activism would reform itself in response to the political opportunity structures available. In the context of refugee activism, this theory is the least well-developed of the four. The limited research available (Hammond 1993, Ostergaard-Nielsen 2001, Wayland 2004) neglects to take into account the focus on frequency, scope and strategies germane to this research project.

While the theories described above have traction and heft from extensive associated literatures, the homeland politics of refugees from Bhutan is absent from any of these. The following sections offer a description of the methods used to collect data, a brief review of the refugee/resettlement context for the Bhutanese, and a comparative analysis of homeland politics in the pre-resettlement and resettlement phases.

**Methods**

A comparative approach, both temporally and geographically, will necessarily be undertaken in order to determine the shape of homeland politics among members of the Bhutanese refugee population. This examination will qualitatively examine data from the pre-resettlement period (i.e. pre-2007) and thereafter, and will cover activities that occurred or are occurring in Nepal and in the diaspora. The discourse of grey literature, both online and printed, in both Nepali and English, has been analysed to understand the frequency, scope, and character of activism in multiple sites. Interviews with homeland activists in Australia and Nepal will help to flesh out possible causal explanations for changes over space and time. Semi-structured open-ended interviews will be repeated longitudinally over a five-year period from 2013 to 2017, allowing for a close examination of actions and views on Bhutan as a homeland in the context of resettlement.

In order to organise the data about types of activism, this article relies upon Keck and Sikkink's (1998, 1999) clearly delineated clusters of strategic techniques used by transnational advocacy networks: information politics, leverage politics, symbolic politics, and accountability politics. This set of categories is useful because, as described below, it comprehensively covers the full range of transnational activities that activists may utilise, and has the potential to draw out differences in the shape of activism across time and space.

Information politics refers to the act of gathering, preparing and sharing information about the issue of concern (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Nearly always a precursor for other kinds of activism, it has the potential to draw in both core and 'soft rim' activists (Guarnizo, Portes and Haller 2003: 1238). This is because the kinds of roles needed to produce information are varied and diverse. Those who have appropriate language skills, for example, can translate documentation. Other people may be involved in the distribution of pamphlets or online materials. Others provide testimony relating to the relevant issue. As such testimony forms the backbone of the data on which information politics relies (Keck and Sikkink 1998), even those who participate infrequently can still be seen as important contributors to the cause.

Leverage politics makes use of more powerful actors who act as levers to magnify the point of pressure. Keck and Sikkink's most commonly cited example of leverage politics in the transnational realm is the boomerang

model, in which local groups bring their causes to international actors, who then place pressure on national governments to make changes relevant for local groups (Keck and Sikkink 1998, Sikkink 2005).

Symbolic politics uses symbols, poetry, images and other creative representations to project a narrative that creates and heightens meaning (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Often linked to forming a cohesive identity, symbolic politics are important for both external purposes—to bring the distant closer—and for internal purposes—to create 'collective signifying processes' (Melucci 1993: 219).

Accountability politics seeks to 'oblige more powerful actors to act on vaguer polities or principles they formally endorsed' (Keck and Sikkink 1999: 95). A valuable way of linking what activists do with the actors whose behaviours and norms they seek to change, accountability politics necessarily requires commitments from the actors in question, which activists can use as a point of pressure.

## Nepali-Bhutanese Refugees in context

The circumstances that generated the exile of tens of thousands of Bhutan's southern-residing, mostly Hindu-practicising, ethnically Nepali population have been covered in detail elsewhere (Evans 2010, Hutt 2003 and 2005, Quigley 2004, D. Rizal 2004, Whitecross 2009). In sum, a suite of social, political and ethno-cultural pressures forced the Nepali Bhutanese—also called 'Lhotshampa'—to depart Bhutan between 1989 and 1992.[2] Families of both a political and non-political bent fled the country, facilitated by a government fearful of changing demographics and proximate historical annexations. While the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGB) asserts that these refugees left of their own accord, evidence from scholars (Hutt 1996 and 2003, Lee 1998), regional commentators (Chandrasekharan 1998), and human rights bodies (Amnesty International 1992) suggest that they were forced. This is at the crux of the citizenship issue, because, for two decades, refugees engaged in homeland politics

2 The term lhotshampa is contested, because while it accurately describes the southern-residing population of Bhutan (Lhotshampa means 'southerner' in Dzongkha, Bhutan's national language), it is a more difficult tag to ascribe to refugees once they have departed Bhutan, and certainly once they have resettled to new countries. They are no longer 'southerners' of Bhutan. At a May 2013 workshop at the School of Oriental and African Studies, resettled refugees eschewed the term. In its place, the author has chosen to use the term 'Nepali Bhutanese'.

have campaigned from Nepal to repatriate (return) to Bhutan and have their citizenship reinstated. By 2006, the UN agency that protects refugees, the UNHCR, counted 107,800 refugees from Bhutan living in seven camps in Nepal (UNHCR 2007: 388).

In 2007, the demographics of the Bhutanese refugee community began to shift, when countries of the Global North decided to resettle Bhutanese refugees permanently to their own countries. The reasons for this change have been outlined elsewhere (Banki 2008b), but the resulting policy has led to a rapid outflow of Bhutanese refugees from the camps and from Nepal. At the writing of this article in July 2013, only 35,919 Bhutanese refugees remain in Nepal.[3] Of those resettled, approximately 5,000 are in Australia, of whom about 500 live in Sydney. In addition to concerns about how resettlement has impacted the ability of remaining refugees to stay healthy, feed themselves and be educated, from the start of the resettlement process there has been a palpable fear that resettlement will reduce the pressure on Bhutan to accept back refugees, and in doing so dilute the efforts of those who want to promote political reform in Bhutan (Banki 2008a). This has implications not only for those who still want to repatriate to Bhutan, but for those Nepali Bhutanese who never left Bhutan and never became refugees, who remain in liminal legal space and whose access to citizenship and a range of rights, including political, cultural. and land rights in Bhutan are not guaranteed (Whitecross 2009: 58).

## The pre-resettlement phase

In the pre-resettlement phase, political activism directed toward Bhutan focused on three related issues: first, raising awareness about the treatment of Nepali Bhutanese in Bhutan prior to exile; second, advocating for the right of refugees to repatriate (return) to Bhutan; and third, in the mid-2000s, examining the newly established democratic process under way in Bhutan. A fourth issue was focused not on reform within Bhutan, but on the international community's espousal of resettlement and its impacts, an issue that has been commented on elsewhere (Banki 2008a, 2008b). As the fourth issue does not concern homeland activism, it is not discussed here.

3 Data from the UNHCR office in Damak, Nepal, provided to the author in August 2013.

*Information politics*

The primary pre-resettlement homeland activity was based around collecting and securing accurate information and ensuring its distribution. Pamphlets and books detail the story of torture in Bhutan's prisons prior to exile (BRAVVE 2006, T.N. Rizal 2004) and videos set the context of expulsion and the culture of fear created by some Bhutanese officials, such as 'The Pathetic Exile', which narrates with mournful music the instances of beatings, public humiliation, and torture of Nepali Bhutanese in southern Bhutan.[4] Monthly newsletters such as the *Bhutan Review*, published between 1993 and 1996 by the Human Rights Organisation of Bhutan (HUROB) covered a range of relevant topics. For instance, the April 1994 issue reported on: the release from prison of a Nepali Bhutanese student activist; the xenophobia of the RGB through evidence of official circulars that warn of the 'infiltration of non-nationals' into Bhutan; and the recent visit of a US State Department official to the camps and the ensuing discussion that India remained reluctant to play a role in encouraging repatriation (HUROB 1994: 4).[5] Information politics also included activities among the refugees that 'develop(ed) a historical consciousness that was conditioned both by their sense of injustice and by their need to underscore their right to return' (Hutt 2003: 10), such as annual dramatic re-enactments in the school camps of the alleged drowning of early activist Masur Chettri by the Bhutanese head of state, Jigme Palden Dorje.[6] Said one refugee with pride:

> 'Masur Chettri was the first man to raise a voice against the Bhutan government. That was a long time ago, that was the time of the third king ... So in that scenario we used to play the drama in the camps. I played the most wanted character, that is, I am the Masur Chettri, because at that time I had a very good voice, and very good courage'.[7]

The frequency of such activism was relatively high, with human rights

4 Unpublished and undated. In possession of the author of this article.

5 The entire *Bhutan Review* archive can be found on Digital Himalaya at http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/collections/journals/bhutanreview/ [accessed 1 October 2013].

6 There is much contestation around the specifics of Masur Chettri's life. See Dhakal and Strawn (1994) and Hutt (2003: 116-120).

7 Interview with refugee, D1, April 2013, in Sydney, Australia.

reports, education in the camps, and articles in the local media occurring regularly. More than any other set of activities, information politics appealed to broad segments of the public, including audiences in Nepal, in India, and in the international community.[8]

*Leverage politics*

Activists made efforts to request that third parties leverage their power by placing pressure on the RGB. Family and community contacts between Nepali Bhutanese refugees and Nepali citizens facilitated frequent meetings between refugee leaders and Nepali government officials, as the former seemed to have the ear of the latter.[9] Other activities included meetings with US and Australian government officials in the mid-1990s and beyond (BRAAVE 1999: 11-17), sending letters to parliamentarians in India with requests to influence Bhutan's actions,[10] and requests in 1999 by the newly formed Bhutanese Refugee Representative Repatriation Committee (BRRRC) to the then-UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, to resolve the Bhutanese refugee issue through the formation of an impartial international team (Chandrasekharan 1999). The nature of leverage politics (and the connections that activists had with influential powerholders) suggests that this type of activity was generally carried out by a small number of core activists, generally in response to specific events in the pre-resettlement phase.

*Symbolic politics*

Symbolic politics played an important role in revealing problematic ethnic and citizenship policies, during which raising public awareness took on its most visible forms. While the first protests within Bhutan took place in September 1990, refugees had already protested outside the country one month earlier, trying to physically travel the distance back to Bhutan and to re-enter the country, symbolically indicating the importance of physical presence in Bhutan for the Nepali Bhutanese population. According to one (currently outdated and archived) website that detailed the mobilisation of Nepali Bhutanese activists:

8 Interview with refugee, D3, April 2013, in Sydney, Australia.
9 Interview with refugee, N11, July 2013, in Kathmandu, Nepal.
10 Interview with refugee, D2, April 2013, in Sydney, Australia.

> More than 25,000 people gathered at Garganda (inside India) to launch peaceful demonstrations and protest rallies in Bhutan on 26th August, 1990. However, the Indian police did not allow the demonstrators to pass through Indian soil. They created barricades and promulgated prohibitory orders banning the Bhutanese demonstrators to move a distance of around 30 km from Garganda to Phuentsholing Bhutan, the gateway through Indian territory. While inside Bhutan a dawn to dusk curfew was imposed in Phuentsholing and the gun-trotting (sic) army personnel were deployed.[11]

In the ensuing years, further symbolic protests of this kind included the 1996 Peace March (with concurrent cycle rallies, walking marches, and demonstrations in Siliguri (India), Damak and Kathmandu, respectively) (HUROB 1996: 4), and the 2007 Long March in which thousands of refugees tried to return to Bhutan but were stopped by Indian authorities (Dhungana 2010). While not carried out with great frequency, symbolic protests such as this played a key role in targeting both Nepali and Indian publics.

Symbolic protests could take written form as well, as refugees used creative writing to focus attention on their homeland. Poems and narrated stories written in both Nepali and English about refugee flight and exile did not explicitly demand reforms in Bhutan, but can still be considered political acts in their own right, as they demanded that the RGB recognise an exiled population. A stanza from one poem from a working draft of an unpublished anthology produced in the camps reads:

> Never in my life I dreamed to be
> A living corpse, a waif, a refugee
> Calculating the year, months and days-
> Hours, minutes and seconds,
> Mere awaiting the bang of repatriation.
> To play lullaby on the cradle of nation,
> With peace, dignity and freedom. (Kharel 2000)

Symbolic politics has the potential, like information politics, to draw in large numbers of participants who may be otherwise peripheral to the

11 http://www.oocities.org/bhutaneserefugees/movement.html [accessed 21 July 2011].

movement. Marches drew thousands of protesters, while those writing creatively may have been able to express hopes and dreams that would find no other manifestation politically.

*Accountability politics*

Of all types of homeland politics, there is the least evidence for accountability politics in the pre-resettlement phase. Limited reference has been found to activists trying to make good on former promises of the RGB, partially because few promises had been made by Bhutan regarding Nepali Bhutanese prior to 2007.

One striking example of homeland politics among the refugees did indirectly make the RGB accountable for former promises. It also utilised information politics in innovative ways, collecting and packaging information so that it could be used for leverage. In 1999 and 2000, the Association of Human Rights Activists in Bhutan (AHURA) developed a digitised database to contest the RGB's official narrative that the refugees were not citizens of Bhutan.[12] Armed with slow computers and scanners, the volunteers for AHURA collected, scanned, and returned to its owners any official documentation from Bhutan that camp residents were willing to share: invoices, tax receipts, old cancelled passports, land registries, and birth certificates. Each document was then linked in a software program to its owner, which was then linked to their home *dzongkhag*, or district. The data could then be sorted by family, refugee camp, district, and types of documentation.[13] Just over 50% of the refugee population participated in the survey, constituting 4,553 families (COHRE 2008: 27-28). According to one source, the digitised database was submitted to Sadako Ogato, the then-High Commissioner for Refugees, and it was requested that these international actors take part in the impending verification exercise to determine the nationality of the refugees. Ogato reportedly claimed that she never received the database (John 2000).

The digitised database represents a creative and innovative approach

12 See Hutt 2003 for detailed translations of specific documents, and explanations of the importance of each. Hutt notes the significance of land title, which is argued to be a proxy for citizenship in Bhutan. Hutt cites one refugee explaining the thrām, i.e. land ownership document. The refugee asserts 'anyone who has land, holds a *thrām*. For him the land itself is proof [of his Bhutanese citizenship]' (Hutt 2003: 21, footnote 18).

13 The author is grateful to AHURA members for granting permission to review the digitised database in Damak in November 2007.

to mobilisation, one that relied on a significant number of actors (i.e., volunteers to collect the information throughout all of the camps) in order to contest the official discourse of the Bhutanese government. It seems, in hindsight, that this would have been a useful instance through which to exercise as much leverage as possible; further research will be conducted to clarify past efforts to use the database as a lever for change.

**The resettlement phase**

Since the start of the resettlement programme for Bhutanese refugees began in 2007, approximately 69,000 refugees have been resettled to countries of the Global North.[14] Interviews and direct observation with refugees in Sydney, Australia, and in Kathmandu and Jhapa, eastern Nepal, form the basis for this preliminary research, revealing manifestations of homeland politics in both the NCR and the resettlement country, but offering mixed evidence about its frequency and nature. On the one hand, many former activists who have resettled find themselves less involved than previously, as they are now focused on community events to build their life in their country of resettlement. One interviewee's comments seem to reflect a broader trend among resettled refugees:

> 'I would say one thing over here, why we are not raising that political issue from overseas. From Australia, we might get a better life over here and we are secure. If we didn't feel secure, we might think "Oh, one day we should have to go our land", so I would say, like around the 500 we are here—Bhutanese in Sydney—nobody can say "Oh, one day I'm going to Bhutan". As a visitor, we can go, but to live there, nobody would say now to go because they are secure here and everything is here'.[15]

On the other hand, resettled refugees are making use of their diaspora status to utilise community resources toward the goal of improving the situation in Bhutan. For example, the Bhutanese Association in South Australia established a constitution in 2009, and its third aim and objective is to 'To support the promotion and protection of human rights

14 http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e487856.html [accessed 22 August 2013].
15 Interview with refugee, D2, April 2013, in Sydney, Australia.

of Bhutanese people, both living within and outside Bhutan, in accordance with the UN General Assembly Resolution 53/144 of 9 December 1998'.[16] Also, those who remain in the NCR may have a greater ability to access resources, with significant influxes of remittances into the camps and surrounding areas of Damak and Jhapa, where homeland activists continue to reside.[17] A telling sign of the importance of remittances to the NCR refugee economy is that there are more banks in Damak, close to the remaining refugee camps, than there are in Biratnagar, Nepal's second largest city with a population of 170,000.[18]

*Information politics*

The sharing and distribution of information about Bhutan among activists appears to have reduced considerably in the resettlement phase, and, where it exists, it continues in a different form. Camp Management Committee leaders note that public events and informational meetings about Bhutan have virtually disappeared.[19] The one exception to this is social programming that encourages the youth and the elderly to come together on the last Sunday of every month, where the elderly share their stories about life in Bhutan with the younger generation. While these meetings do not have a political focus, they are a way for the youth to have a connection with Bhutan.[20]

Written informational material continues to be published, although perhaps in lesser amounts. And a canvassing of the refugee-produced printed grey literature in both English and Nepali reveals a shift in the types of publications. The thin, NGO-produced documents of previous years (Basnet and Dhakal 2001, HRCB 2003, Penjore 2007) have for the most part been replaced by longer books, published in both English and Nepali, with the notable assistance of diaspora communities.

These publications, focused on Bhutan, have historical and political emphases. For example, Tek Nath Rizal, perhaps the best known Nepali Bhutanese whose years in a Bhutanese prison have made him a symbol for the abuses of the RGB and who was an Amnesty International Prisoner

16 http://www.bhutanesesa.org.au/about-us/constitution, p. 4 [accessed 4 May 2013].
17 Interview with refugee, D2, April 2013, in Sydney, Australia.
18 Direct observation, July 2013.
19 Interviews with refugee camp leaders, N7, N8, N9, July 2013, in Jhapa, Nepal.
20 Interview with camp leader, N7, July 2013, in Jhapa, Nepal.

of Conscience, continues to write prolifically, describing both the harms done to him personally and to other Nepali Bhutanese. While two of his books published in 2009 are currently available in English (Rizal 2009 and 2010), a third is only available in Nepali, although assistance is currently being sought from refugees in the diaspora for translation assistance (Rizal, no date).[21] Another historically directed publication, outlining the injustice done to the Nepali Bhutanese and urging that repatriation to Bhutan be considered along with resettlement, appears to be a reissue of earlier work (Rai 2013).

The most notable example of information politics in the resettlement phase is undoubtedly the Bhutan News Service (BNS), an online service which has published more than 1,500 articles in English and 180 articles in Nepali since 2009. Its editorial staff is spread throughout the globe, from Adelaide, Australia, to Syracuse, US.[22] Its 2012 Annual report thanks donors from a range of diaspora countries, including Australia, the UK, Denmark, Canada, the Netherlands, and the US (Bhutan News Service 2012). While more BNS articles concern resettlement issues than news arising in Bhutan (there are 360 articles under the 'Diaspora' section compared to 130 articles under the 'Nation' section), the site does contain some articles that are clearly meant to provide information about politics and power in Bhutan today.[23] The most prominent example of this is information about Bhutan's National Assembly elections, discussed in the following section.

*Leverage politics*

Bhutan's National Assembly Election—which took place in two stages in May and July of 2013—provided a key point of leverage for refugees to apply pressure to politicians within Bhutan, although this may have more to do with Bhutan's recent emergence as a democracy and less to do with resettlement. Not surprisingly, the foci for pressure for Nepali Bhutanese were issues surrounding citizenship, census and return. For example, one Sydney-based refugee has been sending emails to local contestants in southern districts of Bhutan to urge them to resolve the citizenship issue for Nepali Bhutanese. He noted that:

21 Interview with Tek Nath Rizal, July 2013, in Kathmandu, Nepal.

22 http://www.bhutannewsservice.com/about-us/our-team/ [accessed 30 August 2013].

23 A comprehensive analysis by the author of all of *Bhutan News Service*'s articles in both English and Nepali is underway.

> 'Especially in Southern part there is one more census issue, like, people they have been categorised into different groups, and some category of people, they are not getting all the facilities that a true citizen should get in Bhutan ... so these kind of issues can be solved if an MP who is from that region, if he can raise this kind of voice in the Party'.[24]

Another example of leverage politics comes from the former editor of Bhutan News Service, T.P. Misra, who used the election as a way to reach out to the outgoing Bhutanese Prime Minister, Jigme Y. Thinley, whose party was victorious in the primary. Through Facebook, T.P. Misra publicly put the refugee issue on the table, forcing a response about a topic that few Bhutanese politicians want to address. In an article for *The Global Post* entitled 'Bhutan: An exile's view of the parliamentary elections', Misra wrote on 12 July 2013: 'A few days after his party's victory in the primary, I chatted briefly with the outgoing Prime Minister Jigmi Y. Thinley via his Facebook page. Responding to my query about his party's position on the refugee issue, he said: "It is a humanitarian problem that must be resolved in ways that are dignified and durable for the people in the camps" '.

While the months leading up to the election appeared to provide a point of leverage for activists in the diaspora, it is interesting to note that the day after the July elections, three separate interviewees in Nepal did not yet know Bhutan's election results. This calls into question whether physical proximity actually allows faster or immediate access to information from the homeland.[25]

Finally, two Bhutanese refugees based in Scranton, PA, who had the chance to meet US President Barack Obama used the opportunity to give him a 3-point petition that included an exhortation to place pressure on the RGB to consider repatriation. According to the Bhutan News Service, the refugees delivered the following message to President Obama:

> 'We wish to take this opportunity to request you Mr. President to exercise all available diplomatic measures to urge the government of Bhutan to allow return of all willing Bhutanese refugees in Nepal's

24 Interview with refugee, D4, June 2013, in Sydney, Australia.
25 Interview with refugees, N10, N11, N12, July 2013, in Kathmandu, Nepal.

> camps and those surviving hardships outside the camps back to Bhutan'.('Community Leaders meet President Obama, VP Biden', 25 August 2013)

One avenue that was formerly used for leverage politics has closed, at least for the time being: international pressure. The frequency of visits to the UN by Bhutanese activists to promote reform in Bhutan seems to be in decline since resettlement began. First, leaders who have resettled are unlikely to be able to travel to Geneva for UN meetings, because citizenship does not come immediately and refugees must await passports before they travel. ('When I get (my passport), the first country I want to travel to is Bhutan, but I don't think they will let me in', noted one resettled refugee.[26]) This may change within the span of a few short years as resettled activists have access to more resources and the ability to travel. Second, those activists who remain in Nepal are experiencing greater obstacles travelling internationally. Two interviewees in Nepal reported that they were not able to obtain travel documents to leave Nepal, something that in past years they were able to do.[27] Thus, efforts to leverage the influence of third parties, such as sending signed letters to the US and Indian Embassies, are carried out within Nepal. One activist representing the Senior Citizens' Committee for Repatriation reported collecting 2,000 signatures for a letter to the US Embassy.[28]

*Symbolic politics*

Where activists used to host a range of symbolic activities centred on focusing attention on Bhutan and its expulsive actions, including the walking and bicycle marches referred to earlier, the author could find few recent symbolic activities related to the homeland. True, in numerous diaspora communities, Bhutanese refugees are maintaining cultural and religious traditions, such as celebrations of the holiday Teej in various locations such as Salt Lake City and Norway,[29] or the seven-day retelling

26 Interview with refugee, D5, June 2013, in Sydney, Australia.
27 Interview with refugees, N10 and N12, July 2013, in Kathmandu, Nepal.
28 Interview with refugee, N11, July 2013, in Kathmandu, Nepal.
29 http://www.bhutannewsservice.com/main-news/resettled-bhutanese-in-australia-celebrate-teej/; http://www.bhutannewsservice.com/main-news/salt-lake-bhutanese-mark-teej/; http://www.bhutannewsservice.com/main-news/teej-celebration-kicks-off-in-norway/ [accessed 1 May 2013].

of an important Hindu text in the small town of Vadsø in Norway, at a latitude of 70° N. The event was claimed by its organiser, one of 16 resettled families in the town, as the largest Hindu festival ever in the northernmost part of the world (Chautari 2013). Rather than being focused on Bhutan or politics, however, the focus here is on how resettled communities are using symbolic action to maintain tradition. The one example of symbolic politics came in the form of a 2012 book of poetry written by a Nepali Bhutanese expressing his nostalgic feelings about Bhutan (Dahal 2012). An article in the Bhutan News Service explicitly notes that the book was published with the assistance of diaspora refugees living in the US ('Shivalal Dahal's poetry book 'Tursa' released,' 5 December 2012).

*Accountability politics*

As accountability politics relies on promises made and Conventions signed by the power in question, activists' efforts to utilise this means of pressure will depend to some extent on Bhutan's promises to enact change. An editorial published in the *New York Times* on 29 June 2013 provides an excellent, if telling, example of the way in which accountability politics may be used in the future. The author, Vidhyapati Mishra, writes of his personal experience of exile from Bhutan and the difficulties he and fellow refugees experienced over the past twenty years. In 'Bhutan is No Shangri-La' he argues:

> Helping us, though, is not the same as helping our cause: every refugee who is resettled eases the pressure on the Bhutanese government to take responsibility for, and eventually welcome back, the population it displaced... The international community can no longer turn a blind eye to this calamity. The United Nations must insist that Bhutan, a member state, honor its convention on refugees, including respecting our right to return.

This is a powerful call for action, one that references Bhutan's responsibility as a member of the international community. But what is telling about the article is that the author, whom the New York Times claims 'wrote this essay from the Beldangi II refugee camp', had, by mid-July 2013, already resettled to the United States.[30] This is an indication that at the current

30 Email correspondence with Vidhyapati Misra, July 2013.

time, NCR sources of leadership and experience vis-a-vis homeland politics are being continually depleted and transferred to countries of resettlement, for better for worse.

**The end of activism or the beginning of new opportunities?**

Preliminary research on the homeland politics of Nepali Bhutanese indicates that the movement to promote reform in Bhutan continues, although with significant changes in the actor frequency and strategic techniques employed. This points to a movement that is changing in response to changing political structures, both in Bhutan and in the diaspora, and thus most closely resembles the fourth hypothesis posed in this article. Where funding used to come from humanitarian aid organisations (to fund refugee writings, for example), it now comes from the diaspora. Where powerholders in Nepal were once approached to request their assistance in promoting the idea of repatriation, diaspora refugees are now poised to promote the rights of Nepali Bhutanese from their countries of resettlement. And while the frequency of activism among some resettled refugees may have decreased in the short term, the scope of that activism, through BNS and other international platforms, has arguably increased its reach to a wider community. It is an assured certainty that the academic scholarship on Bhutanese refugees will increase now that resettled refugees are more easily accessible to researchers on limited budgets and with limited time to travel: the past few years has already seen a litany of articles about Bhutanese refugees' physical and mental health in the country of resettlement (Benson *et al.* 2012, Mitschke, Aguirre and Sharma 2013, Patel 2012).

It is too early, of course, to measure the impact of homeland politics on Bhutan. Will refugees be permitted to return? Are Nepali Bhutanese likely to resolve their citizenship issues quickly? Longitudinal research over the next several years (as this project espouses) will contribute to answering these questions.

**Conclusion**

This paper has developed the theoretical framework for hypothesising the impact of resettlement on homeland politics, and it has relied on field research and secondary data to chart such activism in the NCR

pre-resettlement phase of Bhutanese refugeehood. It has suggested that in the pre-resettlement phase, homeland activists used a wide range of strategies to mobilise, and that these varied in frequency and scope.

In the short term, preliminary research on homeland politics in the early years of the resettlement phase of this refugee population suggests that, despite the fears of former activists, homeland politics continues, although in altered form, and, not surprisingly, from an increasing variety of physical locations. While the focus for a great many refugees has shifted to individual problems associated with daily living in the country of resettlement, some homeland issues remain important, and both within Nepal and in the diaspora, a focus on the homeland continues, if moderated by distance and temporal resources. In the medium term, it may be that resettlement will facilitate continuing NCR homeland activism, and that the activities that persist will change in frequency, scope and character. An influx of resources, and the networks that have emerged internationally as a result of resettlement, suggest that there is still considerable scope for homeland activism. Future field research in Australia and Nepal over the next five years will allow the testing of this suggestion.

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# Making Peace In The Heart-Mind: Towards an ethnopsychology of resilience among Bhutanese refugees

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## Introduction

Over 100,000 Bhutanese refugees languished in camps established in eastern Nepal by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) through fifteen years of failed bi-lateral negotiations until, in 2007, eight developed nations agreed to support resettlement. In 2007 the town of Damak in Nepal became the hub of a vast resettlement campaign; roughly 70,000 refugees have been resettled in the past five years and the process is ongoing (UNHCR 2013). The mass migration has been accompanied by a surge in popular (Semple 2009) and scholarly interest in the group (Benson *et al.* 2011).

One of the central tropes in this emerging public image is psychiatric vulnerability. An assessment published by the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) in 2011 reported an alarmingly high rate of suicide among Bhutanese refugees compared with other refugee and host country populations and a steady rise in suicide incidences beginning in 2007 (Schinina *et al.* 2011). This report spurred an investigation by the Center for Disease Control into suicide among Bhutanese refugees in the U.S. (Ao *et al.* 2012) and is frequently cited in media coverage of the migration and cases of suicide (Coen 2010).

Psychiatric research has clearly contributed to the representation of Bhutanese refugees as a vulnerable people. Studies have focused on the psychiatric afflictions of torture survivors (Mills *et al.* 2008, Shrestha *et al.* 1998, Van Ommeren *et al.* 2002), psychosocial determinants of medically unexplained epidemics (Van Ommeren *et al.* 2001), psychiatric factors in disability (Tol *et al.* 2007), salient negative emotion terms and idioms of trauma (Kohrt and Hruschka 2010), beliefs surrounding suicide (Ao *et al.* 2012, Schinina *et al.* 2011), and adaptations of psychotherapy for work with resettled Bhutanese refugees (Kohrt *et al.* 2012). Notably, two studies have dealt with coping (Emmelkamp *et al.* 2002, Benson *et al.* 2011); however,

both works revealed correlations between particular coping strategies and psychiatric morbidity or distress.

Significantly, the literature offers no complementary exploration of what it means to be psychosocially healthy in Bhutanese refugee society and what processes (psychological or interpersonal) are already functioning to preserve and promote wellness in Bhutanese refugee communities. In light of this gap, there is a great risk of overlooking the strengths and triumphs of the Bhutanese refugees as well as lay knowledge surrounding mental health. This paper sets out to complement previous research with an exploration of the local beliefs and values that are related to resilience.

## Methodology

In 2011, Chase completed two months of intensive language training followed by eight months of anthropological fieldwork focused on community and cultural pathways to resilience in the Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal. Bhattarai acted as a research assistant during this fieldwork; she hails from a Nepalese community local to the region of the refugee camps and has conducted her own Master's thesis research within the camps. Our research methods included participant observation, four focus groups with refugees involved in psychosocial programming, semi-structured interviews with a random sample of refugees (n=30) and with key informants (n=10), and adaptation and administration of the Brief COPE survey (Carver 1997) of coping behaviour to a random representative sample of refugees (n=193; quantitative analysis addressed in Chase, Welton-Mitchell and Bhattarai 2013). Throughout this research period, both authors were affiliated with the Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation Nepal (TPO-Nepal), a Nepali non-profit organisation and implementing partner of UNHCR that provides psychosocial services to the camp community and other communities in Nepal.

In addition, Chase engaged in a period of preliminary work in the U.S. that served to guide her research agenda in Nepal and illuminate important themes that emerged in both contexts. During the summer of 2010, she completed intensive language training in Nepali, followed by a two-month homestay and 22 semi-structured interviews in the resettled Bhutanese refugee community of Burlington, Vermont. She continues to maintain ties with her host family and to vet research findings and interpretations with leaders of this community.

**Participants**

Ethical approval to work with human subjects was obtained from the Nepal Health Research Council. All interviewees were over eighteen years of age. Twenty-six interviewees were selected from a randomised list of households generated using the UNHCR database to represent major demographic groups in the camps; these interviewees were also administered the Brief COPE (see Table 1). Four pilot interviews were conducted with individuals randomly approached in the camps. Key informants included representatives of all major community-based organisations, two community health workers, leaders in camp administration and security, one shaman (*dhami*), and one astrologer (*jyotisi*).

**Table 1. Demographic data from random sample of interviewees (n=26)[1]**

| | % Sample | % Camp Population |
|---|---|---|
| *Gender* | | |
| Male | 46 | 51 |
| Female | 54 | 49 |
| *Religion* | | |
| Buddhist | 27 | 37 |
| Hindu | 62 | 45 |
| Kirat | 8 | 15 |
| *Social Group* | | |
| Brahman | 31 | 11 |
| Chhettri | 19 | 15 |
| Gurung | 12 | 10 |
| Magar | 4 | 10 |
| Rai | 19 | 20 |
| Tamang | 4 | 11 |

All of the interlocutors spoke Nepali as their first language. In synthesising our findings, we drew heavily on the work Kohrt and his colleagues

1 Complete demographic information was not collected during four pilot interviews or key informant interviews. Only major social/caste groups were included in the table. Camp population data were provided for the purposes of this research by UNHCR in September 2011.

have done in identifying elements of self that are central to understanding conceptions of mental health and psychological well-being in Nepali-speaking populations, including heart-mind (*man*), brain-mind (*dimag*), social status (*ijjat*), body (*jiu*), and spirit (*sato*) (Kohrt and Harper 2008: 468, Kohrt and Hruschka 2010). Although concepts of self are, of course, fluid and variable at the level of individual experience, the framework provides a valuable analytic tool for cultural outsiders involved in care of Bhutanese refugees.

Some explication of the relationship between 'heart-mind' and 'brain-mind' here will serve the discussion that follows. Constituted with properties of both the Western 'mind' (certain types of thinking) and 'heart' (feeling) idioms, the *man* is situated near the biomedical heart organ. The *dimag*, 'brain-mind' or 'social mind', is located in the head and represents logical thought and decision-making as well as the ability to behave 'in accordance with collectivity and social norms' (Kohrt and Harper 2008: 469). In the context of health and healing, strong negative emotion is experienced in the heart-mind (sometimes as over-activity or thinking too much) and may in turn affect other elements of self, including the *dimag*. Disturbances of *dimag* functioning range from fleeting anger to serious, permanent dysfunction related to the concept of *pagal,* or madness, which is highly stigmatised in Nepal (Kohrt and Harper 2008).

## Vignettes of resilience

In recent years, research on resilience has increasingly informed efforts to understand and respond to psychosocial suffering (Foxen 2010). However, just as the field of psychology has witnessed a rapid proliferation of resilience literature, so too has it engaged in debate around the meaning and relevance of the concept in research. Betancourt and Khan define resilience as 'the attainment of desirable social outcomes and emotional adjustment despite exposure to considerable risk' (Betancourt and Khan 2008: 318). Bonanno extends the definition to encompass both a return to healthy functioning and the 'capacity for generative experiences and positive emotions' following adversity (Bonnano 2004: 21).

In 'non-Western' and indigenous contexts, efforts have been made to interrogate global constructs of resilience through the examination of local concepts and pathways operating at the interstices of the individual and the social (Kirmayer *et al.* 2009). Ungar has described resilience as a

phenomenon 'negotiated between individuals and their communities' and inextricably interwoven with 'culturally and contextually specific' factors (Ungar 2008: 219). Ungar and others have argued more broadly for a social ecological conception of resilience wherein individual adaptation is mediated by a dynamic environment encompassing family, culture, community, and society as well as the complex and evolving relationships among these domains (Betancourt and Khan 2008, Ungar 2011).

Ethnographic approaches to resilience research have been advocated by both clinicians and anthropologists who work with forced migrants (Foxen 2010, Rousseau *et al.* 1998). Our research in Bhutanese refugee communities relied principally on ethnography to identify locally meaningful indicators of favourable responses to salient stressors, as well as lay beliefs and knowledge, or ethnopsychology, surrounding the promotion of such favourable responses. Instead of mapping our findings onto existing psychological constructs, we sought to develop an emic model of resilience, to sketch the contours of this ethnopsychological terrain on its own terms.

To this end, we present three vignettes that ground and qualify key themes that emerged during our analysis of ethnographic data. In so doing, we hope to illustrate not only common beliefs and values related to resilience, but also the ways in which these values variably inform action to produce resilient responses in the lives of individuals. Like others who have relied on ethnographic methods to tell stories (e.g. Abu-Lughod 1993), we aim to both illuminate and complicate our knowledge of local practices, simultaneously painting culture in action and paying homage to the rich diversity of life ways that exists within a cultural group.

**Vignette 1: Yasmin[2], Age 21[3]**

Chase met Yasmin at the Manokranti Centre of Beldangi-II refugee camp, a large bamboo hut dedicated to a particular school of spiritual practice and healing.[4] Yasmin had become a caretaker of sorts at the Centre, and

2 All refugee names are pseudonyms.

3 Interview conducted March 2012, Damak, Nepal.

4 According to the official website, 'Manokranti is an inclusive, practical, holistic, non religion and non profit based on the values of developing health, happiness, creativity, humanity, naturality and spirituality' (see http://www.manokrantimovement.org/). Manokranti events observed in the camps included yoga, meditation, and Reiki courses, Reiki and cupping healing treatments, psychoeducation workshops on managing stress, and community ceremonies for members leaving on resettlement.

also provided instruction and treatment to other refugees. During our initial interview, she shared the following story with Chase in Nepali:

> 'I too was very depressed because of my resettlement process ... My sister was married to a local. We had done our resettlement process [without including her] and we were ready to go, and then finally my sister left her husband who had been bad to her. She came to live with us. We couldn't leave one sister behind, so we stayed and waited for her to do the process ... Then, we were ready to go. We were sent to Kathmandu and that same day my sister decided to go back to her husband. We took the bus to Kathmandu. My mother and brother went the day before me. And when each of us got there, we learned that UNHCR had cancelled our flight [as my sister had decided to end her process]'.
>
> 'Now it has been nine months of waiting with no date. When we first got back to the camps, I was so depressed.[5] For a whole week we didn't cook. We had nothing. We had no way to get rations. But my mom did meditation and my brother also had learned first level Reiki.[6] They encouraged me and I started to learn. Then slowly, slowly things have got better. Reiki, yoga, and meditation have been the biggest change in my whole life. At first, just to live was hard. Then so much change happened. It changed my whole mind. I am not afraid of anything, I can handle anything'.

Yasmin's story identifies several major stressors in the camps today, including marriage problems with consequences for both individuals and family networks. In the context of ongoing migration wherein relatives may file to resettle as a group, the effect of these conflicts on family members is disproportionate. Yasmin's narrative also captures the burden of anticipation during the long wait for one's 'date' which comes to symbolise the moment of radical change engendered by resettlement.

The latter half of the narrative addresses the ways in which Yasmin succeeded in finding peace and personal transformation against a backdrop

5 Yasmin used the English word 'depressed'.

6 A touch healing practice with origins in Japan, now widely available in Kathmandu.

of great uncertainty, a feat that she attributes primarily to meditation, yoga, and Reiki. Her account of how and why these practices helped, introduced in the narrative and elaborated in later discussions over the course of our ensuing friendship, resonates with a broader theme in the data: these activities enabled an instrumental *change of mind* (*man*).

In addition to Manokranti, both dominant religions in the camps encourage directly changing or transforming the mind as an adaptive response to unfavourable life circumstances, which are often attributed to sins committed in past lives, or *karma* (Kohrt and Hruschka 2010). In the context of everyday living, this wisdom was commonly invoked through the colloquialism of 'making one's own heart-mind peaceful' (*aphno man shanta banaune*). This and similar idioms of 'convincing the heart-mind' came up in four other interviews, two focus groups, and several TPO-Nepal support groups I observed. Notably, Veena Das discusses the connotations of active engagement associated with the similar idiom of to 'make one's peace' (*shanti banaye rakho*) among Hindu Indian women (Das 2006: 214).

Our inquiries about making peace in the heart-mind shed light on the nature of this change and revealed a few common, culturally sanctioned strategies for achieving it. Some were made explicit in spiritual texts, others embedded in everyday rhythms and social interactions. Daily Buddhist and Hindu practices of meditation (*dhyan*), yoga, or worship (*puja*) were said to make the mind 'fresh'[7] and foster feelings of peace (*shanti*) or relief (*ananda*) in the heart-mind. Another strategy was 'diverting the heart-mind', or keeping the heart-mind busy or engaged (*byasta rahanu*). Community leaders and TPO-Nepal counseling staff alike stressed that idleness can give rise to negative thoughts or over-activity of the heart-mind. On the other hand, activities that engage the body and mind may promote wellness by helping individuals to forget the problems troubling them. Given that refugees are not legally allowed to work in Nepal and face barriers to employment in resettlement countries, friends and relatives often provide a vital outlet for such distraction, as do community organisations.

In addition, engagement in group activities such as those offered at the Manokranti Centre can generate positive feelings that promote resilience in their own right. In other words, activity heals not only by distracting

7 This idiom was always articulated in English.

the mind from unpleasant thoughts, but also by introducing positive feelings such as relief (*ananda*) and fun/enjoyment (*majja*) to the heart-mind, and by making the heart-mind feel light (*haluka*). This value was reflected in TPO-Nepal programming; for example, Nepalese counsellors regularly engaged vulnerable middle-aged and elderly refugee women in light-hearted games involving physical exercise during the Women's Empowerment Group psycho-education sessions.

Some interlocutors described efforts to convince their heart-minds through intentional shifts in perspective, a concept not dissimilar from the psychological construct of 'positive reframing' (Carver, 1997). Several interviewees reflected on the opportunities for personal growth and learning afforded by their refugee status. Others, particularly those with some spiritual designation (e.g. *lamas*, *pandits*), discussed the importance of recognising the truth of *dukha*, the spiritual axiom that all life is suffering. As one elderly man who had resettled in Vermont put it: 'For elderly people coping, they are given consolation by many friends saying, "Life is like this, you have nothing to carry away at the end of it"'. In other words, relief can be drawn from accepting the suffering inherent in a transient existence.

Another Hindu and Buddhist principle with implications for resilience is the belief that the root of suffering is desire. In light of this belief, the first author's refugee host-father in Vermont explained: 'limiting wants or worldly pleasures is a way to cope with mental stressors'. One way in which this wisdom translates into practice, particularly in the context of resettlement, is in the management of expectations. A young male refugee friend in the U.S., learning that Chase would be traveling to the camps, advised her: 'Tell them [refugees in the camps] to come with low expectations, and they will be satisfied'.

This body of wisdom around actively changing the mind speaks to broader ethnopsychological beliefs related to agency and blame in suffering in Bhutanese refugee society. On one hand, the emphasis on the active, internal cultivation of resilience offers a relatively optimistic view of the human capacity to cope in a world where suffering is often construed as pervasive; the Manokranti *gurus* proclaim triumphantly: 'All solutions exist in the mind'. However, the belief may also contribute to stigma, in that disorder can represent a failure to effectively govern one's heart-mind. This was evidenced in the data set by the fact that those seen

as having succumbed to distress (such as those who attempted suicide) were sometimes described as 'ignorant', 'uneducated', or 'not knowing how to think'.[8]

Yasmin's involvement at the Manokranti Centre represents an effective use of religio-cultural technologies for changing the heart-mind, including meditation and yoga. Yet, beyond describing a subjective engagement with adversity, Yasmin's narrative traces the social ecological network of help-seeking and help-providing behaviours operating synergistically to produce this particular resilient response. Yasmin's ability to change her mind relates not only to personal strength, but also to her family's direction and encouragement and the community that built and maintains the Manokranti Centre, which includes other refugees as well as Nepali spiritual leaders.

**Vignette 2: Bimala, Age 50[9]**

Bimala's hut address was drawn from a random representative sample generated using the UNHCR database. She was interviewed by both authors in Nepali. During our encounter, Bimala was warm and talkative, offering us tea and quickly broaching the subject of women's issues in the camps. After a series of more general questions, we asked Bimala about suicide. In response, she shared the following story:

> 'I tried to attempt suicide. But I thought about my child and decided not to commit. My husband married my own younger brother's daughter while coming from Bhutan to Nepal. On the same day he eloped, I gave birth to a baby girl. I was very frustrated. Nobody helped me. I felt ashamed to ask for help as my husband married twice. I used to cry most of the time. I had responsibility to take care of my children. I had no money. It was a very hard time. When I talk about these things my heart feels as if it is going to stop beating ... After I arrived in the camp my husband and his second wife started

8 Interestingly, a connection was made between formal education and the ability to think or control one's thoughts, though it is unclear whether interlocutors were referring to academic or religious education. No psychiatric publication on suicide among Bhutanese refugees to date has examined education level as a risk factor; this may prove interesting to explore in future studies.

9 Interview conducted April 2012, Damak, Nepal.

> to live with me in the same hut. We lived together for eight months. Most of the time they used to beat my child and we used to fight for this reason. One day when I was crying outside the home of one of the LWF[10] members, he stopped and asked me why I was crying. I was uncomfortable sharing in the beginning. He mentioned that he works for refugees and then I told him I wanted to live separately. I was told to go to the office the next day. I was very innocent; I did not know how to talk with people. I did not know where the office was. The next day I asked people the way to the office. I went there. All paperwork was prepared to live separately. I stayed in the same hut though it was in my husband's name. I started to live with my children and [my husband and his wife] moved from my hut. One year later he again tried to come back to my hut as he was fighting with his wife. I denied and did not allow him to come to my house. Being angry, he told other community people that I am a bad character woman. I was pregnant at that time but he refused to accept my child and blamed me, saying I had relations with another man.
>
> Slowly everything was going well and now I am happy with my children. He is living with his second wife with three children. I was encouraged by my children. When I used to cry in the middle of the night, they together cried with me. They convinced me that things would be all right when they grow up. I was inspired by their words. My children are very sincere and obedient ...'.

However, when prompted specifically about sharing, Bimala qualified: 'It is better to share my feelings with my children, but I do not want to make them cry. I cry alone when I feel tensions:

> Now I am working with BRWF.[11] I am sector head in my unit. [At BRWF] I learned to speak. In the beginning, I had fear to face people. My friend wrote my name for BRWF. I told them many times that I am not interested and I am illiterate. They encouraged me by help

10 The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is the organisation responsible for logistics in the camps. The name of the member was removed from this account.

11 The Bhutanese Refugee Women's Forum (BRWF) is a large and influential community-based organisation that has worked to empower camp women socially and economically for more than a decade. See http://www.brwf.org/ for more information.

> in reading and writing. In every meeting I started to learn new things. We were also taught to clean our houses, surroundings in the camp. If women are not active, then man always dominates. I learned these things. Slowly I liked that work and I felt light [*maile haluka mahasus gare*]'.

Bimala's story touches on a gendered class of stressors affecting Bhutanese refugee society. Polygamy was readily identified as a vulnerability factor for women during focus groups, and in Bimala's case was associated with conflict between spouses, child abuse, and social humiliation. Bimala became estranged from her husband and part of her maternal kin network simultaneously, her husband's second wife being her niece. In breaking with societal norms to live alone with her children, Bimala also experienced a loss of community support, exacerbated by her husband's accusations of infidelity.

Bimala describes herself as 'innocent', a common euphemism for being uneducated or illiterate. As mentioned above, 'innocent' people may be seen as susceptible to severe distress due to their inability to manage destructive thoughts and feelings. Bimala's story reveals another layer of vulnerability experienced by this demographic: alienation from the bureaucratic social and governing structures of the camps. Bimala attributes her initial reluctance to engage in BRWF activities as well as her ignorance of agency office whereabouts to her innocence, suggesting a barrier to accessing important services.

Bimala's story illustrates several important themes. First, it is noteworthy that Bimala did not seek out help in her darkest hour; on the contrary, help seemed to find her. Bimala emerged from a pit of despair through active intervention on the part of the agency representative and the BRWF member mentioned. Our data suggest that this feature of Bimala's story is not unique; in cases of severe suffering among Bhutanese refugees, it often falls to friends, family, and neighbours to identify a problem and intervene appropriately. Agencies such as LWF may function as a third line of protection, operating where community supports have failed.

From the perspective of Western health systems research that emphasises help-seeking behaviours, this apparent passivity on the part of the sufferer might be read as a barrier to receiving care. However, to

frame the Bhutanese refugees as vulnerable on this basis is to ignore a rich culture of help-providing behaviour and social intervention. In the refugee camp community, individuals are rarely alone, sleep up to eight to twelve per hut and engage in an economy of constant borrowing and lending with neighbours. Given this highly interdependent lifestyle and a cultural bias against complaining or dwelling on one's woes, it is not surprising that the identification and management of suffering are likewise collective responsibilities. As one elderly refugee in the Vermont community explained: 'Even if a person is born in a poor or unhealthy life, he can become good through good friends'. In other words, the ability to survive and thrive in life is largely a function of one's social networks.

In Bimala's case, a single persistent friend transformed her life by insisting that she join BRWF, despite her initial qualms. Likewise, Bimala's children convinced her to shift her perspective, to acknowledge that her suffering was temporary and that she was not alone. This type of 'convincing' emerged as a common help-providing behaviour in the course of our interviews. Friends and relatives intervene when someone they care about is off track, often convincing them to change their behaviour by 'showing the right/good road' (*ramro bato dekhaune*).

Friends can also provide vital ecological support in the form of loans, goods, services, and, more recently, remittances. In this case, a neighbour affiliated with LWF intervened to connect Bimala with camp resources related to hut logistics. It is crucial not to relegate such actions to the realm of the purely pragmatic. Basic needs were not divorced from concepts of psychosocial wellness in the narratives we collected; on the contrary, financial pressures and ecological challenges (including language post-resettlement) were named as major sources of distress, and have also been found to be primary motivators of suicide among Bhutanese refugees (Schinina *et al.* 2011). As such, ecological support was often viewed as a first line of intervention, one that prevents and relieves stress before it becomes unmanageable.

Related to social support is the concept of sharing. Many informants, especially psychosocial counsellors, stressed the therapeutic value of ventilating one's feelings with others. Through sharing one's mental tensions (*tanab*) or burden (*bojh*), one's heart-mind comes to feel light (*haluka*), a common idiom of wellbeing that also appears in Bimala's narrative. Yet another, contradictory strand of discourse also emerged. Many of the

refugees I interviewed felt that sharing was ineffective and/or expressed reluctance to burden others by dwelling needlessly on their own woes. Some even associated venting behaviour ('saying unnecessary things') with socially inappropriate behaviour symptomatic of dysfunction of the brain-mind. This association is reflected at the level of language; one of the common idioms for sharing is *pokhnu*, literally 'to spill over', which connotes an inability to contain these emotions.

The dual nature of sharing is apparent in Bimala's dialogue: while expressing sadness to her children confers some personal relief, she finds it unfair or irresponsible to burden them with her worries. This raises the point that sharing is an inherently intersubjective phenomenon; one cannot share without an audience, and often the most vulnerable members of society are those most likely to lack these important outlets. Informants who did share usually named only one or two trusted confidantes; individuals who have violated cultural taboos may find they have no one to turn to. Resettlement may also disrupt key outlets for sharing. In such cases, community-based organisations in Nepal and resettlement communities can play a crucial role in creating safe spaces for the non-stigmatising expression and regeneration of social networks.

**Vignette 3: Ram, 26**[12]

Ram is a former substance abuser who recovered to become a leader in several camp initiatives, including Narcotics Anonymous. He has since resettled in the Midwestern U.S. The interview from which this excerpt is drawn was conducted in English by the first author. Here, he responds to the question 'These days, what thoughts or problems cause you stress?':

> 'Many stresses. I am blaming myself for my addiction. I haven't studied much, though I have desire. I am day by day proceeding towards an advanced country and I only have completed +2.[13] U.S. is an advanced country; you need to study hard to succeed there. I also think about financial problems. If my parents were able to provide some finances for me, maybe I would be outside the camp, with a good education, good job, and I could provide good things to the camp ... My sister I

12 Interview conducted May 2012, Damak, Nepal.

13 Equivalent to twelfth grade.

> introduced you to has no [resettlement] process. She keeps saying: "I cannot live without you". These words pain me like thorns. I love her. With her help, only, I am at this stage [of recovery]. She helped me a lot. I don't want to be apart from her. I owe her'.

I prompted Ram to talk about coping and community based organisations (CBOs):

> I listen to music, play guitar, read books ... I have spiritual meditation music that I put on my cell phone. I close my eyes and meditate for 30-35 minutes. My whole body becomes light ... At first all the community people think me negatively, at that time I was feeling bad. My sister just said: "Don't work, just try to be on the right track. Always do good, and things will be good. Past is past, think of it as a teacher, future is unknown, but today is live. So do always good, and then everything will be good...".
>
> I am not an elected member, but I have helped CBOs. For example, when the recent fire happened [I helped].[14] The feeling or attitude of people in my life, like my father, is positive. For this reason, even when I was in addiction, they made my attitude positive. Even as an addict I helped because of my parents' attitude ... One time, when I was in addiction, I along with my friends started a small home made out of bamboo and plastic: in that hut we taught for two and a half months, without any fee. We just did it to help our community children ... Still the children are asking me to come help. They all liked me. They said I had motivating power, "a lot of wisdom that changed our mind". Their love and respect helped me to get over this [addiction]'.

I go on to ask Ram about what makes him happy these days and his hopes for the future.

> 'Love [makes me happy]. Everyone defines this their own way. I mean friends, family, even with mud/dirt, relationships with bamboo and

14 The bamboo huts of the refugees are highly flammable and fires break out fairly regularly. A few have been disastrous, destroying hundreds of huts in one day. In the wake of such fires, volunteers from the community, such as Ram, gather to rebuild homes and care for the displaced.

> huts. We are totally known with bamboo. Everything in our lives, chairs, huts, are made of it. We have to love it ... I make my mind positive. Life is uncertain, but I only think about today.'

Ram's words reveal the depth of his struggle with substance abuse and the ways it has marked him, a struggle that key informant interviews suggest affects an increasing number of Bhutanese refugee youth. Ram also discusses anxieties that characterise the wait for resettlement, including fears around parting from loved ones and entering the American job market.

In spite of openly donning the highly stigmatised identity of a recovering addict, Ram is a case study of resilience in the refugee camps. When I began seeking a research assistant, several influential individuals in camp administration recommended Ram as the ideal candidate. These intersubjective indicators of wellness are significant; positive perceptions on the part of the community appeared central to concepts of individual wellness among our interlocutors. 'Community taking negatively' was a common idiom of vulnerability used to describe those who were lacking crucial social supports, while elevated social status in the community was associated with inclusion, engagement, and general wellbeing.

According to Kohrt and Harper (2008), social status (*ijjat*) is a central element of the ethnopsychological self in Nepali-speaking populations that is cultivated by behaving in accordance with societal norms or standards. While many of the individuals I interviewed and befriended had already broken with a dominant cultural contract, leadership roles in community-based organisations and other volunteer work seemed to offer a path to restoring social status and associated wellbeing. Ram explicitly links the respect accrued through volunteer tutoring to his recovery. It is through such work that his reputation, and therefore his social link to the broader community, was restored. Many of the women involved in BRWF, like Bimala, expressed similar feelings of approval and community support gained through their activities.

In this way, community based organisations (CBOs) might be construed more broadly as psychosocial interventions with implications for resilience. These groups often target vulnerable members of society for inclusion and leadership roles, such as divorced or widowed women (in the case of BRWF). Whereas previous research has explored the ways in

which such individuals might be ostracised or excluded from positions of responsibility under the rubric of traditional culture, our research points to a necessary addendum that social status is a fluid construct and that pathways for its regeneration exist within Bhutanese refugee society. Moreover, because these CBOs are seldom explicitly linked with a mental health agenda, they contribute to wellness without imposing harmful stigmatic labels or overtly problematising emotional suffering.

In the post-resettlement context, community groups may play an equal or greater role in psychosocial care. Upon reviewing a draft of this article, one community leader in Vermont commented: 'With the materialistic world in the West, people may not find community support as much because of the busy schedules everyone has which might lead to more frustrations among the homebound and illiterate adults... community based organisations must play an important role in supporting them in the changing environment'. In Burlington, community farming projects, women's knitting groups,[15] and the Vermont Bhutanese Association[16] were all active in engaging members of society that were perceived as vulnerable or isolated.

Ram's success was also an interpersonal project for which he explicitly distributes credit. He describes a single influential friend who was able to get him on the right track by providing concrete advice on how to change his mind. This 'sister'[17] advanced the wisdom of focusing on the present while avoiding troubling thoughts of the past, future, and the community's disapproval. Her words invoke the logic of *karma*, the notion that meritorious action will bear fruit. Ram also speaks gratefully of his father's positive attitude, tracing the social ecological influences that led him to his instrumental venture in community service. His account of this service experience resonates with a broader finding that altruism, in this context, confers benefits on both parties implicated. Providing help or service to others can foster positive feelings, improve social status, and generate spiritual merit.

Yet the narrative also suggests a strongly subjective engagement with coping and a range of strategies that operate in the interiority of

15 See www.chautarivt.com.

16 See www.vermontbhutaneseassociation.org.

17 Here, Ram refers to a close friend. The use of kin pronouns among friends is common in the camps and more generally in Nepal.

individual heart-minds to produce resilient responses to adversity. Ram describes several activities that divert the mind or make it 'light', including meditation. He has actively adjusted his perspective so that he finds love and happiness even, as he poetically states, in the bamboo that comprises the substance of refugee camp life.

Ram later summed up his approach to coping, saying: 'You need self-control power, which comes from doing meditation. You need to be patient and make your mind at peace. Don't make big or unrealistic plans'. Although highly unique, Ram's voice here echoes the wisdom advanced by other interlocutors, suggesting a shared body of cultural wisdom we might call a Bhutanese refugee ethnopsychology of resilience.

**Discussion: towards an emic model of resilience**

Drawing on the vignettes above and other qualitative data, we have identified several key themes, idioms, and processes related to resilience in the Bhutanese refugee context, which are summarised in the model below. In order to best illustrate resilience as a dynamic and multidimensional phenomenon, we elected to depict these various individual and collective strategies as they interact or compete with unfavourable responses to adversity.

The shaded boxes in Figure 1 represent findings on how the interplay of heart-mind (*man*), body (*jiu*), brain-mind (*dimag*), and social status (*ijjat*) can transform an immediate emotional response to stressful life events or conditions into a state of suffering that is problematised. The progression was drafted on the basis of popular beliefs about suicide and severe distress that were elicited through interviews and then verified by Nepali and refugee colleagues at TPO-Nepal, based on their clinical experience. While several other researchers have explored mental health-related experience in Nepali-speaking populations (Kohrt & Harper 2008, Kohrt & Hruschka 2010), this model is unique in its concern with responses to 'normal' or common sources of adversity, as opposed to ruptures in the ordinary, such as torture and trauma.

In short, unfavourable life circumstances create feelings of *tension* (the most common local idiom for general distress we encountered[18]) to build

18 In the words of the assistant director of TPO-Nepal's Damak branch: 'Tension is a term used by many Nepalese, even illiterate ones, simply to show that s/he is facing some kinds of problems. The problems at times could be severe which demand a lot of attention

**Figure 1. Bhutanese Refugee Ethnopsychology of Resilience: Summary of Key Themes, Processes, and Idioms**

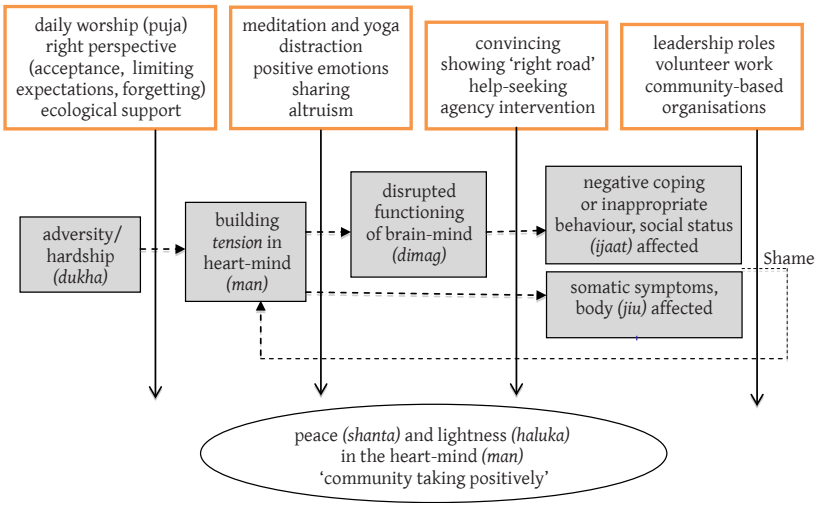


**Figure 1. The shaded boxes connected by dotted lines depict a maladaptive response to adversity resulting in escalating distress. The un-shaded boxes feature adaptive strategies or processes that produce resilience. The vertical arrows represent points at which a particular set of strategies may halt or interfere with the maladaptive pathway in order to produce a favourable response (i.e. preventing tension, managing existing tension, addressing serious distress or disorder, or ameliorating the social effects of distress or disorder). Indicators of a favourable or resilient response are depicted in the oval at the bottom.**

in the heart-mind (*man*). If *tension* is not addressed or managed, it may in turn disrupt the functioning of the brain-mind (*dimag*). Emotional/mental suffering is often simultaneously experienced viscerally in the body (*jiu*) and can be disabling (e.g. Hoge *et al.* 2006, Van Ommeren *et al.* 2002). Severe *tension* and disrupted *dimag* function may also lead to negative coping behaviours, such as alcoholism or drug use, that in turn affect social status (*ijjat*). Both of these consequences of distress can result in a failure to fulfill responsibilities attached to social roles and, consequently, produce shame and alienation that contribute to escalating *tension* in the heart-mind.

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and intervention, or it could just be solved without any intervention, meaning ... it's just momentary' (personal communication). While the Nepali equivalent of tension (*tanab*) was occasionally used, the majority of our interlocutors used and recognised the English word 'tension' more readily.

The unshaded boxes represent common strategies and processes related to resilience in the Bhutanese refugee context, ranging from individual/internal to more collective efforts implicating friends, family, and community members. These activities function to promote adaptive responses to distress in a number of ways, as described in the caption that follows. The oval at the bottom of the diagram depicts idioms of wellbeing which indicate that a favourable response to distress has been achieved.

**Conclusion**

In this article, we have used three case studies to illustrate key findings of one year of ethnographic fieldwork focused on resilience among Bhutanese refugees. Far from being typical, the vignettes above represent exceptional cases of resilience. The strategies employed by these individuals and their communities outline what we might call the best practices of this particular ethnopsychological framework, reflective of a sophisticated body of collective knowledge around the promotion of mental health that has been tested and refined over time.

Generally speaking, Bhutanese refugee individuals facing adversity are likely to be encouraged to accept hardship as an inevitable fact of life in a cosmos governed by *karma* and to cultivate an adaptive perspective on this suffering by actively adjusting their heart-minds to avoid dwelling on thoughts that bring discomfort and disharmony. Several techniques for achieving this adaptive change of mind are actively promoted by religious and community organizations: these include meditation, yoga, distraction, and the generation of positive emotions.

In cases of acute distress, a friend, relative, or neighbour might intervene more directly in order to 'show the right road', convince an individual to change his behaviour or attitude, or provide instrumental support. Some individuals may benefit from sharing with others, although such interactions are not always available or appropriate. There may also be psychosocial relief associated with being a help provider or volunteer. When interpersonal supports fail, community organisations offer a pathway to regenerating social networks, restoring social status, and reinforcing positive coping (e.g. distraction, generation of positive emotions). The sum of these personal and interpersonal processes can produce favourable responses to adversity characterised by subjective feelings of

peace or lightness in the heart-mind, as well as intersubjective markers such as positive community perceptions.

While these beliefs and values are already to a great extent reflected in community-based programming in the camps, they may not map onto popular models of public mental health care in resettlement countries. In a context of migratory flux and rising suicide rates, understanding this rich body of religious and cultural wisdom around resilience can reduce harmful stereotypes and inform interventions. Policy makers and clinicians involved in efforts to reduce psychiatric morbidity among Bhutanese refugees may consider engaging with the ethnopsychological beliefs and best practices elaborated in this paper as well as working in partnership with the multitude of community-based organisations springing up across the Bhutanese refugee diaspora.

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# BOOK REVIEWS

## Revisiting Rituals in a Changing Tibetan World

edited by Katia Buffetrille.
Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012 (Brill's Tibetan Studies Library vol. 31), 386 pages, black and white illustrations, ISBN 9789004232174. Euros 131.

Reviewed by Cathy Cantwell

This collection brings together a wide range of case studies from Tibet, Nepal and Mongolia, exploring the question of what happens to rituals during an era of modernisation, globalisation and socio-economic and political upheaval, and what kind of role they may play in these societies today. The contributions range in size from 13 pages upwards, but one chapter is so substantial that it could have been developed into a major publication in its own right. At just over 100 pages, Robert Barnett's study of ransom rituals in contemporary Tibet provides the historical background to ransom (*glud*) rituals in the Tibetan context, discussion of their different types, of the components of the symbolic structures offered as substitutes to the troublesome spirits, as well as the ideas associated with the ritual exchange. The essay examines the persistence of these ritual forms in today's Tibet under Chinese rule. Clearly, gathering ethnographic materials on such rituals in Tibet is not unproblematic, because besides the risk to informants involved in cooperating with unauthorised research by foreign scholars, in this case practitioners are involved in activity that is officially defined as superstitious, and is therefore liable to suppression or criminal prosecution. Nonetheless, ransom rituals have re-emerged, and the sight of effigies at busy city crossroads in Lhasa is not unusual, although they are generally destroyed quickly by passing cars. It seems that despite the length of the Cultural Revolution, the continuity of the associated Tibetan beliefs and their transmission across generations was not altogether interrupted. In Lhasa, Barnett focused on the disposal of ransom effigies in public space rather than the private practice itself. In contrast to Lhasa, where few monks and lamas would admit to involvement in these rites, Barnett witnessed an elaborate ransom ritual in Amdo (in Qinghai), where a lama had gained a reputation in the region for his divinations and ritual cures, his clients including Mongolians and Chinese. In conclusion, various possible social

and political meanings are explored, such as the implication that Tibetans' own cultural perceptions are co-habiting with global modernity, and the ritual struggle with demonic interference may not be wholly different from the experience of dealing with other types of temperamental and alien forces in modern life. The article is illustrated but, unfortunately, not all the photographic evidence is presented. A number of 'photosets' are described in an appendix, which is no substitute for the photographs themselves. If the publisher is unable to include the illustrative materials, it would at least have been helpful if the photographs could have been presented on a referenced website.

The editor's own contribution builds on her previous studies of the site of Halesi-Māratika, sacred to Hindus and Sherpa and Tibetan Buddhists. Here, she meticulously traces the history of the site from the eighteenth century, including a long-running dispute between two lineages of Hindu priests who had held the site, complicated further by a Sherpa lama trained by Tibetan masters who settled there in the late twentieth century, built a monastery, and has been succeeded by a son and an identified reincarnation. The socio-political changes of recent times have brought intervention by the Maoist authorities, and various uncertainties, but the development and internationalisation of the site continues. The article focuses mostly on the contextualisation of ritual practice today, rather than the practices themselves, but some attention is given to the development of large-scale Tibetan Buddhist rituals at the site, which attract Tibetan, Himalayan and international participants.

Alexander von Rospatt's article opens with a case study of rituals at Svayambhū, where despite a history of involvement of Tibetan Buddhists, Newar Buddhists persisted with their own rituals during periodic renovations of the chaitya. However, while rituals remain central to Newar social life, the recent past has seen very great religious change which has impacted on ritual performance. Initiation and ritual participation are less strictly restricted on the grounds of gender and caste affiliation, while a modern reformist influence has promoted standardisation, and brought greater attention to ensuring that rites are done 'properly' with attention to correct Sanskrit and understanding the meanings. Ritual practice has also been used to strengthen Newar Buddhist ethnic identity.

Marie-Dominique Even reviews the historical background for Mongolian Buddhism over the past century, from Soviet persecution to

becoming an integral part of Mongolian national identity. Mongolian Buddhist monastic reconstruction has prospered, at least in the capital, and monks and lamas provide ritual services for the laity—yet, despite the influence of some transnational currents, it seems that more individualistic and modernist tendencies have so far taken root only on the margins.

Hildegard Diemberger discusses the 'personhood' of holy books in Tibetan contexts, and the place of recovery and preservation of texts in Tibetan ethnic reconstruction in recent decades, considering also changes in their ritual treatment in the context of new forms of reproduction and transmission, especially the creation of electronic versions.

Nicola Schneider summarises continuing debates surrounding the proposal to reintroduce the full ordination of nuns into Tibetan tradition, showing that in such a case the inflexibility of ritual prescriptions has held back an innovation which many important lamas support.

Mireille Helffer's contribution is more directly focused on ritual practice, presenting useful detail on the ritual calendar of Zhe chen Monastery in Bodhanath, Nepal. She highlights changes instituted in exile, but above all she makes clear the extraordinary achievement of re-creating an entire repertoire of elaborate rituals in the new setting. Moreover, today, ritual memory has been enhanced with digital texts, audio and video recordings, photography and so on. In the modern context, developments have included international ritual dance tours with a quite different ethos from traditional performances, but improving the technical expertise of the dancers and providing important financial support for the monastery.

Fernanda Pirie discusses the non-ritualistic legal dramas of dispute mediation amongst nomadic groups in Amdo, in contrast to the 'rituals of state authority' set up by local officials to mark the acceptance by all parties of agreements acceptable to the State. These ceremonial pacts may not resolve key issues from the nomads' perspectives, and may ultimately fail to end hostilities.

The system of lots drawn from a golden urn, provided in the late eighteenth century by the Manchus to the Tibetan Government for use in the identification of the Panchen and Dalai Lamas' reincarnations, is the subject of Fabienne Jagou's essay, which explores the history of the practice, including Chinese sources. The current Chinese Government claims that its choice of the 11th Panchen Lama is valid because it used

this system, while the identification made by the Dalai Lama and the official search team is invalid. It seems that the Chinese State insists on an absurd symbolic pretence to be the protector of Tibetan tradition.

Finally, Thierry Dodin briefly argues against a view that presents political acts of resistance by contemporary Tibetans as *transformed* rituals, when they may simply be the same religious rituals with new political connotations, or may not in fact be rituals at all.

Perhaps a little more could have been done to draw links between the papers, to consider recurring themes or reasons for contrasts, but despite this the book represents a significant contribution to the study of ritual in Tibetan and Himalayan contexts. Unfortunately, its price is set at a level only affordable for University libraries. While this may be inevitable in the case of highly specialised academic studies, in this case it is especially a pity because a book with such a broad theme deserves a wider readership.

## Medieval Tibeto-Burman Languages IV

edited by Nathan W. Hill.

Leiden: Brill, 2012, 480 pages, 10 colour photos, ISBN 9789004232020. Euros 158 / $220.

Reviewed by Kazushi Iwao

This volume contains a selection of papers from the Fourth Medieval Tibeto-Burman Languages Symposium, held in 2008 at the School of Oriental and African Studies in conjunction with the 41st International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics. It consists of Nathan Hill's introduction and 15 individual articles, which deal with various topics and methods related to Tibeto-Burman languages. Six of the 15 papers cover Tangut studies, reflecting a current attraction to the field, especially in China and Japan. The remaining papers represent the work of scholars interested in a variety of Tibeto-Burman languages: they include three papers on Tibetan and one each on Mon, Burmese, Lepcha, Pyu, Nam, and Yi. Although the core studies concern linguistics, the papers in this volume also encompass various other fields such as literature and philology. Due to space limitations, it is impossible to comment on all 15 papers in this short review; therefore, I have selected certain papers on which I offer my comments.

Among the six Tangut papers, Bojun Sun and Chung-pui Tai's 'Features of the Tangut consonant system as reflected in Sanskrit-Tangut transliterations' is especially remarkable. The authors study the Tangut transliteration of Sanskrit *dharani*s to reconstruct the Tangut consonant system. It is noteworthy that they indicate the importance of Sanskrit–Tangut transliteration materials for reconstructing Tangut pronunciation. These materials were often used in the field's pioneering studies, although they are now often overlooked. Kirill Solonin's 'The Chán teaching of Nányáng Huìzhōng (-775) in Tangut translation' is also important: it is an intensive study of the Tangut translation of the *Chán Teaching of Nányáng Huìzhōng*. He provides the background of the work and the complete annotated English translation of the Tangut version. However, one should note that the Chinese text provided in the 'annotated translation' section is not the original but the reconstructed version from the Tangut text.

Shintaro Arakawa's 'Re-analysis of "Tangut-Tibetan" phonological materials', Guillaume Jacques' 'The Tangut kinship system in Qiangic perspective' and Takumi Ikeda's 'Verbs of existence in Tangut and Mu-nya' highlight the similarity between Tangut languages and Tibetan, Rgyalrong, and Mu-nya, respectively. Jacques discusses Tangut kinship terms based on *Degree of Mourning* and notes that it is strikingly similar to Rgyalrong kinship with regard to siblings. In addition, he indicates the existence of an Omaha-type skewing rule in Tangut, which is also observed in Rgyalrong.

With regard to Tibetan Studies, Nathan Hill's 'Tibetan palatalization and the gy versus g.y distinction' revisits the polemic issue of the Old Tibetan orthographic distinction between <gy> and <g.y>. Investigating previous interpretations and comparing them with the case of the Burmese ry-, he concludes that the distinction between <gy> and <g.y> represents the phonetic distinction of [gʲ] and [gj]. Iwao Ishikawa's 'A note on the theme and the author of PT 239 Recto 399' focuses on the Old Tibetan religious text, P.t.239 recto, which provides ample information on early Buddhism in Tibet. His primary argument concerns the meaning of the term *bsngo-ba,* which appears in the title of P.t.239. He concludes that the term, previously interpreted as 'substitution', actually means 'improvement'. As P.t.239 is essential to understanding early Tibetan Buddhism, and because the term *bsngo-ba* is key to deciphering the text, those who deal with P.t.239 cannot ignore this work.

Takumi Ikeda's 'Highlights in the decipherment of the Nam language' and Uwe Krech's 'A preliminary reassessment of the Pyu faces of the Myazedi inscriptions at Pagan' address the interpretation of unknown texts (Nam and Pyu, respectively). Ikeda's paper attempts to decipher Nam, an unknown language written in Tibetan script that emerged from the Dunhuang caves. There are three extant fragments of Nam manuscripts: P.t.1241, P.t.1246, and IOL Tib J 736. According to Ikeda's analysis, these originally comprised one manuscript. Thus, this paper represents a significant step toward deciphering the Nam language.

In the field of orthography, Sam van Schaik's 'The origin of the Headless Script (*dbu med*) in Tibet' is impressive. Comparing several examples of Tibetan script in Dunhuang texts, he concludes that the headless style originated from official bureaucracy during the imperial period. This is an important achievement for tracing the orthographic development of

Tibetan writing. Halina Wasilewska's 'Orthography of traditional Yi writing: conventions of sign use in the ritual scriptures of the Yi' demonstrates the orthographic diversity of traditional Yi writing in Southwest China. Wasilewska presents several examples in tables and diagrams, among which the list on pp. 456–464 erroneously provides the same data twice.

The remaining papers, Christian Bauer's 'When did middle Mon begin?' Rudolf A. Yanson's 'Aspiration in the Burmese phonological system: a diachronic account,' Heleen Plaisier's 'Two Lepcha *deluk* texts' and Hongyin Nie's 'Notes on the predicative personal suffixes of the Tangut language,' also provide excellent data and analyses based on primary sources and the authors' individual research. Overall, this volume clearly reflects the high standard of contemporary Tibeto-Burman studies.

## Cardamom and Class. A Limbu village and its extensions in East Nepal

by Ian Carlos Fitzpatrick.

Kathmandu: Vajra Publications (Cinnabaris Series of Oriental studies-IV), 2011., 321 pages, ISBN 978-9937506663. $25.

Reviewed by Olivia Aubriot

This book is about socio-economic changes brought about by cardamom cropping, which was introduced into eastern Nepal in the 1970s. The book's singularity stems partly from an anthropological political economy-based approach, which is taken within a now rather unfashionable theoretical framework: that of class formation. Not only does it provide an interesting ethnographic and socio-economic description of a village in Taplejung district, but it also studies its links with the 'dispersed' village, the new settlements in the plains, as well as the impact of cardamom production on internal and international mobility.

Based on Fitzpatrick's doctoral thesis, the book provides numerous surveys carried out in Mamangkhe, one of the northernmost villages in Taplejung district, in Birtamod and in settlements around Happenchowk in Jhapa district. It also draws on participatory fieldwork research on cardamom cultivation, and on in-depth interviews with producers, merchants, plains settlers and labour migrants. Data were collected in 2007-2008 and therefore give very recent insights.

Each major theoretical aspect of the thesis—class structure, economic differentiation, migration—is introduced through a theoretical contextualisation and a clear positioning of the author. More generally, the text is well written and makes for good reading. It stresses the objectives of the study and the major changes and differences compared to previous anthropological studies, and summarises the main findings at the end of each chapter.

Organised into six chapters, the book first sets the theoretical context of economic and social stratification, and provides an overview of the anthropological literature on caste and class in South Asia, thus legitimising its approach. The recent introduction of large amounts of cash (through cardamom production and international labour migration to

places other than India), 'has redrawn the parameters of wealth and inequality' (p. 26). The author adopts a different stance from Caplan, who stressed the importance of *kipat* (a community-specific form of land tenure) for the social and economic dichotomy between Limbus and non-Limbus (specifically Bahun-Chetris): these two groups have both poor and wealthy members, and land has long been a commodity here.

The second chapter sets the historical context: the mythological origin of the Limbus, their relations with the Nepali state and with non-Limbus in the village since the eighteenth century when eastern Nepal was conquered, the political autonomy gained through the *kipat* system, their social organisation into clans and the influences of the 1990 'People's Movement' and the 'People's War' on their political movement. With regard to Gorkhali control, unfortunately no mention is made of Sagant's theory (in *Le paysan Limbu: sa maison et ses champs*, 1976): the Gorkhalis' armed, political conquest was all the more intrusive in various aspects of Limbus' lives; it was a real technical revolution brought to the area by non-Limbus, whom the State encouraged to migrate, with the introduction of the plough, irrigated rice fields, and a more productive agricultural system than the swidden agriculture Limbus then practised. The historical description of land use since the settlement of Bahun Chetris in the village (around the end of the eighteenth century) given in Chapter 6 matches Sagant's description and is worth noting.

The third chapter provides a socio-economic and anthropological description of the village, a 'true' Limbu village where Limbu language and culture have survived relatively untouched by external influences. From a socio-economic point of view, it also has the specificity of being the largest area of cardamom production in the district. Cardamom 'is far the most unequally distributed resource' (p. 115): 'the top 10% [of households] produce 17 times the value of the bottom 50%' (p. 117). The historical process of economic and social change should not be understood only through an ethnic or caste-based analysis, even if the Chetris, Gurungs and Sarkis appear to be the wealthiest social groups, but also from a class-based analysis (p. 117).

Chapter 4 deals with cardamom cultivation itself, its production and the local history of its growth, as well as its history of cultivation in eastern Nepal and in Sikkim, where villagers used to work as labourers in cardamom fields. One rather surprising finding is how unaware farmers

are of the importance of production techniques and practices, a successful cardamom cultivation being, for them, due only to ecological conditions. This chapter also shows how the economic impact of cardamom production has benefited large- and small-scale producers, as well as non-producers, and has introduced major social and economic change to the village, including out-migration.

Chapter 5 thus describes the various processes involved in mobility: within the district, migration in order to settle in Jhapa (curiously the terms 'Tarai' or 'plain' are rarely used), or for international labour migration (to Sikkim, but also to long-distance destinations requiring a visa). This is a key chapter for understanding the relations that still exist between the village in the mountains and the 'dispersed village' in the plains. This link, which does not necessarily exist in other parts of Nepal, is not sufficiently highlighted: migrants still own land in the mountain village (since cardamom is a very lucrative cash crop) and are in regular contact with those living there, for various reasons: firstly, help can be provided in the form of ready cash throughout the year, whereas in the mountains cash is available only after the cardamom harvest; secondly, plain dwellers can act as a relay for job hunting since their area is a hub for international migration; and, thirdly, their situation also serves as a template for legitimate change. Moreover, contrary to other villages, they have settled in the plains very recently (end of the 1990s) subsequent to cardamom production, but also subsequent to the Maoist insurrection. Whatever the type of migration, the social aspects of mobility are also well illustrated.

Chapter 6 starts with a history of changes in land use (with the reminder that most Chetris left the village before the introduction of cardamom). Then, using four accounts as examples, it explains how the relationship between debt and landownership has prevailed, and has even been exacerbated. However, the introduction of cardamom as a cash crop has led to some changes in the distribution of resources: in the past, economic differentiation occurred mainly along ethnic lines, whereas nowadays some Limbus, who were traditionnaly excluded from this process, have become wealthier.

This book describes the history of economic change in a very clear manner, showing how the introduction of a cash crop has rapidly brought major social and economic change, and has contributed to villagers'

integration at national and global levels. It is also worthwhile pointing out that economic surplus is not enough to prevent out-migration, or at least that the uneven distribution of cardamom benefits may explain that, like other Nepalese people, migration to faraway countries is also a strategy used by Mamangkhe villagers.

## The Inheritance of Change: Transmission and practice of Tibetan medicine in Ngamring

by Theresia Hofer.

Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde, Heft 76, 2012, 418 pages, 2 maps, 4 tables, 36 colour photos, 1 black and white photo, 3 Appendices, 3 Glossaries of Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese terms. ISBN 978-3-902501-14-1. Euros 39.50

Reviewed by Mona Schrempf and Olaf Czaja

Theresia Hofer has produced an original and welcome ethnographic contribution on a little studied yet important topic: the diverse modes of transmission of knowledge(s) and practices that today still exist outside of the mainstream Lhasa-centred institutions of Tibetan medicine. Her case study was undertaken in the rural area of Ngamring County, Tibet Autonomous Region, China, and focuses on the lineage transmission of the so-called 'Northern Tradition' Jangluk (*Byang lugs*) of Tibetan medicine that flourished between the 15th and 17th centuries and that continued locally until the end of the 19th century. It thus occupies an important place in this field of research, which has thus far centred upon institutionalised Tibetan medical practice, in particular at the Mentsikhang and the Tibetan Medical College in Lhasa, and in colleges of Tibetan medicine elsewhere in China.

An important strength of Hofer's approach is her close examination of the local significance of medical lineage, both in terms of family lineage and teacher-student-lineages. [1] Her data for this work are based upon semi-structured and biographical interviews with local physicians. Hofer also uses texts and interviews to examine how the representatives of this old form of knowledge transmission relate themselves to institutionalised medicine during the present and in the past. Earlier endeavours to

1 With the exception of the author's own works (Hofer 2007, Hofer 2008a,b), few other ethnographic works have focused on such lesser known types of transmission of Tibetan medicine in Tibetan populated areas of China (see Craig 2007, Schrempf 2007, quoted by the author on p. 132f.) On medical lineage and legitimacy based on case studies from Nepal, TAR and Qinghai province see Craig (2012:78-112).

centralise and standardise Tibetan medicine through the medical institutions of Chakpori (founded in 1696) and the Mentsikhang (founded in 1916), both located in Lhasa and both supported by the respective Dalai Lama of the day, still allowed lineage based medicine to thrive and develop in a parallel fashion alongside these centralised medical institutions. However, beginning in the early 1950s, and more significantly from the 1980s, Tibetan medical practices changed as they became 'integrated' into Chinese-style biomedicine and public health care services. Hofer reveals how local medical knowledge gained through lineage transmission almost ceased to exist following the reform period of Deng Xiaoping, and explains the reasons why. In part, the commodification of compounded medicines via factories, and increasing prices for raw ingredients of *materia medica*, both contribute to a lack of access to Tibetan medicines among the rural Tibetan population. Furthermore, certification and increasing standardisation of medical learning and practice within the established medical institutions marginalised local medical practices that are purely based upon lineage in such a way that young physicians find it difficult to make a living outside of government-regulated health care services. At the same time, Hofer stresses how lineage based knowledge is still closely connected with medical identities. She further observes that the influence of Chinese biomedicine or *tang sman* (lit. 'Communist Party Medicine') in attempts to mainstream and fit Tibetan medicine into the public health system has been enormous.

While the present publication is based upon the author's MA research, including a six-week ethnographic fieldwork trip in 2003 and consideration of several primary and secondary sources, her subsequent Ph.D research was based on an in-depth and extensive ethnography with many months of fieldwork in which she focused on the remaining individual lineage physicians in Ngamring, their agency, and their medical practice today (Hofer 2011). In the present book, it might have been better to focus solely on the ethnographic fieldwork and the ethnohistorical dimensions of local lineage transmission—already a huge challenge for an MA student and one that she masters admirably well. However, her monograph starts off in a rather traditional manner with a general introduction on the history of Tibetan medicine in its first two chapters.

The two historical chapters of the author's present MA monograph turn out to be a little disappointing. The first chapter, following the

Introduction, is entitled 'Contending Histories of Medicine in Tibet (7th-15th C.)'. It offers a general introduction to Tibetan medicine and a brief discussion of early developments up to the 12th century, with an emphasis on the fundamental Tibetan medical text, the *Gyüshi* (*Rgyud bzhi*). It is mainly based upon secondary literature and provides no new facts. Occasionally, it is impaired by a lack of insight, especially with regard to the origin of the *Gyüshi* and the literary genre of medical histories. In the second chapter, the main focus is on the transmission of medical knowledge in Ngamring, the seat of the Jangluk medical tradition, and in Central Tibet from the 15th to the 20th century. This historical part represents a summary of the relevant part of the medical history by Sangyé Gyamtso (1653–1705) and is annotated with brief references to secondary literature. Principal proponents of the Jangluk medical tradition, including the Lhünding subschool, are chronologically introduced via their short biographies and a list of their medical writings. Despite the claim made by Hofer, this does not represent a critical examination or historical research. It is insufficient in terms of methodology and content. For instance, for any historian it would be mandatory to countercheck statements with other relevant historical sources, which is, however, never done. The brief characterisation of these personalities is marred by serious omissions and mistakes. Moreover, it is obvious that the author is not familiar with the political and intellectual history of Tibet. For instance, one can read that an important teacher called 'Lochen Sonam Gyeltsho' (sic) was an Indian translator (pp. 93, 118). However, he is Sönam Gyamtso (1424–1482), one of the leading Tibetan intellectuals in the 15th century. It is indeed difficult not to know him from historical sources or modern academic research. Franz-Karl Ehrhard devoted a monograph to him in 2002 and also edited his correspondence, including many letters to the rulers of Ngamring. Furthermore, extant medical treatises of the Jangluk were not examined for their contents. Thus, the reader does not learn anything substantial about the specific medical views of the Jangluk tradition. It must be said that an examination of the transmission of medical knowledge without discussing its contents in some detail is simply impossible. An in-depth study of this important medical tradition thus remains to be written. This underscores Blezer's (2007) recent observation that the historical study of Tibetan medicine entails major general lacunae.

In summary, it is clear that the historical section of this work should not

have been turned into separate chapters but summarised in the introduction. Rather, the author should have focused on her ethnographic research and the historiography of its lineage proponents instead. Nevertheless, we would like to conclude that this work remains an outstanding contribution, having generated and presented new ethnographic data on the transmission of little known medical lineages in Ngamring. It opens up the prospect of deeper inquiries into the medical school of Jangluk and the diverse practices of Tibetan medicine as a whole.

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## Connecting the Disconnected: Coping strategies of the financially excluded in Bhutan

by Cecile T Niang with Mihasonirina Andrianaivo, Katherine S Diaz and Sarah Zekri. Washington DC: The World Bank, 2013, 85pp., 5 Figures, 3 Tables, ISBN 978-0-8213-9834-0

Reviewed by Richard Whitecross

This research report provides an important baseline for our understanding of financial capability in Bhutan. The banking and financial services provisions in Bhutan were very limited until 2009. Prior to 2009, banking was provided by the Bank of Bhutan Limited and the Bhutan National Bank Limited. The Royal Insurance Corporation of Bhutan was the main provider of insurance and, unusually, was able to engage in lending activities. More recently, three new banks have been created: Druk Punjab National Bank Ltd, T Bank, and the Bhutan Development Bank Ltd (BDBL). With the exception of BDBL, the other banks, according to the report, concentrate on the urban areas, for example, Thimphu and Phuenstholing.

The report is set out in six chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the objectives and the context of the study. The research was undertaken to inform the development of Bhutan's Financial Inclusion policy. The report summarises the findings of the research and provides a snapshot of household financial management practices across the country. Four sites were selected: Thimphu, Mongar, Paro and Samste. Chapter 2 outlines the current provision of financial services in Bhutan. The overview of the rapid changes that have taken place since 2009 provide the reader with a clear understanding of the new formal provision of financial services. The section on the informal financial service providers is of particular interest, especially to social scientists.

Building on this background information, the report turns to examine financial literacy, financial inclusion and consumer protection. These are interlinked concepts and it would have been useful for the general reader to have a brief explanation of what these terms mean. Research reports aimed primarily at a policy audience need to be concise, but some definitions would have been helpful to ensure a shared understanding. The chapter plunges straight in with this opening sentence, 'Financial

literacy and consumer protection are low in Bhutan, reducing trust in the financial system' (p. 19). Financial literacy is a key life skill. However, to develop financial literacy requires an individual to have other skills, notably functional literacy and access to information. Literacy rates continue to improve in Bhutan, yet, as this study shows, women, especially rural women, are affected by financial exclusion and this reflects the limited literacy among adult women in rural areas. The third chapter also highlights key issues around financial literacy, financial exclusion and consumer protection. Rural communities are less able to access financial services and the research found that there is significant disparity in financial inclusion among economic groups. Poor respondents 'reported greater difficulty in obtaining credit because of a lack of collateral' (p. 21) and this is developed in Chapter Four. The report sets out clearly the challenges facing rural Bhutanese. Furthermore, two groups are highlighted by the research: women and young Bhutanese aged between 18 and 24. These two groups are very important to understand.

The report finds that women, including rural women, are adaptable and knowledgeable; therefore, breaking the barrier to their financial inclusion could be beneficial. Young people were found to self-exclude, on the basis that they lacked the necessary collateral for bank loans. In addition, hesitancy based on the lack of personal connections with a bank or bank staff illustrates the importance of social networks. The absence of stronger consumer protection mechanisms is noted as a major barrier and one that links low financial literacy or capacity to low levels of public legal capacity. In order to be able to develop trust in financial institutions, ordinary people have to understand their rights and how they can seek redress, for example over an administrative error.

The lack of a culture of customer service further undermines confidence in financial institutions. Although the authors comment on the use of English for many forms in the banks and point out that 'many rural and elderly people do not speak, read or write' English, some context on the linguistic complexity of Bhutan should have been noted. This is a challenge for any institution operating in Bhutan, so perhaps consideration about how the financial service providers can overcome this problem would have been appropriate.

Chapter Four considers the formal and informal means by which people save money and their reasons for doing so. From my own experience, as

detailed in my doctoral research, the reasons for saving money range from covering school expenses, buying food and preparing for emergencies to buying land, building a house or for celebrating key life events such as childbirth, weddings or funerals or sponsoring religious ceremonies or going on pilgrimage. Where they save tends to reflect the nature of what they are saving for—in a bank for a major purchase or longer term savings, or at home in cash for short term goals. The authors note the continued importance to Bhutanese of semi-liquid assets such as textiles (notably *kiras*) and jewellery. The respondents comment that these items can be sold in an emergency. However, as the authors note, the amount people receive for these items may vary, and because they are difficult to value they are not able to be used as collateral to leverage investments or loans.

Chapter Five focuses on formal and informal lending. This is an invaluable chapter for the information it provides on the level of household borrowing. Formal lending is limited and restricted to those able to provide collateral. Therefore informal lending arrangements are important. This was very evident during my own research when it was clear that families acted jointly to support the purchase of land or the construction of a new house. Trust and social networks were and are important. The report highlights the limitations of the existing formal lending provisions and the emphasis on collateral based lending. It found that the process for seeking and obtaining a formal loan is both complicated and slow. Crucially, this chapter discusses informal lending in some depth and concludes with a section on lending by religious institutions. The role of religious institutions as a source of informal lending is well established and generally they charge a lower rate of interest than other informal lenders. However, for religious reasons, loans may not be given for pig, fish or poultry farming. The report suggests that there is a potential for lending by religious institutions to contribute to over indebtedness and therefore mean higher costs for financial services. This section raises a range of interesting questions about the role of the religious institutions in the economic life of Bhutan and one that would be, if treated in a historical study, of broader academic value.

The final chapter considers remittances, insurance and technology. The level of remittances out of Bhutan remains higher than remittances sent to Bhutan. However, the latter have been increasing and this highlights an area that has as yet not been studied: the role of economic

migration outside of Bhutan. However, the main focus is on how urban and rural Bhutanese send money out of the country, usually to support their children attending schools and colleges in India. Knowledge of and about insurance remains low and is an area that needs to be addressed. Finally, the role of technology to improve access to financial services is briefly discussed, though it does not address issues of IT security.

Over half of the volume comprises eight appendices. Four set out the tools used in the research, allowing the reader to assess its robustness. There is a brief bibliography. On reviewing the bibliography, only 14 titles are on Bhutan and the majority of those are official publications highlighting the limited amount of research undertaken on financial literacy and inclusion in Bhutan. Overall, this is an important, well written report that provides an accessible baseline for further research.

# ENDPIECE

# Reflection on the Resettlement of Bhutanese Refugees in the UK: The voices of refugees

Lok Nath Bajgai

We refugees are reluctant migrants: uprooted, stateless people, who have fled our country Bhutan, and no longer have the protection of any state government. Our people fled Bhutan due to our ethnicity: as a minority in Bhutan, we were in danger of being arrested, persecuted and tortured. Some have survived rape, torture and abuse by the Bhutanese army and police. Thereafter we were forced to live in refugee camps in East Nepal. Many of our children have barely known a normal childhood, and many have suffered inconceivable trauma.

After almost twenty years of dwelling in refugee camps, we were offered to resettle to third countries, such as the UK. The *Gateway Protection Programme* (GPP) is a life-line for vulnerable people like us. In 2010, the first Bhutanese refugees arrived in Manchester with the GPP. A year later, more Bhutanese refugees were resettled in Sheffield and Bradford.

## Discovering a new home

When my family and I arrived in the UK in September 2010, and we got off the plane, the first thing we noticed was that it was very cold. We were also suffering from jetlag. We were transported to the transit centre, from where we were driven to our new home in Manchester. The case worker along with the interpreter showed us our new house, and explained how to use the kitchen equipment, and showed us the typical English house, with lounge (living room), bedrooms and bathrooms. Everything was ready for use when we arrived. Washing machines, can openers, electric ovens, stoves and central heating were new to most of us: in the beginning, we found it somewhat difficult to handle the kitchen equipment, particularly the electric stove. It took us a few weeks to learn our way around these things. Another persisting issue is for us to understand the particular English accent that people use here in the North West of England. For our children and the youth it is easy to learn to speak and communicate in English, but for the parents and grandparents it is far more difficult.

Our youth aims to gain qualifications and experiences that help them

to become capable adults. We hope that our youth will strive to make a major contribution to British society in the new future. However, our youth is struggling to increase their confidence, self-esteem and communication skills, which would enable them to cope with mainstream education.

**Issues with resettlement**

Not all people are content and satisfied with living in the UK. We Bhutanese people are family-oriented, and seek work in order to support our families: we are well-mannered and good neighbours. Refugee Action UK (RAUK) has encouraged the new arrivals to build on their group identity, and helped to set up a group organisation. Some of our group have successfully established their own community group. RAUK has helped us to overcome the many challenges and obstacles we faced during and after resettlement.

The vast majority of Bhutanese refugees in the UK are unemployed. Most of the qualifications and work experience we acquired in both Bhutan and Nepal are not accepted in the UK, and it is therefore difficult for us to find suitable jobs. Most of us are completely reliant on job seekers allowance and welfare payments. It is stressful to seek employment in the current economic crisis, and the compulsory job applications we have to complete create anxiety and frustration, because if we fail to apply our benefit payments are cut. Some elderly members of our community, who are not yet in retirement, find their situation particularly frustrating, as the entry to the job market is closed to them, due to the language barrier. As they also have to comply with the job application rules, there is a real possibility that they will lose all state subventions in the long run. As these payments are not sufficient to cover our living costs in the first place, the cuts would mean that some of us may slip into poverty.

**Community development**

Facing these issues alone is impossible. We are happy to have a strong community group, whose members support each other in times of hardship. The community organisation (in our case, *Takin Association UK* (TAUK)) is a place of refuge, where we can come together, enjoy each others' company, and provide help for people in need. We host several events every year, in order to celebrate religious festivals and socialise.

Our youth take part in these celebrations, as they make friends with other community members and young people from different backgrounds. We host several projects, such as a refugee football team and a film project.

**Note on research with Bhutanese refugees**

We have identified one significant issue with most research and literature about Bhutanese refugees, which we would like to highlight. It is close to our heart, to be acknowledged in the most appropriate terms. We came across several instances in which we have been referred to as being 'Lhotshampas'. We would like to make very clear that our ethnicity is not Lhotshampa – this Dzongkha term has been created by the Bhutanese government to refer to all people living in the Southern belt of Bhutan. In fact, the word consist of '*lho*', meaning 'South' and '*tshampa*' meaning 'people living harmoniously' – therefore the word 'Lhotshampa' actually means 'people living in the South', which includes all citizens (Bhutanese – both Drukpa and Nepali, Tibetan, Indians) resident in the South of Bhutan. Therefore, the term 'Lhotshampa' does not apply to us as an ethnicity, and we would appreciate it if researchers and writers would refrain from using this term when referring to us. We consider ourselves 'Nepali' or 'Nepali-speaking Bhutanese'.

On the other hand, it is of uttermost importance to conduct research about refugee resettlement, in order to identify problems (but also positive outcomes). We are proud and happy to have been invited to take part in the SOAS-led project, and hope that this is only the beginning of a long-term research project.

## Voices from the Bhutanese Youth

Ajay Thapa

Today, I am here to share my thoughts and experiences with you. As a young person and a refugee, a lot has changed in my life, and I would like to outline my experiences so far.

In the early 1990s, nationalist policies led to a political crisis in our homeland Bhutan, and many of us Southern Bhutanese of Nepali origin were forced to leave Bhutan and flee to Nepal, where, with the help of local Nepali citizens, we settled on the banks of the river Mai. Due to a lack of health services, proper food and clean water, many children and adults died from diseases there. By 1992/93, the UNHCR began to construct camps for the refugees in the Jhapa and Morang districts of East Nepal. In the almost 20 years of our settlement in Nepal, we became used to living in the seven different UNHCR-administered refugee camps. There have been many different agencies, such as the as LWF, AMDA, WFP and CARITAS, which have helped with camp maintenance, food distribution, health, education and other programmes and facilities. In 2007, the UNHCR and the IOM began the Gateway Protection Programme, and initiated third-country resettlement. The first Bhutanese refugees arrived in the UK in summer 2010, and I personally arrived in August 2010.

Only a few refugees have been resettled to the UK, in comparison to other nations, such as the USA. On the one hand, it is good that we Bhutanese refugees are resettling, in order to secure our and the coming generation's future, but on the other hand, it made us feel sad, as we had to leave behind and say farewell to family and friends.

Nepal is a peaceful country, and we did not have to face wars unlike refugees from for example, Afghanistan or African countries. But war is not the only problem refugees have to face: refugees have difficulties getting a job, and they do not have access to educational facilities. But, to a certain extent, I have achieved my aims and objectives.

Being a refugee is not easy. I would have preferred to stay in the country where I was born, if I had had opportunities to study, and good health services. We do not choose to come here: it is the circumstances that force us. There is no doubt that the UK is a great nation, with its

history and outstanding reputation across the world, as well as its innovations in science and technology. But it is difficult sometimes, and even more challenging to explain who and what we are. I have spoken with an English friend about the economy, and he mentioned that immigrants take away jobs from the English people, and that most people only migrate to the UK for jobs and benefits, and that the immigrants' lives in the UK must be amazing. But it is very hard to be away from our homeland, in a new environment, with a different language and culture.

## Ramesh Ghimirey

The Bhutanese refugee youth live in different areas of Manchester. Young Bhutanese are experienced and have far-reaching interests, and aim to increase their abilities in order to do well in various fields of interest. Some young Bhutanese in Manchester are multi-talented in performance, and actively engage in singing, dancing and playing musical instruments, such as the guitar. Others are more interested in physical activities, and take part in various sports, such as football, badminton, volleyball and running. Some members of the Bhutanese youth have a good command of information and computer technology and have gained sufficient confidence to perform IT works, such as web designing, installing computer software, and audio- and video editing. The Bhutanese youth have also taken part in a film-project. Under the guidance of professional film-makers and project coordinators, they produced a short documentary called 'Life Beginning' which compares the people's lives in England to Nepal. The final film was released in June 2011, and was sponsored by the UK Film Council (First Light) and various NGOs. The Bhutanese youth interviewed some British natives, to find out more about British culture and lifestyles, which in turn allowed young people to meet and socialise with the native youth. Subsequently, the film project was not only enjoyable, but also allowed the Bhutanese youth to gain interview and film-making skills. [1]

One of the issues young Bhutanese are facing is the ability to speak and communicate efficiently in English. They can speak and write English

1 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VE-vHz_SxA

well, but not fluently. The main reason for this problem is that English is not their native language, and they did not speak English in their native country. Although some used to be taught in English before they arrived in the UK, the majority only began to learn English once they joined schools, colleges and ESOL classes in the UK.

When the Bhutanese youth arrived in England, it was a very difficult time for them, as they had to learn to adapt to their new daily lives in a new environment. They could not converse with English people, and an interpreter was needed to translate their questions, issues and statements. After staying in the UK for a few months, most youth joined schools and colleges, which proved to be the best means to get used to their new environment. Also, they developed and improved their skills, by utilising educational facilities. However, due to the advanced age of some people, they could not join schools of colleges, and were admitted to ESOL classes instead, where they study English at different levels. Yet, because of their enthusiasm and skills, some Bhutanese youth were offered places to study in various faculties, colleges and universities.

These are only a few aspects of life the Bhutanese youth experiences in the UK, and all young people are keen to improve and acquire more skills and experiences.