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POLITICAL SCIENCE

ANATOMY OF RESETTLEMENT: MIXED-METHOD RESEARCH ON BHUTANESE  
REFUGEES (410 PP.)

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This dissertation is a much-needed study of how resettlement impacts refugees. I found the ‘solution’ of resettlement to be promising for some refugees yet restrictive for others. Based on my analysis, Bhutanese refugees interpret their past and present differently in negotiating their place and identity in resettlement. In Akron, many have found stable jobs, started businesses, and are pursuing higher education aspirations. Opportunities in resettlement and their positive self-perception allows these individuals to expand and ‘own’ their new revised identities (e.g. Bhutanese-Nepali), in contrast to the primary socialized identity preferences (i.e. the Bhutanese label) of refugees who find themselves marginalized and dependent in their new environment. At a broader level, I have found the US resettlement policy to be exclusively invested in economic output of refugees with little regard for their socio-cultural adaptation. Given the diversity of refugee experiences and their reasons behind ‘choosing’ resettlement, resettlement policy merits further critical examination and likely a structural revision. Scholars of refugee and immigrant behavior, as well as interested policy makers will find this work highly pertinent. In this study, I used ethnographic research—interviews and field observations—centered on Bhutanese refugees; I also employed a limited statistical examination of refugee migration patterns in the US.

ANATOMY OF RESETTLEMENT:  
MIXED-METHOD RESEARCH ON BHUTANESE REFUGEES

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	viii
CHAPTERS	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
The Refugee Context.....	4
A Narrative of Identity and Agency.....	9
Research Path Forward.....	12
Chapter Conclusion.....	16
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	17
Refugee Experience in Camps: A Precursor to Agency.....	25
Review of Resettlement-Centered Scholarship.....	30
Review of Relevant Scholarship on Identity.....	54
Chapter Conclusion.....	71
III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS .....	72
A Case for Ethnographic Case Study.....	75
Brief Discussion on Agency in the Quantitative Chapter.....	119
Chapter Conclusion.....	121
IV. CASE STUDY FINDINGS I.....	122
Initial Discussion on Refugee Identities.....	127
Post-Refugee Identities: A Shift toward Hybrid Labels.....	133

	Bhutanese Refugee Experience: A Tale of Three Locations.....	147
	Memory of Bhutan: Repression, Dissidence, and Flight.....	152
	Pre-Flight Identity Frames .....	169
	Refugee-ness in Nepal: Narratives of Survival.....	171
	Chapter Conclusion.....	195
V.	CASE STUDY FINDINGS II.....	197
	Lack of Social Agency in Resettlement .....	205
	Challenges of Access and Isolation among the Older Generation.....	211
	Social Agency of the Empowered Refugees .....	233
	Institution, Agency, and Claiming of Identity.....	263
	Chapter Conclusion .....	279
VI.	STATISTICAL FINDINGS.....	280
	Pertinent Scholarship and Hypotheses.....	286
	Research Design and Data .....	312
	Empirical Analysis .....	323
	Chapter Conclusion.....	332
VII.	DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	334
	Reflection of the Research Question.....	334
	Research Implications.....	342
	Research Challenges.....	356
	Research Path Forward .....	363
	REFERENCES.....	370
	APPENDICES.....	395
	A. Letter of Consent .....	395
	B. Economic Development Project Materials.....	397
	C. North Hill Residential Map.....	405
	D. BCAA Brochure.....	406
	E. Chapter VI Statistical Tables.....	407

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Incoming Bhutanese Population (Source: PRM) .....	10
2. Bhutan and Surrounding Region (Source: NewSin Asia) .....	85
3. Conceptual Mapping of Emergent Themes (NVivo Nodes) .....	117
4. Outline of Bhutanese Refugee Experience and Identities .....	124
5. Evolution of Bhutanese Refugee Identities.....	137
6. Experience-Agency-Identity Relation.....	201
7. 2015 Refugee Residence and Businesses in North Hill.....	208
8. Total Refugee Population in North Hill in 2010 and in 2015 (Source: IIA).....	210
9. Comparison of Immigrant and US-owned Revenue Trend in North Hill.....	245
10. Nepali Caste Hierarchy (Source: Diana Simpson).....	273
11. Bhutanese Community Association of Akron (BCAA) Brochure.....	276
12. Scatter Plot of TANF Benefits and Total Refugee-related Welfare (2012).....	298
13. Refugee-related Welfare Over the Years.....	299
14. Distribution of Incoming Refugees to the US .....	314
15. Determinants of Refugee Identity Preferences.....	340
16. Structure of Resettlement and its Human Toll.....	344

## LIST OF TABLES

1. Interviewee Breakdown by Gender .....	133
2. Interviewee Breakdown by Professional Status .....	134
3. Post-Refugee Identity Categories .....	135
4. A Picture of ‘Suffering’ .....	148
5. A Picture of Resettlement Challenges (NVivo Data) .....	220
6. A Picture of Resettlement Challenges (Continued) .....	237
7. US-owned businesses in North Hill.....	243
8. Immigrant-owned Businesses in North Hill.....	247
9. Bhutanese-Owned businesses in North Hill.....	248
10. Experience and Identity .....	263
11. Summary Statistics Table .....	317
12. Panel-Corrected Standard Errors (PCSE) Models of Secondary Migration.....	327

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

What is the impact of third-country resettlement on a Bhutanese refugee community? In lieu of answering this broad question, this research is an attempt to understand resettled Bhutanese refugees' agency, expressed through their group identity and cultural practices. Permanent migratory process—in this case, refugee resettlement—leads to agency-altering and identity-transforming consequences. Based on my research, agency and identity are interlinked; as refugees adapt to their host environment in a variety of ways, their agency and perceived social position influence their identities. From epistemological and methodological points of view, my investigation consists of several moving parts. I seek to utilize this introductory chapter to help the reader make sense of the what, the why, and the how of my research.

First, let me elaborate on my research question. Resettlement in the United States is a family-based migration process, planned by the US government, and carried out by voluntary agencies (volags), and local-level institutions (Nawyn 2006; Singer and Wilson 2006). Over the last decade, Bhutanese are one of the largest refugee populations to be resettled in the US, planted in 41 states [Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) 2015]. Once resettled to the US, this 'new' life is a given condition for each resettled refugee.<sup>1</sup> However, the

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<sup>1</sup> Framed in a positivist manner, it can be argued that resettlement functions as an independent or a predictor variable here. On the other hand, divergent refugee experiences in terms of agency and identity would serve as the dependent variable of interest.

I don't recommend de-constructing my largely qualitative research premise in this manner; I am presenting this in order to assist the reader's understanding of the research question.

refugee experience within the resettlement process is far from monolithic, as inferred elsewhere by scholars like Colic-Peisker (2005, 2009), Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003), Markovic and Manderson (2000), and Portes and Rumbaut (2001, 2006). The inequality of refugee experiences I have observed and recorded is linked with their past as well as future. I have come to understand that resettlement, framed and famed as a ‘durable solution’ to refugee situations, is ill-understood in isolation. Instead, I find it far more appropriate to consider resettlement as part of the overall refugee journey (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011).

While the Bhutanese are one of the ‘preferred’ refugee populations for US resettlement, origins of its forced migration has largely been ignored and understudied (Rizal 2004). This historical anonymity and the Bhutanese government’s utter lack of accountability continues to rankle many Bhutanese refugees today (Interviews 1, 5, and 7). Many Bhutanese refugees opted for resettlement—at a high personal cost—for the sake of their children (Interviews 12, 13, 14, 25, 27, and 28). The context for choosing resettlement often varied from one person to another—lack of repatriation to Bhutan, or lack of opportunities for the youth—but they generally agreed resettlement was the best hope for their future generation. During my fieldwork, I have spoken to and interviewed refugees who find themselves in lives of social isolation and irrelevance (for a diversity of reasons); it is difficult to make a case that resettlement has been a beneficial solution for them. On the other hand, my field site boasts many obvious signs of progress, especially in the economic sector. Celebration of refugee entrepreneurship is often premature (Bonacich 1973), but in the limited time frame under study (Bhutanese resettlement began in 2008), the Bhutanese community in Akron has been impressively active in its social and economic organization. For many of these refugees, resettlement has served as a springboard for progress they’ve been waiting for all their lives.

Alongside their past memories, their current experiences show positive prospects for future influence for their individual agency and social status, which in turn, has an important effect on our understanding of refugee identities in resettlement. Hence, the understanding of resettlement meets at the messy intersection of the past way of life, the present, and the path forward.

## The Refugee Context

Instances of refugee crises, driven by armed conflict and systemic persecution, are common in our history (Chimni 2009, 11; Jenkins and Schmeidl 1995, 63). Refugee issues tend to attract short-term popular attention but are largely ignored in the long-term. Recently, refugee matters have enjoyed sustained political interest and clamor as refugees have started knocking on the doors of western European countries (Grant 2015). This moment of refugee exigency is an exception to the rule where refugee populations are forced to live in refugee camps, as reflected in works of IR scholars like Chimni (1998), Moore and Shellman (2004, 2006, 2007), and Salehyan (2007). More than 50 million refugees and internally displaced populations (IDPs) continue to survive on the geopolitical margins, awaiting a permanent resolution of their future [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2014]. Therefore, academic interest in immigrants and more recently, in refugees, is as relevant as it is important.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) defines a refugee as follows:

A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (Article 1A[2]).

A conceptual understanding of what it means to be a refugee merits a more nuanced consideration. Refugees are a subclass of migrants that enjoys a degree of political protection.

However, refugee lives are fundamentally defined by political, civil, and economic restrictions. Refugees have “limited access to freedom of movement, few educational or training opportunities, and no right to work. They are generally left dependent on international humanitarian assistance for their most basic care and maintenance” (Betts 2009, 15). The political categorization of refugees, therefore, translates to a lack of agency (especially in comparison to economic migrants) and a sense of powerlessness (Hein 1993; Zetter 1991, 2007).

Refugee situations tend to be long-lasting, as refugees spend an average of seventeen years in exile (Milner 2014, 553). Bhutanese refugees waited for eighteen years (and in some cases, longer) before their resettlement began. The refugee regime—a broad network of transnational and local organizations, host states and aid-providing countries—is responsible for the immediate protection and rehabilitation of the refugees (Betts 2010, 14; Hein 1993, 47; Scalettaris 2007, 37). Refugee situations largely take place in underdeveloped countries, making it easier for developed countries to participate indirectly through the provision of monetary aid (Castles 2004, 175). Their indirect involvement, alongside humanitarian concern, is arguably borne out of global security and foreign policy concerns (Betts 2009, 14; Fuller and Cochrane 2015). The UNHCR is increasingly prominent in refugee protection and operations, partly because countries are generally slow and hesitant in reacting to refugee crises (Hein 1993, 46). Evidently, confronting refugee situations is an exercise mired in political complexities and proposed long-term solutions are no exceptions. This is especially evident in Europe’s imperfect, messy attempt in reacting to incoming refugees and asylum seekers at their doors.

The refugee regime prescribes three durable solutions to the refugee crisis: repatriation, local settlement, and third-country resettlement. Voluntary repatriation allows the refugees to return to their native societies, during the post-conflict phase; local settlement is a situation

where refugees are allowed by the host country to seek asylum; third-country resettlement concerns refugees starting lives in a different country, especially if the other two resolutions are not on offer (UNHCR n.d.). Resettlement is generally the least preferred and rarest of resolutions. Only one percent of the refugees are offered third-country resettlement (UNHCR 2015, 2018). Resettlement is offered to Priority One (P1) cases, refugees in imminent danger; and, Priority Two (P2) cases, refugees of special humanitarian concern (Singer and Wilson 2006, 4). Resettlement is popularly framed as a humanitarian gesture, but this representation is often contested (Betts 2010, 14). There are political deliberations to resettlement, like domestic policy and fiscal responsibility (Hein 1993, 48), as well as international security and migration fears (Betts 2011, 50; Thielman 2012, 27). Throughout the history of US, immigration has always been a political instrument of inclusion and exclusion (Zolberg 2006), and resettlement is no exception. The humanitarian argument of resettlement, while initially accurate, is affected by the politics of the host society. For their part, refugees contribute to the host society immediately in the economic front, and their economic impact is even larger in the long run (Borjas 1999). As I report, particularly in Chapter V, refugee lives are intimately affected by the structure of resettlement, and in turn they affect their host community with their economic as well as cultural presence. In summary, resettlement provides refugees an opportunity for a fresh start in a new country, but it is hardly a panacea.<sup>2</sup> Refugee resettlement is a transactional process that is as complex as it is fascinating when viewed through the refugee lens.

Becoming a refugee, especially for a protracted duration, does little to free the survivors from victimhood. To be categorized as an official ‘refugee’ translates into political protection as

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<sup>2</sup> Resettlement, furthermore, is attached to serious, understudied integration challenges. There have been reported cases of stress-related suicides among refugees in the US, especially the Bhutanese refugees [Center for Disease Control (CDC) 2014; Kulman and Tsukii 2014].

well as a powerless, agency-less existence (Hein 1993; Zetter 1998). I have been curious about the effect of proposed long-term solutions—resettlement, in particular—on refugees. This curiosity originated in 2010, when I worked for the UNHCR in Nepal. During my visit to Bhutanese refugee camps in Eastern Nepal, I observed pre-resettlement preparation programs, from information sessions, to formal visits by embassy officials, to health check-ups and vaccinations.<sup>3</sup> During these often-feverish events, I couldn't help but notice the excitement as well as trepidation of the Bhutanese individuals and families. Most of them were excited, but many also looked worried. Their refugee situation was finally going to be 'resolved' permanently, albeit in far-off countries and culturally foreign communities. The 'choice' of resettlement for many of these refugees I learned much later (as presented in Chapter VI), often masked their sacrifice for their family members.<sup>4</sup>

The study of politics is famously attributed to be a study of who gets what, when, and how (Lasswell 1936). Today, social science is just as interested in studying the have-nots and the victims. This puts resettled refugees in a theoretically attractive space for a meticulous inquiry. Given their past experiences, they remain in the category of refugees even in resettlement and by implication, victims; however, resettled refugees are also the 'lucky' ones who made it out of their exile in refugee camps and huts. Put differently, they meet at the intersection of past victimhood and newfound agency. Observing resettled refugees and studying resettlement is an important and salient research, especially given the current polarized political climate on the question of immigration and refugee resettlement. My field inferences

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<sup>3</sup> Even in 2010, I witnessed the refugee vetting process to be strict, from the initial paperwork to criminal and medical vetting. In contrast to the Bhutanese refugees, Somali and Pakistani families remained largely in limbo despite their appeals and protests.

<sup>4</sup> The resettlement process was voluntary. However, there are claims that UNHCR had been systematically reducing the ration for refugees over the years (Chapter V). I wonder to what extent such actions affected the eventual refugee decision-making on resettlement.

paint an overall positive and optimistic picture of the Bhutanese refugee community in Akron, which is not to say it is a flawless picture. Sometimes we are overzealous in rendering an immigrant group a model community, or in declaring them to be an economic success (Bonacich 1987). Re-building a life in the US is impossible for immigrants without sacrifice and difficult choices. But the overall picture of resettlement offers optimism for both refugee communities and host societies.

I have focused on Bhutanese refugees for a variety of reasons: they are historically underrepresented (Rizal 2004), and because of my own personal connection described earlier. The Bhutanese refugees, or the *Lothshampa*, fled government persecution from Bhutan because of their ethnic Nepali heritage. The Nepali government, however, was an unwilling (and impoverished) host. The UNHCR was largely responsible for providing the necessary resources to ensure their survival (Bhaumik 2007b). The concept of refugee is variously described as a political label (Scalettaris 2007, 38; Hein 1993, 44), or a form of external categorization (Jenkins 1994, 199). Whatever the title of refugee holds, for some, it translates into marginalization and long-term uncertainty. While working for the UNHCR, I gravitated toward the dynamics of refugee identity. In my perspective, the harsh reality of camp life gradually undermines a refugee group's identity. Resettlement provides an opportunity for the refugees to break out of this proverbial nametag in a new environment. It is my contention that inquiry into resettlement of Bhutanese refugees will provide significant insights into how refugees are affected by resettlement and how they may go on to impact their host society.



## A Narrative of Identity and Agency

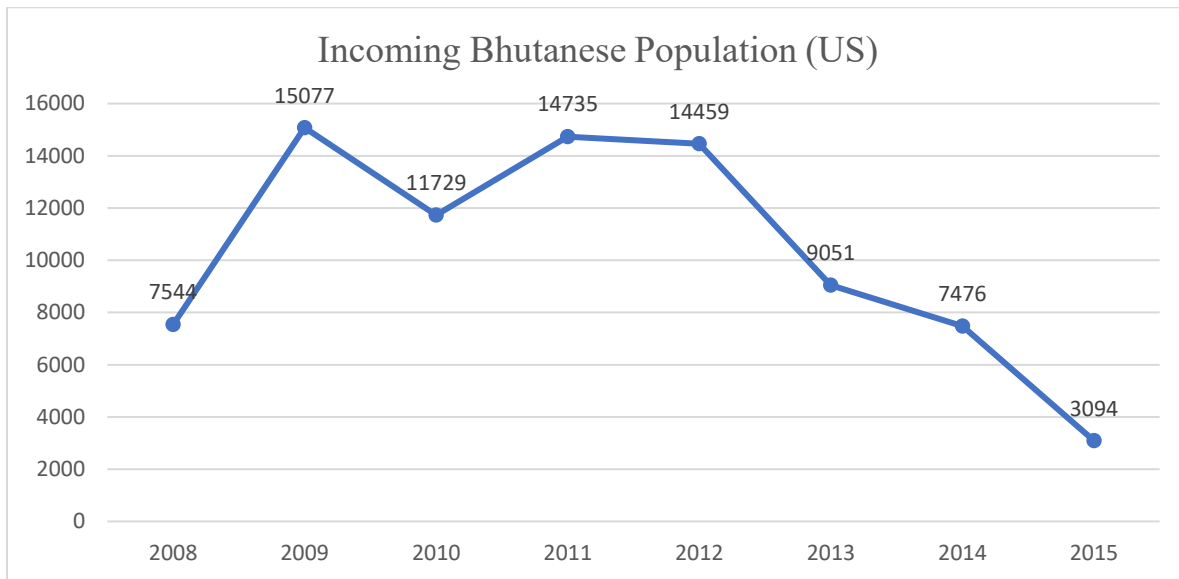
Although my research question is simple, the answer is complex with far-reaching implications on how we view refugees and resettlement. Also, this line of inquiry has not been adequately followed. Refugee adjustment is mostly viewed through the prism of economic and social experiences (Allen 2009; Borjas 1989, 1999; Markovic and Manderson 2000; Potocky-Tripodi 2001, 2003a, 2003b). As a scholar of refugee studies, I am interested in the big picture as well as the nuanced inferences offered by case studies. Macro perspectives on resettlement are scarce, while case studies tend to largely ignore social identity frameworks. I study the impact of resettlement of Bhutanese refugees at the local level (through my extensive case study); I further study refugee agency in the form of secondary migration within the US in my quantitative chapter to help develop some macro perspectives on refugee behavior. Both the proposed macro outlook and the identity-driven case study are relatively novel endeavors in the study of refugees and resettlement.

Refugee resettlement has not received much attention from the political science scholarship (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011).<sup>5</sup> Case studies on resettlement are naturally grounded on refugee experiences. Scholarship emphasizing refugee experiences generally ignores the complex past of the refugees (Markovic and Manderson 2000, 325). The importance of past and present experiences was evident during my field research, resulting in the data presented in Chapter IV. There is a strong connection between group experiences and social identity; social identity is the self-perception of the group, generally defined by their social experiences. In my view, social identity is the vehicle that links resettlement experiences with

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<sup>5</sup> Important contributions have come from social science fields like anthropology and sociology. Some of these works—Malkki (1992), Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003), White (2002), and Nawyn (2006, 2010)—are presented within the epistemology of Refugee Studies, a field with porous disciplinary boundaries.

the refugees' past. Narratives of the past are especially important for Bhutanese refugees, who spent eighteen years and more in the refugee camps. Unlike the current situation of Syrian and Iraqi refugees, the plight of Bhutanese refugees did not attract much academic or media attention. Since 2006, more than 80,000 Bhutanese refugees have quietly been resettled in 41 US states (PRM 2015).



*Figure 1: Incoming Bhutanese Population (Source: PRM)*

Viewed from current research perspectives, refugees are perceived as individuals with little to no agency (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Ludwig 2016; Zetter 1991). Although weighed down by the economic expectations in the host society, refugees are agents who constantly negotiate their social order. In my case study, I observed Bhutanese refugee agency in the management of their group and individual identities. Employment has been argued to be the main axis of identity during initial resettlement, but the attitude of refugees is equally important (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003, 62). Case studies on refugees further highlight the significance of social status and networks (Allen 2009, 332; Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003, 337). Institutions, moreover, assist refugees in “[observing] home culture and [employing]

advocacy to resist subordination” (Nawyn 2010, 158). Bhutanese refugees, I have found, work hard to replicate the cultural content of their identities (Barth 1969), even though they may use varying forms of identity frames. This is their way of reclaiming identity from the persistent tag of refugees. In summary, refugees are agents who are active in the management of their social environment and identity.

In addition to the pursuit of economic stability, I find that Bhutanese refugees seek to remove the stigma of refugee-ness through their social-cultural practices. Identity is a salient way of making sense of ourselves, and the world around us. Immigrants and particularly refugees have historically been subject of an ‘otherizing’ behavior. It is not just the nationalist attitude, with its racial undertones, of the host society (Portes and Rumbaut 2001), but also the structural powerlessness of refugee experiences (Zetter 1991) that make refugees ‘invisible’ to the world. In order to truly understand the impact of refugee problems as well as prescribed solutions like the resettlement, I assert it is crucial to absorb refugee experiences in our understanding. In that pursuit, agency and identities are important facets, and social identity (while borrowing relevant inferences from other frameworks and disciplines) is an appropriate vehicle for that investigation.

## Research Path Forward

The social science disciplines haven't studied resettlement adequately from a bottom-up perspective, nor have they paid attention to the plight of Bhutanese refugees. Taken together, these factors make this an appropriate case for an ethnographic research. In Chapter II, I stitch together a variety of pertinent scholarships and review them. This includes thematic sections where disparate disciplines overlap. The section on Refugee Experiences in Camps provides important insight into refugee agency even in exile. In the Review of Resettlement-Centered Scholarship section, I review pertinent literature from the perspectives of bureaucratic and economic views as well as bottom-up experience-centric views. Here, I articulate how the resettlement process can be seen from a state-based structural perspective and from a worldview prioritizing refugee lives. In this chapter, I further provide a section on relevant discourses on ethnic and social identities. Here, I elucidate diverse perspectives on identities, while emphasizing the theoretical links between experience and identity. I use this section to further argue the appropriateness of social identity-based lens for my research.

Chapter III functions as my research design and methodology chapter. Here, I make the case for my ethnographic field work, borrowing from past works of ethnographers from a diversity of backgrounds. I use this chapter to justify the selection of the Bhutanese case, articulating their history, from the Bhutanese government's repression to the forced migration of *Lothshampas* to refugee camps in Nepal. This historical review is very pertinent to the findings reported in Chapter IV. In Chapter III, I build the case for ethnographic data collection through field observations and semi-structured interviews. I extensively describe my entry into the population, my research strategies, and unexpected dilemmas I often found myself in. In Brief Discussion on Agency in the Quantitative Chapter, I elaborate my quantitative study into refugee

agency in the form of secondary migration in the US (as analyzed in Chapter VI). In essence, this section lays out my rationale for Chapter VI, add assumptions behind my statistical inquiry, while establishing the relevance of investigating secondary migration in the context of resettlement. My field inferences on secondary migration—a common facet in Bhutanese resettlement—aided my quantitative analysis chapter as well.

I present my findings in three different chapters. In the tradition of sociologists like Alejandro Portes, Ruben Rumbaut, Steven Gold, and to a lesser extent, Val Colic-Peisker, I observe the diversity of experiences within the Bhutanese community, and view these individuals as active agents. In Chapters IV and V, I present my qualitative findings on Bhutanese refugees' identity and agency in resettlement. A corollary to the investigation of refugee agency is the phenomenon of secondary migration (Chapter VI); Chapter VI captures my statistical findings on what factors influence refugee secondary migration between US states. Chapter IV, entitled 'Pre-Resettlement Phase' starts by building a framework for revised or hybrid identities in resettlement. Since I found past experiences in Bhutan and refugee camps to be crucial, I use this chapter to organize and present testimonies articulating the context of their displacement. I also present interview data to sketch diverse Bhutanese refugee experiences in Nepali refugee camps. The concluding section of the chapter provides a fascinating perspective on why Bhutanese refugees chose resettlement; like the rest of the data, there is a complex array of perspectives that guided the decision to resettle. As well as unexpected data, this section also serves as an appropriate segue to Chapter V covering Bhutanese experiences in resettlement in Akron.

In Chapter IV, the interviews point to diverging identity preferences within the Bhutanese refugee community. This divergence is further captured in resettlement-based experiences in

Chapter V; here, I supplement the interview data with my extensive field observations on refugee behavior in North Hill. There is an interesting correlation between refugee experiences and identity preferences that is largely driven by the social agency of the respondents in resettlement. Like the narratives on past experiences, the social role of refugees plays a critical role in determining their identity preferences in refugee resettlement. Despite a variety of identity markers in resettlement (ranging from Bhutanese to Nepali to Bhutanese-Nepali), the community is largely invested in sustaining their cultural way of life. This is evident from the community's political functions and a variety of ethnic and religious celebrations taking place within the community. From a theoretical point of view, especially from the vision of Jenkins (1994) and Barth (1969), the impact of experiences on identities is important, as it articulates the fluid nature of identity and the mixed experience of resettlement for refugees (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011). However, differential take on identities should be understood in the context of the culture. In the Bhutanese case, their way of life remains a central piece of their existence in resettlement. I conclude this chapter with a section describing the organizational role of Bhutanese Community Association of Akron (BCAA) and its impact on the community's organizational capacity and possibly its collective identities.

Chapter VI, a statistical analysis of secondary migration of refugees in the US, is thematically and methodologically distinct from the preceding analytical chapters. Given its theoretical and methodological distinction, I have organized this chapter in manner and style similar to that of a journal article. In other words, I provide specific sections ranging from the review of pertinent literature to develop appropriate hypotheses, empirical framework and appropriate methodology, and discussion of empirical results. The theoretical assumptions guiding this chapter are based on immigration-focused political science and economic scholars

(Borjas 1989, 1999; Hawes and McCrea 2018; Hero and Preuhs 2007; Putnam 2007) in addition to the scholars cited in Chapter II. I view the data analysis in Chapter VI to be an initial step towards the investigation of secondary migration and into the structural impact of resettlement on refugee populations in the US. Briefly put, I find that refugee populations move from one state to another for a variety of reasons. The economic indicators—ranging from state’s welfare to housing affordability—are significant in my investigation. As for identity-based inquiry, I use proxies of state-based ethnic refugee populations. Although there is a promising picture, my data and methods are far from robust. In other words, the urgency and vividness of field observations on identities aren’t similarly mirrored in this broader study. While this chapter is not well-related to my identity-based investigation, it focuses on a type of refugee agency in resettlement. My observations in this chapter are best viewed as interesting correlations than a distinct causal path. In summary, Chapter VI provides a separate yet important perspective in our understanding of refugee behavior in resettlement.

## Chapter Conclusion

The examination of resettled Bhutanese refugees (or any resettled refugee group for that matter) is as complex as it is important. Life in resettlement is tied to, among other things, local institutions (Hein 1993; Naywn 2006, 2010), the host society's stringent economic expectations (Ott 2011; Potocky-Tripodi 2001, 2003a, 2003b; Rumbaut 1989), the refugee population's adjustment mechanisms (Barkdull et al. 2011; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003; Markovic and Manderson 2000; Schweitzer et al. 2006) and shifting family dynamic and identity frames (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006). In sum, resettlement is a complex endeavor that demands a precise and meticulous investigation. My research focus on refugee agency and refugee identity is an important piece in understanding refugee issues and resettlement better, but I hope it is only a part of the a more comprehensive investigation (and perhaps, policy change) into refugees and resettlement. In my dissertation, I provide an interesting and complex slice of life of a refugee community in resettlement, but it is far from a complete picture.



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

To prepare for the examination of the impact of resettlement on a Bhutanese refugee community, I reviewed a variety of pertinent scholarships. The relevant disciplines include political science (mostly limited to immigration), public policy, economics, anthropology, sociology, and social psychology, giving my work a truly interdisciplinary character. Given the diversity of the disciplines, there was a wide variety of theoretical approaches to examining migration and refugee issues. Some works in political science, sociology, and economics worked with general theories and expectations, which was reflected in their statistical analyses (Borjas 1989, 1999; Hein 1992; Massey et al. 1998; Portes and Stepick 1985; Rumbaut 1989); other social scientific studies were comprised of various interpretive case studies (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003; Colic-Peisker and Williams 2003; Gold 1992, 1998; Malkki 1992, 1995a, 1995b). These contributions were instrumental in establishing a theoretical baseline as well as empirical expectations, which were further supplemented by social psychological work on social identities and intergroup contact (Barth 1969; Jenkins 1994, 1996, 2002; Tajfel and Turner 1986; Vignoles et al. 2006). In the interest of brevity and efficiency, I present this review in the form of thematic sections.

Throughout American history, immigration has been underlined by strategic considerations of labor and political interests (Zolberg 2006, 14). Refugee resettlement represents those norms (Hein 1993; Ott 2011) even though it is often presented as a humanitarian

exception. The process of resettlement resembles a political trade-off between the host government and the incoming refugees. The primary interest of the US government is for refugees to be self-sufficient almost immediately, i.e. to be employed within three months of their arrival and independent of welfare (Nawyn 2006, 1520).<sup>6</sup> This burden of self-sufficiency guarantees the immediate participation of refugees in the US economy, but it arguably comes at the cost of integration or assimilation into the host society.<sup>7</sup> Studies show that despite economic participation, refugee communities find it difficult to connect their social experiences to American society (Franz 2003; Ives 2007). Immigrant communities generally attempt to recreate an environment that is familiar to them in host societies. The quintessential example of this behavior, and expressed agency, comes in the form of large ethnic enclaves, like the Cuban community in Miami, or Chinese and Korean communities in California (Borjas 1999; Gold 1988, 1992; Portes and Rumbaut 2006, 2010). Moreover, the US government seems largely uninterested in measuring or addressing immigrant integration [Government Accountability Office (GAO 2012)] as long as the economic criterion is fulfilled. Therefore, I view resettlement as a political transaction; in return for providing refugees with citizenship and concomitant privileges, the US obtains an injection of labor for local economies across the country (Dwyer 2010; Kallick 2012).

Resettlement, therefore, can be roughly viewed from two separate lenses: a political-bureaucratic view and a refugee-based experiential view. This dissertation is centered on the

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<sup>6</sup> Local agencies provide financial support for three months, for which they are paid a fixed amount per refugee by ORR. In resettlement, refugees are generally entitled to welfare such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Social Security Insurance (SSI), state child health insurance (SCHIP), and Medicaid benefits (Singer and Wilson 2006, 18). As refugees become permanent residents and citizens, they qualify for 'regular' welfare like Medicaid and TANF.

<sup>7</sup> Portes and Rumbaut (2006) argue the ethnic consciousness of immigrants persists partially due to the enduring prejudice in the host society (126).

latter, which in turn, helps with the de-construction of the former, i.e. structural resettlement but from the point of view of refugees. In examining the impact of resettlement on refugees, I am invested in studying the Bhutanese refugees' social identities. My research is an attempt to understand Bhutanese refugees' agency, expressed through their group identity and cultural practices. This work is an exposition of social identity within the context of immigrant adjustment. By exploring the recent experiences of Bhutanese refugees, I study the dynamics of identity in its persistence of ethno-national roots (the primordialist argument), as well as in its shifting nature (the constructivist strain).

In resettlement, refugees belong to a unique subset of immigrants. Like other immigrant groups, refugees are strongly motivated by the welfare of their families and succeeding generations (Portes and Rumbaut 2006, 2010). On the other hand, refugees are survivors of painful experiences resulting from, among other factors, ethnic and political persecution, forced migration, and forced exile in refugee camps (UNHCR n.d.).<sup>8</sup> It is likely that the overall experiences of refugees make them more motivated, even desperate to succeed in resettlement. In the resettlement environment—i.e. the realization of promise of permanent home—how are their social identities affected? Does their history of trauma and conflict push refugees to reconsider their group identity? Does the emergence of new possibilities and successes lead to a shift in identity? Or, do these factors entrench the refugees' ethno-national identities instead?

For my investigation I borrow from a variety of identity-related frameworks, ranging from political ethnography to social psychology. My theoretical preference is based on the constructivist interpretation of identity, but I believe social constructivism needs to incorporate

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<sup>8</sup> Initial resettlement is also documented to be stressful via pressures of employment and linguistic adjustment (Aebenyiga et al. 2013; Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011).

some primordial facets of identity and belonging. Refugee crises are relevant and even urgent in the global geopolitics. At an individual level, refugee crisis represents a crisis of and struggle for identification. The status of a refugee signifies loss, and a distinct inability to redress this situation (Arendt 1958). Refugees are stripped of their legal and political rights, rendering them ghosts outside the Westphalian state system. Hannah Arendt (1958) articulates the situation of refugees as such:

The calamity of the rightless [refugees] is not that they are deprived of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, or of equality before the law and freedom of opinion – formulas which were designed to solve problems *within* given communities – but that they no longer belong to any community whatsoever. Their plight is not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them; not only they are oppressed but that nobody wants even to oppress them (296).

At least in theory, durable solutions are meant to guide refugees back into political relevance, by re-admitting them into society and providing them with a sense of belonging. Like repatriation and reintegration, resettlement represents a path out of liminality and uncertainty of refugee camps, toward a life of citizenship and rights. As these permanent solutions are difficult to come by, they often aren't subject to the critical eye or policy-based analysis. On a similar note, study of refugees and immigration can use a more nuanced theoretical approach.

The overall approach of social sciences is to treat refugee groups within the larger immigrant category in resettlement. This un-critical approach is understandable in some ways. The sharp, concrete delineation of refugees in the camps becomes fuzzy in resettlement. In their adaptation and possibly assimilation, immigrant experiences are likely to overlap with that of refugee groups. However, there are key distinctions between the two groups. Incoming refugee populations can be considered a special group of immigrants. The US federal

government offers structural protections through a variety of welfare provisions and training to refugee populations (Gold 1988, 1992; Hein 1993, 1997; Nawyn 2006, 2010). For instance, refugee families in the US are immediately eligible for financial support for the first three months.<sup>9</sup> With time, refugee families qualify for specific welfare provisions like Medicaid and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) [Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) 2011]. Resettlement also translates into immediate eligibility for legal employment, as well as permanent residency and eventually, US citizenship. The humanitarian origin of resettlement has its limits, however; US resettlement pressures refugees to become self-sufficient in a short time frame (Hein 1993). Following its de-centralization policy, the US disperses refugee families across the country (Ott 2011). Resettled refugees may enjoy an initial advantage over other immigrants, but this edge should be understood in its proper context. It is important to state that refugee communities often require such assistance, in comparison to other immigrant groups, as they start their life anew: 50 percent of refugees receive some form of welfare in their first 24 months (Potocky 1996). In addition to the state-centric welfare and training, refugees often require support in accessing healthcare, especially mental health services, given their past experiences (Beiser 2006, 2009; de Carvalho and Pinto 2018; Kingsbury et al. 2018; Simich et al. 2005).<sup>10</sup>

For refugees, their pre-refugee history and refugee-centric experiences continue to be influential factors in their adaptation (Fuglerud 1997; Lacroix 2004). In social psychology, scholars have traced the link between past and present in the study of identities as well as

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<sup>9</sup> The length of support may vary based on states and nature of the family's needs. This support for three months has been reduced from the original time of 18 months (Rumbaut 1989).

<sup>10</sup> The challenge in resettlement is most explicitly represented in the form of high suicide rate among refugee communities. Scholars like Potocky (1996) have found that the US doesn't provide sufficient mental health services to incoming refugees. In my research, I have also found refugees to be reluctant to address these issues or are often ignorant in accessing necessary services.

response to upheaval like influx of immigration (Jetten and Hutchison 2011; Jetten and Wohl 2012). I work with the assumption that pre-refugee identities and post-refugee identities are linked but are not necessarily the same.<sup>11</sup> Despite their shared experiences, refugee groups are not monolithic. In resettlement, refugees can cluster around pre-refugee categorizations of ethnicity and class (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Gold 1992; Markovic and Manderson 2000). On the other hand, refugee adaptation can also be contingent on the local context of resettlement—location and host attitude (Ives 2007; Portes and Rumbaut 2006, 2010). The study of post-refugee identities, therefore, needs to consider all these contextual factors, which are unique and critical for refugee communities and identities. Resettlement means starting over in a foreign environment. During this process of adjustment, I expect refugee group identities to undergo a reexamination. This is based on opportunity and experience. First, resettlement provides space for refugees to shed the unwanted label of refugee.<sup>12</sup> Second, what form of internal negotiation takes place within the refugee group? Put differently, does the community identify itself through the identity that was long denied, i.e. Bhutanese? The myth of or belief in common roots is critical in ethnic identity, perhaps more so for refugee families. Or, is there a perceptive identity shift toward a different identity? This shift could be toward a Nepali identity, their ethnic origin and host country for the last two decades, or to an assimilated US identity. Or, is there a room for hybrid or conglomerate form of identities? There is precedent of reinvention by refugee groups in shunning their previous national identities (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Malkki 1995a, 1995b). The answer to these questions is, as expected, complicated.

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<sup>11</sup> By pre-refugee identity, I refer to identity status before the displacement; post-refugee identity refers to identities in resettlement, i.e. after the period of liminality.

<sup>12</sup> The concept of refugee is variously described as a political label (Scalettaris 2007, 38; Hein 1993, 44), or a form of external categorization (Jenkins 1994, 199).

The question of identity is intriguing especially in the context of resettlement. The US government resettles refugee families, rather than individuals (another difference from immigrant communities). The older generation of the refugee community might differ from the younger individuals in what constitutes their ethnic heritage and national identity (Byrne 2011; Jaji 2011). Both the Bhutanese and Nepali categories meet at the intersection of ethnic and national identity. Re-negotiation of group identity in resettlement also represents a distinct agency, particularly in resettlement. As Eriksen (2010) astutely notes, defining ethnic identity is difficult; it is wiser to lean on the subjects' self-perception of ethnic identity. In contrast to the present works on migration, my work strives to highlight the agency of refugees, especially apparent in the context of resettlement. For refugees, opting for resettlement itself is an act of agency. As I write this chapter, a few thousand Bhutanese refugees remain in consolidated camps in Nepal, hoping to be repatriated to Bhutan (Expert Interview, personal communication, 05/27/2017). It is evident that some refugees long to return home, while others have made the fateful decision to resettle.<sup>13</sup>

The process of group identification is inherently political; identities can change or cascade. Laitin (1998) in his political ethnography, infers that identity groups are willing to shift their national identity when they perceive that other participants of the group are also willing to do so.<sup>14</sup> From a social psychological perspective, an identity shift marks an 'exit' from a less favorable group identification (Tajfel and Turner 1986). As resettlement is a consequential

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<sup>13</sup> In her study of Liberian refugees, Byrne (2013) explores refugee agency in likelihood of opting for resettlement. She argues refugees attached to their ethnic bond are more likely to choose repatriation, compared to refugees with 'liberal' worldview, who are more likely to opt for resettlement.

<sup>14</sup> In Laitin's (1998) study, the political exigency is the fall of Soviet Union, and he measures the likelihood of preservation of Russian among Russian-speaking populations in Estonia, Kazakhstan, Latvia, and Ukraine. The 'tipping' in favor of native language, he argues, is based on future considerations and political context.

experience, an identity shift is one possible outcome for many refugees. The next logical step, then, is to identify the sources contributing to any identity shift. Immigration scholarship, in emphasizing their present-day struggles and adjustment, find little room for past refugee experiences (Franz 2003; Markovic and Manderson 2000). While the influences of the present (and consideration of the future) are incontrovertibly relevant, so are the varied experiences of the refugees. The past experiences of Bhutanese refugees include instances of alleged kidnapping, rape, and torture that forced the first wave of the Bhutanese exodus to Nepal (*Amnesty International* 1992; Saul 2000) as well as the extended un-welcome stay in Nepali refugee camps. Consideration of these experiences will be just as important when negotiating their identity in resettlement.

In summary, the long-term ‘solution’ of resettlement is a consequential one. In addition to the usual economic and political adjustments, resettlement has an identity-transforming impact on refugee individuals and communities. In my examination of resettlement-based identity, I expand on relevant works on refugee life at different stages. I begin with a discussion of available literature on refugee experiences in refugee camps, as the experience of displacement leaves an indelible mark on refugees (Lacroix 2004). I follow this section with a review of resettlement-centered scholarship, sub-divided into the discussion of the structural or top-down view of resettlement, and the experience-centric bottom-up view of resettlement. Here, I borrow generously from a variety of perspectives, including well-known theoretical frameworks as well as stand-alone case studies and pertinent policy reports. I follow these sections with the elaboration of relevant social psychological frameworks on social identities. There is a plethora of theoretical and experimental work in this tradition that can be fitted into my research.



## **Refugee Experience in Camps: A Precursor to Agency**

I view the examination of experiences—in the resettled present as well as the refugee past—as a crucial component of the analysis of refugee identities. The exploration of refugee experiences, moreover, underlines the agency of refugees. Refugee camps survive in the margins of our country-based international order, and our political attention. However, some case studies have contributed in creating an intriguing picture of refugee agency and social organization (Byrne 2013; Jaji 2011; Malkki 1992). One positive consequence of these studies is that they help dispel the myth of refugees as helpless victims, who are perpetually waiting for assistance. Often, refugees are surviving through an active struggle and resistance, where identity is often central to their worldviews and actions.

In Kakuma and Dabaab camps of Kenya, Jaji (2011) captured a conflict between camp authorities and the refugees. The management of these camps was very strict, to dissuade local settlement or the integration of refugees into Kenyan society. The Kenyan government applied sanctions and the strict enforcement of rules on refugees from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Somalia and Uganda. Refugee responses ranged from passive resistance to confrontation, but mostly through the “maneuvering and manipulation of loopholes rather than confrontation” (237). From seeking information on refugee rights to acquiring more resources than rationed, Jaji depicts refugees as active agents. Through their fieldwork in three different Congolese camps in Rwanda, Allough et al. (2017) articulate the active economic participation of refugees. The refugees in these camps were responsible for making economic and business decisions, with the help of aid agencies, and often worked in collaboration with the host society. This economic agency is emphasized as a positive form of refugee involvement in

host society. These inferences lay in a sharp contrast to the general view of refugees as victims (Nicassio 1985, 153).

Jennifer Byrne (2013), in her research on Liberian refugees in Ghana, examined the role that national identity played in refugees determining their future. The Liberian national identity is central as well as contextual in refugee decisions on local integration in Ghana (20-21). Individuals with a strong connection to their ancestry, culture, and language were resistant to building new homes in Ghana. On the other hand, refugees who were open to reintegration or resettlement pointed to “a continued desire to resettle to a developed country with an expectation of finding more opportunity and upward mobility” (53). The latter group perceived their Liberian identity as a combination of ethnocultural, civic, and liberal values, and emphasized their desire for self-sufficiency.<sup>15</sup> Refugee views, as Byrne shows, are far from uniform, and they are affected by age, education level, and gender. This work hints at the revision of group identity, following protracted refugee experiences.

Ethnicity, especially in the refugee camps is complex (Jaji 2015, 49), as the exile of refugees challenges the typical, territory-based idea of national identity. After all, “identity is always mobile and processual, partly self-construction, partly categorization by others, partly a condition, a status, a label, a weapon, a shield, a fund of memories, et cetera” (Malkki 1992, 37). As an anthropologist, Malkki is instrumental in linking refugee experiences with social identity. Like Byrne (2013), Malkki captures how varying contexts can lead to disparate manifestations of refugee identity. She contrasts refugee experiences in a rural Tanzanian refugee camp and its urban counterpart. In the former, refugees from different countries evaluate and reconstruct an

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<sup>15</sup> Dimensions of civic identity: feeling; language; citizenship; education; respect laws.  
Dimensions of liberal identity: opportunity, self-sufficiency; freedom; democracy; rule of law; tolerance; property.

ethnonational Hutu identity for themselves. On the other hand, in the urban camps, the refugees were not interested in any national categorization, instead developing a cosmopolitan group identity. In the case of Rwandan refugees, the subject of genocide forced them reinterpret their ethnic identities beyond the traditional Hutu-Tutsi binary categories: “Rwandan refugees endeavor to repel the fugitives label and legitimize their claim to refugee status through a constructivist interpretation of ethnicity which emphasizes atypical experiences that deviate from the hegemonic narrative in Rwanda” (Jaji 2015, 17). I find these contrasting experiences to be evidence of disparate refugee efforts at social organization. The management of camp economics and politics (Alloush et al. 2017; Jaji 2011), as well as the readjustment of identities (Byrne 2013; Jaji 2015; Malkki 1995a, 1995b) assists the social organization of behaviors and group relations (Barth 1969, 15). In exploring refugee identities, as well as the performative aspect of their group identities, Malkki (1992) and Jaji (2015) underline the agency of refugees, a concept that is largely absent in many refugee-centered works.

Humans are social and political beings. Nations and nationalism are not built around ideologies but cultural systems (Anderson 1983 quoted by Malkki 1992, 37). It is, therefore, reasonable that refugees attempt to re-establish their old social systems, even in refugee camps. Yet, the pall of refugee-ness is indelible. “Refugee studies scholars have observed that people undergo vast shifts in patterns of social life in refugee camps, learning customs that will serve them well or poorly in other settings” (Kibreab 1999 paraphrased by Holzer 2012, 275). While the length of exile may vary—Bhutanese refugees spent two decades in camps; Bosnian refugees waited around five years for resettlement—the experience of being a refugee can make some of these groups reconsider their ethnic, cultural, and national identification. Determination of group identity—either maintaining it or changing it—can serve a political function in the long run

(Laitin 1998). I view these identity narratives as evidence of agency of refugees, however limited it may be in refugee camps.

Revisiting the immigrant-refugee distinction, one principal difference is the agency (or, lack thereof). Irrespective of their legal status, economic migrants choose their migration destination and economic actions. By contrast, circumstances limit the agency of refugees. Refugees are driven out of their homes or are forced to flee across state borders because of ‘push’ factors like fear of persecution and violence, rather than economic ‘pull’ factors (Moore and Shellman 2007, 811). This is evident in their choice of resettlement as well. Choosing resettlement, especially for protracted refugees, is underlined by desperation. Karen refugees in Thailand reflected that “many of those preparing to resettle had few illusions about how hard life would be after resettlement” (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011, 219). Perhaps, this was the sentiment felt by Bhutanese refugees during my visit in 2010. Rosalind (2010b) reports a chaotic conflict taking place within Bhutanese refugee community in Nepali refugee camps. A dissident group of refugees had waged a cultural campaign—ranging from poetry to theater—advocating return to Bhutan and vilification of resettlement to western countries and by association refugees favoring resettlement. This conflict culminated in the harassment and even physical attack of the latter group (306). These studies are salient in dispelling the misconception of resettlement being the obvious or easy choice. Many refugees choose resettlement over the dreaded alternative of a lifetime in refugee camps. Yet, these decisions are far from easy as they are often perceived to be traitors for turning their back on their home, as attested by some of my interviewees.<sup>16</sup> Refugees are generally defined by the narrative of helplessness (Kumsa 2006; Ludwig 2016; Rajaram 2002; Zetter 1991) but as the discussion in this section shows, refugee

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<sup>16</sup> I articulate the context and history of Bhutanese refugees in Chapter III.

communities are far from docile. Even in the political protection afforded by their 'refugee' categorization, they have to struggle for resources, their future, and also for defining their identities.

## Review of Resettlement-Centered Scholarship

There are three durable solutions to the global refugee crisis: repatriation, reintegration, and resettlement (UNHCR 2015, 2018). Among these solutions, refugee resettlement is often seen as the ‘last resort’ (Ott 2011, 4). Refugees generally prefer the option of a safe return home (voluntary repatriation), and in some cases, absorption into the host society (reintegration) (Adelman 2001; Chimni 1998; Van Hear 2014). The choice of resettlement—when countries offer it to refugees—is realistically understood as the last of the durable solutions. “Resettlement is more expensive [for host states] ... and requires greater cultural adjustment on the part of the refugees” (Jenkins and Schmeidl 1995, 71). A minority of (generally affluent) countries<sup>17</sup> offer resettlement to about one percent of the global refugee population.<sup>18</sup> In offering resettlement to refugees fearing their safety and protracted stay in camps (Singer and Wilson 2006), resettlement is situated on a humanitarian pedestal (Betts 2014). From a critical point of view, states entertain foreign policy and economic considerations in offering resettlement to refugee groups (Chimni 1998; Hein 1993).

Refugee resettlement has yet to produce volumes of research and scholarship. Apart from a few specific case studies on refugee adaptation (e.g. works by Colic-Peisker and Eastmond) studies addressing refugees are largely embedded within the broader spheres of immigration and institutions. These works are influential in delineating the structural system of resettlement (works similar to Singer and Wilson 2006), and are often useful when inquiring

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<sup>17</sup> Number of countries offering resettlement has grown from 14 in 2005 to 37 in 2016. Traditional host countries like the US, however, generally absorb majority of the ‘burden’ of incoming refugee populations. For more information:

<https://www.unhcr.org/information-on-unhcr-resettlement.html>

<sup>18</sup> The current estimate is less than one percent, considering the drastic reduction of resettled refugees recently. Number of refugees resettled dropped by 50 percent between 2016 and 2017. For more information: <https://www.unhcr.org/resettlement-in-the-united-states.html>

about the impact of immigrant or refugee introduction to host societies. With the passing of the 1980 Refugee Act, the resettlement process has become standardized in the United States (Hein 1993; Singer and Wilson 2006). As part of that legislation, the US Congress and the President set an annual ceiling on the number of refugees to be received. While grounded in humanitarianism, resettlement is more of a trade-off. For refugees, resettlement brings stressful expectations—most especially the economic self-sufficiency rule (Gold 1988; Hein 1993; Rumbaut 1989; Singer and Wilson 2006) –while also providing the self-affirming experience of becoming legal citizens (Rumbaut 1994).

In contrast to this traditional approach, an emerging line of inquiry is more interested in exploring the experiences of immigrants and refugees (with Portes and Rumbaut being the most notable scholars). Largely sociological in style, these works capture the immigrant experience, which forms the basis for investigation into identities and belonging. As an ethnographer, I value a bottom-up emphasis on experiences in pursuit of my research question, which links up well with the investigation of identities. Because the extant scholarship directly covering resettlement is relatively thin, I borrow from a variety of overlapping social science disciplines including political science, public policy, and sociology.<sup>19</sup> This section locates the political and economic positions of immigrants and refugees in American society. Some scholars take an economic or resource-driven approach to assess the impact of immigrant contributions to a society. Others employ a sociological framework that highlights lived experiences. While the resettlement-as-experience perspective is central to my dissertation, it is pertinent to examine and deconstruct resettlement from a bureaucratic lens. Structural aspects of resettlement have a

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<sup>19</sup> I largely ignore some interesting but largely out of scope work on mental health for the sake of brevity and clarity.

direct effect on the experiences of refugees (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Nawyn 2006, 2010).



## **Top-Down View of Resettlement: Bureaucratic and Economic Picture**

As with most decisions on immigration, political and economic expectations underline resettlement (Hein 1993). What is the underlying interest of the US in offering resettlement to refugees? Alternatively, what does the country provide to incoming refugees, and what does it expect from them in return? According to Rumbaut (1989, 102), US action on resettlement is designed to make welfare accessible to refugees (at the same level as US citizens), and for the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to reimburse states (and local institutions) for their refugee programs. In return, the principal goal of the 1980 Refugee Act is for refugees to acquire economic self-sufficiency and contribute to the US economy (Hein 1993; Singer and Wilson 2006; Rumbaut 1989). The self-sufficiency rule expects refugees to participate in the labor market, and to be free from welfare dependency as quickly as possible (Rumbaut 1989, 116). As part of the US's decentralized approach, the ORR and the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) disperse refugees across the US and guide local agencies in addressing refugee needs (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Nawyn 2006, 2010).<sup>20</sup> The process of resettlement, at least on paper, should ensure that refugee flows do not overwhelm a local community's resources, and that refugee labor is matched with the local demand. Here, the assumption is that refugee communities are likely to be settled in their designated locations (Bloem and Loveridge 2017; Ott 2011)). However, this approach can lead to an inconsistent local response to refugee needs because capacity and institutions vary among states (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011, 232). Moreover, secondary migration patterns, i.e. the tendency of refugees to move away from their original resettlement site to new locations, is driven by a

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<sup>20</sup> PRM is housed within the US State Department, and ORR is housed under the Department of Health and Human Services.

desire for cultural proximity as well as the presence of ineffectual services and lack of economic opportunities at the primary location (Barkdull et al. 2012; Bloem and Loveridge 2017; Ott 2011).

George J. Borjas (1999) views the modern US immigration system as too lenient on immigrants, to the point of recklessness. In his econometric analysis, Borjas paints an economic picture where the participation of under-skilled immigrants, especially Latin groups, in the labor market and the welfare arena comes at the expense of low-skilled American workers and argues that this ultimately hurts the economy. Borjas is also critical of the formation of immigrant ethnic enclaves; in his view, the enclaves lead to economic stagnation instead of economic mobility for immigrants. Among the economists studying immigration, Borjas belongs firmly in the ‘immigration reduces low-skilled native wages’ camp; he is an advocate of establishing a limited, merit-based immigration system in the US. On the other side of the econometric spectrum, scholars like David Card (1990, 2001) is in the ‘immigration raises all Americans’ wages’ camp (Putnam 2007, 166). These empirical divisions have transformed into ideological ones. In *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity*, Huntington (2004), advocates for a return to Protestant, English-speaking ways of American past. On the other hand, Portes and Rumbaut (2004) essentially accuse George J. Borjas of trying to sabotage the opportunities that he was offered as an earlier immigrant from other immigrants.

Objectively, there is ample supporting evidence that refugees’ and immigrants’ economic contribution increases, and welfare dependency decreases over time in the US. It is accurate to say that “[w]hen immigrants arrive in the host country, they lack many of the skills that are valuable in host country (*e.g.*, language, knowledge about the location of jobs, etc.)” (Borjas 1989, 472). However, the economic situation of refugees is observed to improve with time

(Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Rumbaut 1989). It generally takes five to six years for the refugee's economic status to reach parity with their US-born counterparts (Shaw and Poulin 2015, 1100). Refugees and immigrants, especially within their ethnic enclaves, are known to create self-perpetuating economic and cultural networks. This is evident especially in their entrepreneurial ventures, which utilize immigrant labor but contribute to the overall local economic value (Gold 1988, 1992). Akron, my research field site, has benefited economically from the immigrant influx and their economic ventures through increasing employment, home ownership, and business revenue (*New American Economy* 2016).

Portes and Rumbaut's (2006) work on the socialization of immigrants in American society, underlined by relative deprivation, further serves as a riposte to Borjas's view of immigration. Portes and Rumbaut view ethnic enclaves as an important economic and social alternative to success for many immigrant groups. The success of immigrant groups in host societies is inherently dependent on their networks (357), and ethnic enclaves are a sophisticated manifestation of these networks. The authors (interestingly) observe that the first generation of immigrants generally toil in low-wage jobs to pave the way for the second generation, who, they argue are more likely to choose selective acculturation—preservation of their immigrant culture, alongside fluency in American culture (350)—instead of assimilation. While Borjas (1999) considers ethnic enclaves to be communities preventing the immigrant integration, Portes and Rumbaut (2006) instead find them to be consequences of (at least partly) native prejudice in American society (126). The inescapable yet variable facet of identity is further demonstrated in the dissimilar experiences of immigrant groups: Mexican and Haitian communities were more likely to face discrimination, compared to Chinese, Korean, Cuban, and Vietnamese groups (Portes and Rumbaut 2006, 271).

Understanding the political place of refugees is related to absorbing the difference between refugees and immigrants. Refugees only comprise a small portion of the overall immigrant population but there are important distinctions between refugees and (economic) migrants. Unlike other immigrants, a host society like the US provides resettled refugees with the privileges and protections associated with citizenship. This includes a fast-track work permit, permanent residency, and naturalized citizenship (in most cases) and resettlement-specific welfare (Hein 1993). Rumbaut (1994) notes that obtaining permanent residency and citizenship (symbols of legal-national identity) has a positive effect on immigrants (757). If the bureaucratic identity of refugee comes with negative connotations and a sense of helplessness (Zetter 1991), life in resettlement re-introduces myriad privileges of citizen life. It is pertinent to note these provisions and privileges are generally not afforded to economic migrants, at least not initially.

This intimate relationship between refugees and the host state also has some less than ideal consequences for refugees. Jeremy Hein (1993) provides perhaps the most authoritative work on the state-refugee link. According to him, “[T]he state’s unique relationship with refugees is a subset of its larger function of reproducing the social order” (54). Here, refugees are distinct from immigrants because the state is responsible for their social organization and welfare. In resettling refugees, the US model is based on the number of refugees and has an emphasis on economic adaptation (Lanphier 1983, 4). The US resettlement policy actively pushes refugees toward paying their economic ‘dues.’ From the instant refugees board a plane for resettlement, they are formally in debt to the International Organization of Migration (IOM) for the cost of their plane tickets (Bloem and Loveridge 2017, 26). Similarly, the economic expectation of US is “for refugees to achieve economic self-sufficiency as soon as possible”

(Nawyn 2006, 1520). This translates into refugees being compelled to start paying their rent within six months. Refugee families get cash assistance for the first eight months, a provision that has been shortened from an original period of 36 months (Ott 2011, 5).<sup>21</sup> This expectation of self-sufficiency is the driving force of resettlement as far as the US is concerned; it's a priority with no exceptions.

There have been some relevant statistical works on refugee income and earnings. As mentioned earlier, human capital serves an important positive function in refugees' economic integration. In resettlement, age, proficiency, time spent in the US, and education are crucial markers of economic progress (Borjas 1989; Nawyn et al. 2012; Potocky and McDonald 1995; Potocky-Tripodi 2003; Rumbaut 1989). In her study on refugee economic status of East European, Southeast Asian, and Cuban refugees, Potocky-Tripodi (2001) found education, gender, and household composition to be statistically significant predictors. As mentioned previously, family and community dynamics are often more important in refugee socioeconomic status than human capital factors (Rumbaut 1989). Potocky-Tripodi's (2001) analysis is also notable for casting doubt on social capital's relevance on overall immigrant adaptation. Operationalized as networks, ethnic composition and formal assistance, she found social capital has minimal impact on refugee employment, public assistance, and earnings (34). She raises a relevant question of whether immigrant social capital should be represented by their communities or the families (35).

The social and ethnic networks, often aggregated as 'social capital', are more influential in the immigrants' socio-cultural adaptation rather than their economic capital. It is also likely

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<sup>21</sup> As refugees move forward to applying for permanent residence and citizenship, they can become eligible for other forms of welfare.

that the economic relations within immigrant networks aren't readily captured in conventional frameworks and aggregate units of statistical analysis. The general concept of social capital was built on notions of community norms and reciprocity (Putnam 2000). Moreover, larger refugee networks translate into more dependents in a family unit (Rumbaut 1989). Family composition and the state's welfare system are equally crucial in the determination of economic adaptation (122). The longer refugee families live in the US, the more their economic situation is likely to improve. This inference is supported by other sources: the longer refugees spend in the US, the more likely they are to attain parity in economic levels (i.e. their economic stature improves) and welfare participation (i.e. their dependence on state welfare decreases) with the US population (Capps et al. 2015). The economic impact of refugee communities rises over time (while their ethnic ties are likely to get weaker over successive generations). Applying social capital to refugees, therefore, necessitates contextualization.

Desbarats (1985) observed that the presence of existing refugee communities and the milder climate of the western US were important considerations alongside access to public assistance and income. According to Singer and Wilson (2006), newer refugee populations have been documented to prefer settlement in semi-urban areas. This is in stark contrast to the metropolitan gateway cities that were preferred by refugee populations in the past. Based on its interest in decentralization, the US government is likely to continue settling refugees away from traditionally immigrant-friendly areas. In Singer and Wilson's (2006) view, the size of a city, diversity of its population, labor market, and access to healthcare and education are favorable factors for refugee integration (19).

The social characteristics of refugee groups vary and can influence their mode of incorporation (Rumbaut 1989, 106). The level of education, fluency in English, and the

ownership of a vehicle are universally important for success in the economic life of the first generation of the refugees (Nawyn et al. 2012; Potocky-Tripodi 1996, 2001, 2003; Rumbaut 1989). In contrast to earlier works on the impact of social capital on refugee economic profiles, Ryan Allen (2009) provides an inferential contrast. Allen conducted a multi-method research project to examine the effect of ethnic networks on the earnings of resettled Somali refugees in Portland, Maine. Through his statistical inferences, he shows that the annual income of Somali refugees increased as years passed if they were part of established Somali networks (358). He found more evidence of vestiges the community's interest in establishing the ethnic-national network and in re-creating the expectations and restraints that underlined their collective past. Through interview data, he articulates a contrasting picture for Somali women – their annual income lowered over time when exposed to the same statistical variables. This indicates that representatives of the first generation of resettled refugees are often likely to practice an intransigent form of nativism (Portes and Rumbaut 2006).

Specific to refugees, there is growing evidence of their economic value and participation in US society. A score of institutions have reported that refugee individuals are quick to enter the labor force (partly influenced by the self-sufficiency rule), and help to improve the local economy (GAO 2012; *New American Economy* 2016). The improvement in the refugee economic profile has come through a considerable growth of small businesses and entrepreneurship (Kallick 2012), and the subsequent rise in local spending power as well as property value (*New American Economy* 2016). The influx of Bhutanese refugees has led to a positive effect for the local economy in Akron. In addition to the opening of new businesses and rising home ownership (as well as rising rental values), the refugee advent has overseen an increase of \$207 million in the value of the local housing market (Vigdor 2017).

The institutionalist perspective on resettlement is equally important in completing the bureaucratic puzzle that is resettlement. There are three types of institutional structures in the US that assist refugees – voluntary agencies (volags), mutual assistance associations (MAA), and support agencies. Volags are the NGOs responsible for planning and distribution of refugees in the US (Nawyn 2010, 153).<sup>22</sup> Volags “are the non-profit organizations that the US government funds to assist refugees during the resettlement process” (Allen 2009, 338). Therefore, Volags work in close co-ordination with the ORR and a variety of grassroots-based support agencies. Support agencies are local institutions that oversee the local resettlement of refugees. These institutions provide a wide range of services to refugees, from reception at the airport, arranging initial housing, job placement, language classes, and legal services (Hein 1993; Singer and Wilson 2006). However, provisions offered by support agencies can vary widely from one state to another, as witnessed by Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny (2011). The principal responsibility of resettling Bhutanese refugees in Akron falls on the International Institute of Akron (IIA), a local support agency which receives funding from the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, one of the nine Volags described above.

On the other hand, MAA’s are ethnic organizations that serve a particular immigrant or ethnic group (Nawyn 2006). These organizations are a quintessential manifestation of growing political and social agency of a refugee or immigrant group. These organizations are established to assist the refugee community, independent of government support. As grassroots organizations, these organizations receive support from local resettlement agencies, and remain

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<sup>22</sup> There are nine VOLAGs: Church World Service (CWS), Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC), Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), International Rescue Committee (IRC), US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and World Relief Corporation (WR). USCRI is responsible for Bhutanese refugee resettlement.



active within the refugee populations. In the context of my study, the Bhutanese Community Association of Akron (BCAA) is the main MAA providing services. This organization is led by local Bhutanese refugees, and is the most visible political representation of the community.

Institutions play important, albeit varying, roles in resettlement. Local institutions function as the point of first contact for refugees, and an initial source of support. The hierarchy of institutions listed in the preceding paragraph facilitates as well as constrains refugee adjustment. Host states provide a home and concomitant protections to refugees, but also introduce them to a system of constraints (Hein 1993, 54; Nawyn 2006, 1511). Typically, Volags, with their proximity to the government, are inflexible in their policies and expectations of refugees. Volags' services "are more narrowly focused on the primary interest of [the] state in resettlement, which is for refugees to achieve economic self-sufficiency as soon as possible" (Nawyn 2006, 1520). On the other hand, support agencies and MAAs work intimately with refugee groups, often going beyond the bureaucratic system to provide socio-cultural support to the refugees (1525). On an interesting note, Nawyn observed very little difference between the functions of secular and religious institutions in serving refugees; both types of organizations are invested in making the cultural transition for refugees as smooth as possible (1516). Religious organizations are also known to step up when the designated support agencies are unable to address the challenges associated with resettlement (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011). Even though Volags are formal representatives of the US Government, local agencies disburse the necessary services and training, and MAAs subsequently rise to meet specific goals of the community, making them more intimate and culturally relevant to the refugees (Nawyn 2010, 158). As I will extrapolate in Chapter III, the respective roles of the local support agency (IIA)

and the MAA (BCAA) were useful in different ways to the Bhutanese refugee population in Akron. The significance of institutions cannot be overstated in the resettlement of refugees.

Therefore, resettlement is a ‘solution’ that comes with many strings of an economic nature. There have been studies on the impact of refugees (and immigrants) on US society (Card 1990; 2001; Borjas 1989, 1999) and the economic facets of refugees on the US (Hein 1993, 1997; Potocky-Tripodi 2001, 2003; Rumbaut 1989), which sketch a structural picture of US resettlement, and more importantly the place of refugees within this system. In the next section, I elaborate on works focusing on the experiences of refugees. In other words, I attempt to provide a picture of refugee-centric resettlement from the extant literature.

## **Bottom-Up View: Refugee Experiences**

What do refugees experience in resettlement? The implicit assumption underlining works on immigration is that all immigrants are looking to integrate into their host societies (Franz 2003; Ives 2007). While ‘integration’ is employed liberally in immigration works, it can possess different connotations. In a political context, local politicians may equate integration with the (economic, cultural, and political) assimilation of immigrants and refugees into the host society (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006). In his fantasized vision of American identity, Samuel Huntington (2004) argues that all immigrant groups should shun their cultural (and linguistic) ways to fully assimilate into the American identity.

If integration refers to social, political, and economic ways of life, immigrants actively participate in the economic front, while resisting cultural assimilation. Berry (1980) views integration as at the intersection of adoption of host culture and retention of native attachments (quoted by Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003, 348). The US administration generally regards integration from an economic perspective (Lee et al. 2015, 333), largely ignoring the communal integration of refugees. In their stated expectation of economic self-sufficiency of refugees, and passing the buck to the states, the US government does not seem too interested in integration (Capps et al. 2015; GAO 2012). While resettled refugees must participate in the economic sphere, they’re not entirely keen on cultural integration either. Research on immigrant agency – in the form of ethnic enclaves as well as secondary migration—suggests immigrants are uninterested in social integration (Borjas 1999; Portes 1987; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Rumbaut 1989). The social adaptation to resettlement is contextual and can heterogenous to the local host society the site as well as the refugee groups (Rumbaut 1989). Integration can be difficult during resettlement as refugee groups are fearful to approach their host community, and the latter is

often suspicious of the former. Let's turn our attention to the scholarship where experience of refugees is central to the inferences.

In articulating the 'mixed' experiences of the Karen refugees, Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny's (2011) work highlights both the success and challenges associated with resettlement. Corroborating the economic works on resettlement (Kallick 2012; Rumbaut 1989), the Karen community improved in the areas of employment, education and healthcare, following their initial adjustment period (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011, 234). The community gradually became more economically independent (contrary to assumptions that refugee populations remain dependent upon host states) but challenges regarding employment, education, and healthcare continued to persist. These narratives of success and challenges include extensive secondary migration, not only to be closer to established ethnic networks, but also to move to affordable locations. This is natural as migrant groups tend to look for familiar sources of support (Hardwick and Hume 2005, 195). Indochinese refugees exhibited this behavior during their resettlement as well (Rumbaut 1989). Although their resettlement is relatively new, Bhutanese refugees have been observed to participate in secondary migration extensively, mostly coming into Akron, Columbus, and Philadelphia.

An important inference of Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny's (2011) work is the role of varying institutions in determining the experiences of Karen refugees. Determination of the destination state of resettlement seemed a little arbitrary; moreover, the impact of host state institutions was observed to be not consistent, partly due to the US policy of decentralization of resettlement. The Karen refugees were resettled throughout the US, and the state-specific institutions' ability to address refugee needs varied (230). The local agencies were even more ill-prepared for the effects of secondary migration. "Although secondary migration is not unique

to Karen refugees, the US resettlement programme is ill-prepared to deal with this natural and expected movement” (234). The authors didn’t delve into secondary migration adequately but criticized the US policy of decentralization as it seemed to lead to inconsistent delivery assistance during post-resettlement phase. This criticism of the US resettlement practice is not novel, as reflected in the works of Hein (1993), Ong (2003), Kibria (1993), Bui (2004), and Barkdull, Weber, Swart, and Phillips (2012).

In his theoretical piece on place and identity, Gaim Kibreab (1999) posited that the displacement of refugees is influenced by three factors: attitudes of receiving society, local policy environment, and available employment opportunities for the refugees (387). Kibreab (1999) passionately argues that despite the pervading idea of globalization and borderless states, refugees remind us that place matters, as a sanctuary of culture and rights (385). In other words, despite displacement, refugees and migrants seek out cultural and social familiarity. While this assertion is accurate, displaced populations are also able to develop hybrid identities, without sacrificing their innate attachment to native culture and land (Malkki 1992, 37; White 2002, 81).

Hume and Hardwick (2005) empirically apply Kibreab’s (1999) proposition in their comparative case studies of African, Russian, and Ukrainian refugees resettled in Portland, Oregon. The authors found support for Kibreab’s (1999) proposed factors, providing a valuable insight on the refugees’ adjustment: “refugees to urban Oregon continue to hold on to their old identities even as they search for new identities...struggling to maintain their own cultural values and traditions even as they are being transformed by the external conditions of their new homes” (Hardwick and Hume 2005, 206-207). The refugee mode of adaptation in the US can be contextual (Markovic and Manderson 2000; Rumbaut 1989) but all of them rely on institutional

support from the state (Hein 1993; Nawyn 2006, 2010) as well as ethnic and national networks (Allen 2009; Franz 2003; Portes and Rumbaut 2006).

Colic-Peisker, a sociologist, views refugees as agents, and applies theories on social identity in her analysis. Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003) employ human capital and social identity frameworks in studying Bosnian refugees resettled in Australia. They argue that refugee situations and the force-fitting of the refugee label led to a loss of Bosnian identity (338). Here, their revision of group identity is split along the class lines. Bosnian individuals with higher levels of human capital—consisting of English proficiency, formal skills, and urban backgrounds—generally reconciled their old identity with their new social status, forming a hybrid social identity in the process. Based on Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity perspective, these Bosnian refugees 'exited' their previous identity to move into a more favorable status (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003, 352). On the other hand, Bosnians with lower human capital appeared to adopt an ethnic form of the Bosnian identity, expressing 'loyalty' in the process. Here, it is interesting to notice that Bosnians wanted to remove the tag of refugee, but their response to their ethnic identity varied. The development of social identities in resettlement is as fascinating as it is complex. Franz's (2003) comparative cases of Bosnian refugees in Vienna and New York, is similar in scope but emphasizes the role of the environment. Bosnian refugees, especially women, created networks with fellow Yugoslav nationals as well as Austrians in pursuit of economic opportunities. In contrast, New York's employment-first policy prevented these networks from forming (153). The latter, therefore, identified themselves along ethnic boundaries. These studies underscore that refugee behavior is far from monolithic.

In a separate yet ambitious study, Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2003) created an interesting typology of refugees, based on their attitudes toward resettlement – ‘achievers’ and ‘consumers’ practiced active resettlement; ‘endurers’ and ‘victims’ practiced passive resettlement. Such categorization places the onus on refugees regarding their attitude to resettlement. The active resettlers – who defined themselves through their achievements or possessions – were social, ambitious, and optimistic about their future in the host society; this group was generally comprised of young individuals (63). On the other hand, passive refugees were resigned to not being able to replicate their life before the war or the exile:

The main difference between the endurers and the victims is the degree of hopelessness.

Endurers try to keep a semblance of normal family life and support their children’s achievement, enduring their lot with some stoicism, while victims often completely retreat into the ‘sick role’ (74)

Loss of their previous social status activated emotional stress among the refugees (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003, 65). They further made an interesting observation that the victims here were more likely to become dependent on welfare and institutional support. Such differences in attitudes, worldviews, and perspectives on identities are common within refugee groups (Byrne 2013). Age and preparation for a life in resettlement are possible predictors. The ambitious and the ‘elite’ subsets travel to host societies first (Rumbaut 1989). The stragglers are often the older generation who, having endured many of the traumatic experiences, choose resettlement simply as a better alternative to life in refugee camps (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011).

In a similar study, Markovic and Manderson (2000) found that immigrant and refugee women practiced three types of adjustment strategies: they became more ethnic in their identities; they became ambivalent; or they became invested in their future in the host society

(321-324). Interestingly, Markovic and Manderson observed that the social inequalities of their home societies were replicated in social class differences among the women, a pertinent point for my research agenda. I find it natural for immigrant communities to attempt to replicate their social order as closely to their native societies as possible. In their study of the adjustment of women from the former Yugoslav republics, Markovic and Manderson (2000) observed that social inequalities embedded in the social structure of [the native society] ... resulted in social class differences among these immigrants” (324). This study provides credence to the importance of refugee attitudes in their adjustment. From my vantage point, these inferences reflect the ability of refugees (as well as any migrant group) to create their own social space within the host societies.

Benson, Sun, Hodge, and Androff (2011) conducted a study on Bhutanese refugees resettled in Arizona, with the goal of capturing the impact of religious practices on the community’s stress levels (540). They found English proficiency, education level, and social support to be significant factors in their adaptation (parallel to similar findings), but they did not find enough evidence to support their hypothesis (547). In my view, this is not a surprising inference. Religion often serves as a proxy for culture (Nawyn 2006, 1516). Refugee communities invest in the reproduction of culture and their old ways of life but these are unlikely to reduce stress in the ways that employment and positive social status can; human capital is universally relevant in the adjustment of refugees (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Hero and Preuhs 2007; Hume and Hardwick 2005; Kibreab 1999). The authors further employed a Likert-scale questionnaire when detailed follow-up interviews would likely have been more appropriate in the generation of nuanced data.



Refugee experiences can vary from one group to another; each refugee population comes with their own cultural expectations and practices.<sup>23</sup> In many cases, immigrant groups can be treated differently by the host community. In developed societies, white or white-looking refugee communities appear to fare better (Colic-Peisker 2005, 2009). In the US context, Asian and to an extent, Latino communities are likely to receive better receptions compared to African-descent immigrants like the Haitians (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006). In other words, race and ethnic origins matter; ethnicity and race have coterminous boundaries (Eriksen 2010). Portes and Rumbaut (2006, 265) further enlist keen observations on differential adaptation of immigrant generations: if the first generation is largely a working-class community, strong ethnic communities can still propel the second and third generation in their social mobility; on the other hand, if the first generation is a working-class community with weak ethnic ties, it leads future generations into stagnation and downward assimilation. In delineating the social capital (or, ethnic ties) of immigrants, Portes and Rumbaut (2001, 62) highlight parental status, family structure, and gender. Put differently, strong family and ethnic connections increase the likelihood of immigrant children following their family's footsteps.

Furthermore, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) capture interesting inferences on identities among the second-generation over time. In their longitudinal analysis, they identify instances of identity shift among young immigrants. They found these identities to range from categories of national origin, pan-ethnic identity (e.g. Latino), hyphenated American, and American categories (155). The respondents' self-identification along this identity-based spectrum was recorded over time, and was affected by factors like family dynamics, and social interaction. In

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<sup>23</sup> Jenkins (1994) calls this existence of diversity of experience 'virtual' aspect of identity. I will elaborate this social psychological concept further in the 'Experiences' section.

other words, identity is navigated between the worlds of native culture and host society, which further underlines the key role of experience on identities. The question of language is salient because it is a marker of identity. It is possible that if immigrants look ‘different’, the pressure to assimilate on them is higher. Portes and Rumbaut’s work on second-generation immigrants delivers important inferences that are just as relevant for refugee individuals and families. In wholesale resettlement, several generations of families are transported at the same time. Yet, the young generation faces similar challenges of balancing native and host society cultures. As a matter of fact, the abruptness of resettlement can lead to a higher shift in balance of power within refugee families: the younger generations are better-prepared for a life that requires mastery of a new language and culture. In Portes and Rumbaut’s (2006, 350) theoretical vision, the second generation of immigrants are likely to favor what they term ‘selective acculturation.’ This refers to a cultural adjustment that requires “the acquisition of English fluency and American cultural ways *along with* preservation of certain key elements of the immigrant culture, of which language is paramount” (350).

Gold’s (1992) comparative work between Vietnamese and Russian Jewish populations in California is useful in articulating the complexities that define resettlement. For instance, Soviet and Vietnamese refugees would leave their business venture if they found desired employment. In contrast, the Koreans were likely to stick with their entrepreneurial ventures. Resettlement effects and experiences vary based on location and refugee groups. Gold is especially interested in the entrepreneurial enterprises of the refugee communities. Why do refugees start small businesses? They do so either because it’s part of their culture (like in Chinese and Jewish communities), or because opening a business makes sense in the face of lack of English skills and other know-how about business operation (Gold 1988, 418). While it is easy to observe

refugee entrepreneurship and deem it successful (Bonacich 1987), refugee business enterprises are a way of searching for economic success when refugees lack access to the mainstream market of the host societies. Refugee networks, while small, provide the necessary impetus and often, a safety net:

...refugee business owners provide themselves with economic, organizational and motivational advantages over the businesses of natives or ethnic groups by virtue of their status as refugees or members of an ethnic community. These resources are vital to refugee entrepreneurs because the businesses [they] ... must compete with generally have more capital and better connections in the US than they do (Gold 1988, 423).

In resettlement scholarship, the practice of secondary migration – a principal example of refugee agency – is generally accepted but rarely analyzed. The secondary migration of refugees takes place for logical reasons: “to migrate towards increased job prospects, lower housing costs or better school systems; to live closer to friends or family members; or to take advantage of some geographical location or environmental amenity” (Bloem and Loveridge 2017, 26). Apart from these economic reasons, secondary migration is also motivated by the desire of refugees to be close to ethnic kin (Brown and Scribner 2014; Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011). Secondary migration further underlines economic reality of refugee experience as well as the importance of social networks in host societies.

Refugees may share similar pains of adjustment with other migrant groups, but resettlement is unique due to its close link with the state (Hein 1993). Resettlement comes with state protection as well as constraints for the refugees. From the economic self-sufficiency requirement to state- and institution-based welfare disbursement, these experiences define the incoming refugees’ expectations, arguably affecting their group identities. In other words,

refugee life in resettlement is unmistakably connected to the US political economy (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). Post-refugee identities often diverge along class lines and economic access (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Franz 2003; Markovic and Manderson 2000), and the length of their stay in resettlement (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut 1989). What happens to refugee identities in resettlement has not adequately been studied. To examine the agency of Bhutanese refugees through group identity, I review relevant identity-based frameworks in the next section.

In this section, I have reviewed case studies on immigrants and refugees to establish a theoretical baseline for my own work. I have also covered works outlining the structural demands and expectations US places on refugees. In investigating resettlement-based experiences, it is important to remain cognizant of the link between state structure and refugee experience, i.e. how the former affects the latter. This link, as I have explained in this section, distinguishes refugees from other immigrant groups. Scholarship on refugees in resettlement is still nascent and is often focused on their relationship with the host community, or their potential impact on host society. Put differently, refugees are often studied in relation to others, or generally perceived as different. In the next section, I review pertinent social psychological identity-based frameworks and propose their adoption in studying refugee experiences as well as identities. In recent times, identity has been gaining interdisciplinary traction across social science disciplines. Alongside traditional disciplinary sites like anthropology, psychology, and sociology, the significance of identity-based frameworks have breached the boundaries of political science and international relations. This is highlighted in the growing sub-field of

political ethnography, which further underlines the current need for studying phenomena and groups in a micro-political context.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> I will elaborate on political ethnography in Chapter III. I find its discussion more appropriate in the overall context of research methodology.

## **Review of Relevant Scholarship on Identity**

Even when displaced and de-territorialized, migrant groups hold on to their native attachments (Adamson 2012; Koinova 2009; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Shain and Barth 2003). Scholars on refugees, however, tend not to employ identity as an instrument of analysis, with some exceptions. Instead, the theoretical inclination on identities is heavily tilted toward state-based and territorial identities, something refugees are denied (Malkki 1992; White 2002). Therefore, refugees are rarely seen or studied as agents. The application of social identities allows us to study refugees as actors and leaders. Social identity perspectives emphasize socialization and transaction, where actions and identities evolve. It is my contention that a refugee group's identity is likely to undergo re-definition during resettlement. After all, re-negotiation of group identity aids in social organization (Barth 1969, 15; Jenkins 1996, 28), as variously evidenced in the inferences of Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2003), Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003), Malkki (1992) and Jaji (2015).

There are many ways in which a group manifests its collective identity—religion, nationality, and ethnicity are some common units of analysis. Ethnicity is considered the most fundamental unit of identity analysis, as other forms of group identity are often built around ethnicity (Jenkins 1994). As a concept, ethnicity or ethnic identity can be fluid and concrete at the same time, as contrasted between primordial and constructive accounts of group identities (Barth 1969; Geertz 1973; Hancock 2010). According to Smith (1986), ethnicity is an intangible yet genuine entity: “‘ethnie’ unites an emphasis upon cultural differences with the sense of an historical community” (22). According to Smith, there are 6 determinants of ethnie: collective name, myth of descent, shared history, shared culture, idea of a homeland, and solidarity. In the case of ‘homeland’, Smith insists a ‘commemorative association’, i.e. an agreeable memory of

home, is enough. Weber (1922) similarly asserts ethnic group “is based ... on the belief shared by its members that, however distantly, they are of common descent” (quoted by Jenkins 2008, 10).

Precise boundaries of ethnicity can be difficult to articulate, but communities including refugee groups exhibit common factors like common lineage, history, and culture, as proposed by Smith (1986), to define their ethnic identities. “Ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves” (Barth 1969, 10). Alternatively, it’s easier to lean on a group’s self-identification with ethnicity. According to Eriksen (2010, 17):

Ethnicity is an aspect of social relationships between persons who consider themselves as essentially distinctive from members of other groups of whom they are aware and with whom they enter into relationships...when cultural differences regularly make a difference in interaction between members of groups, the social relationship has an ethnic element. Ethnicity refers both to aspects of gain and loss in interaction, and to aspects of meaning in the creation of identity. In this way it has a political, organizational aspect as well as symbolic, meaningful one.

The above quote emphasizes the role of interaction and experience in understanding ethnicity. The significance of the role of experience in identity has been made by other scholars as well, namely Barth (1969) through identity ‘content’, and Jenkins (1996) through ‘virtual’ identity.

Individuals from an ethnic group find their identity to be unique even when someone from the outside might observe the group boundaries to be porous and interpretive (Eriksen 2002, 51). Ethnicity may be the basic unit of identity on which the perceptions of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are built, but the signifier of identity differs from group to group. From a personal perspective, my ethnic identifiers relate to my ‘native’ national identity, i.e. Nepali in the context of US society. On the other hand, my ethnic identity takes a very concrete and complex

tribal and caste-based form in Nepali surroundings. As an immigrant, these categorizations don't necessarily confuse me as they're all part of my experiences. However, I have an appreciation for the confusion these categories might create for identity scholars. Horowitz (1985) similarly observed a similar shift in Sikhs who "started out as a religious sect but turned into an ethnic group when descent became a membership requirement" (quoted in Smeekes and Verkuyten 2015, 163). In observing this fluid nature of identities, it is important to note the dialectical and transactional characteristic of identity, i.e. group identities are not simply self-defined but have to be accepted by others, as noted by Barth (1969) and Jenkins (1994, 1996).

Ethnic identity is a social vehicle for exclusion as well as inclusion (Jenkins 1996, 3). Ethnic identities inspire unity through expressions of shared history and experiences that are passed down to successive generations (Smith 1994, 22-23). However, the common culture and language of the ethnic group is equally defined by the 'other', i.e. the people outside of the group. I view group identity – including its ethnic incarnation – as a method of managing the group's social environment through perceptions of fundamental commonalities and differences. Disciplines such as psychology, sociology and anthropology have been at the forefront in the exploration of ethnicity and ethnic identity, with varying units of analysis.<sup>25</sup> Approaches in psychology analyze ethnicity at an individual level while sociology and anthropology approach ethnicity at a group-level. Individual and group-level understandings of ethnicity, however, are interrelated—social psychological theories view the self as developing through a constant interaction with others (Cooley 1902; Mead 1934). Social psychological frameworks, therefore, study ethnicity as a process of identity creation and negotiation.

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<sup>25</sup> While political science has joined these disciplines in studying ethnic conflict, its main emphasis is mostly on ethnic nationalism and ethnic conflicts; Fearon and Laitin's (2003) work on ethnic civil wars is an appropriate illustration here.



Here, it is pertinent to discuss the contrasting features of primordial (or essentialist) and constructivist points of view in the examination of group identity. The social constructivist perspective is increasingly accepted across a breadth of disciplines (Adamson 2012; Adamson and Demetriou 2007; Barth 1969; Brass 1991; Jenkins 1994, 1996; Lyons 2012; Shain and Barth 2003). However, the preceding approach of primordialism has endured over time and continues to be relevant in the discussion of identities (Smith 1986, 32). “Primordialism assumes that a person’s fundamental ethnic identity is fixed at birth and cannot change” (Joireman 2004, 19). The primordialist take on identities is simple: we seek to be part of the familiar through various forms of categorization. The appeal of primordialist categorization is evident in the global nationalist rhetoric and anti-immigrant attitude. People endorsing ethnic conceptions of nationhood are arguably likely to be anti-immigrant in their worldviews (Smeeke and Verkuyten 2015, 170). Ethnic and national conflicts that lead to refugee displacements, including the Bhutanese and Rohingya cases, exhibit primordial origins.

"No enduring world order can be created which ignores the ubiquitous yearnings of nations in search of roots in an ethnic past, and no study of nations and nationalism that completely ignores the past can bear fruit" (Smith 1986, 5). For Geertz (1973), identity is deeply rooted in kinship (258). Within his research context, Geertz emphasizes the familiarity of language, social practices, and culture in general to define one’s identity. However, the givenness of group identity is manifested within a social system, where individuals ‘perform’ their identities. Stakes involved in cockfighting rituals in Bali, as Geertz (1973) noted, could be interpreted as unreasonable to outsiders but these rituals were embedded into performative functions of the Balinese men. It is my view that even when groups experience socialized changes to their identity, a sense of ritualized or performative identity remains. It is important to

point out that Geertz's perspective was based on newly forming states underlined by colonial pasts. His work was a critique on the role "kinship, locality, and culture played in modern sentiment of citizenship in the emerging post-colonial new states" (Jenkins 2008, 45). Perhaps, in the absence of strong civic institutions, ethnic dimensions of identities take precedence; "[t]he patterns of primordial identification and cleavage within the existing new states are not fluid, shapeless, and infinitely various, but are definitely demarcated and vary in systematic ways" (Geertz 1973, 268).

The relation between ethnic identity and nations (and nationalism) is well-established. Nationalism can function as the link between state and ethnicity (Eriksen 2010, 120). In his famous historical analysis, Anderson (1983) views nations as "imagined communities" (6). Here, among the literate populations, print journalism is attributed to have helped create a socially constructed community through a sense of shared time and space. This is an important contribution because Anderson helps the readers understand how identity could be imagined; and if the shared identity can be created in our imagination, so can the inter-group differentiations. In a simpler manifestation, identification of the self and categorization of the other is necessary in defining individuals, groups, and nations (Hancock 2010, 1662). The divisive potential of ethnicity overlaps with theoretical explorations on nationalism. Scholars like Brass (1991), Connor (1994) and Smith (1994) prefer the term 'ethnonationalism', further blurring the line between nationalism and ethnic identity. Ethnicity generally establishes the foundation for nationalism through "the myth of common ancestry, shared memories, and cultural elements" and almost always eclipses patriotism (Smith 1994, 28-29; Connor 1994, 196). Along with shared culture, kinship is a strong catalyst of ethnonationalism (Horowitz 1985). Horowitz articulates kinship as the fuel that can lead to violent and brutal conflicts between groups –

conflict over ethnicity often devolves into a fight for one's identity and kin (1985, 88). Ethnic conflicts generally escalate when they are driven by the fear of extinction of one's group. As an extension, an attack on one's cultural ways as well as kin can be construed as the attempt to wipe one group's identity as well as existence (Hancock 2014). In sum, the primordial school of thought, at various levels, offers nuggets of truth about identity that is still applicable today. "Ethnicity is a form of collective identity that is firmly rooted in history hereby providing people with a sense of identity continuity and temporal depth" (Smeeke and Verkuyten 2015, 163).

"By contrast [to primordialism], the social constructivist school, brought into prominence by Fredrik Barth (1969), believes that the *creation* of ethnic difference is always contingent upon the context of the situation and that group boundaries serve political and social aims of the group involved" (Hancock 2010, 1660 italics in original). Barth (1969) views ethnic identity as a form of social identity. In making an inventive argument, Barth does not view social nature of identity as an unintended consequence. Rather, ethnic identity is a product of the deliberate action of maintaining or manipulating the group boundary (10). In other words, groups possess the ability to change the rules of categorization, i.e. whom to include and exclude. This is an important facet of management of identities as well as social life.

Building on Barth's (1969) innovative conceptual framework, Jenkins (1994) makes an imaginative theoretical contribution in understanding ethnic identity. Ethnicity is transactional in nature, but these transactions are of two kinds – internal and external (Jenkins 1994, 199). Members of ethnic groups can manipulate group boundaries internally, but their social identities are also influenced by external categorization. Refugee is "one of the most powerful labels currently in the repertoire of humanitarian concern" (Zetter 1988 quoted by Scalettaris 2007, 38). Here, the label of refugee is an enduring yet powerful illustration of external categorization,

symbolizing loss and victimhood. The international label of refugee, therefore, is a quintessential example of an external categorization; although the official label of ‘refugee’ provides some protection, it also equates to powerlessness of the refugees (Zetter 1991).<sup>26</sup> As Jenkins (1994) argues, group membership is a function of power dynamic.

Both Barth and Jenkins emphasize the centrality of experience and socialization on identity processes. In fact, social constructivist scholars consider ethnic identity to be a social identity (Jenkins 1994, 1996, 2006). Like primordialism, social constructivist theories are far from perfect (Gil-White 1999). However, the latter’s emphasis on socialization in the development of ethnic identities deserves merit. From Barth’s (1969) perspective, the key factor is not the representation of identity, but its boundary. In other words, the categorization of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ can shift over time, depending on who has the authority to define them. For instance, incoming Irish immigrants in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were politically deemed ‘not white enough’ to exclude them from the mainstream society (Zolberg 2006). In addition to the categorization (called the ‘nominal’ part), development of identity is also based on the ‘virtual’ part (Jenkins 1994, 202). In my interpretation, the latter refers to the experiences that define the development of identities. Put differently, the virtual part of identities determines the nominal aspect of identities.

In my view, both constructivist and primordialist perspectives remain relevant and inter-related. Jenkins (1996) aptly captures this through the concept of ‘primarily socialized identities.’ Put differently, some of our group identities are more essentialist than others. These are core identities – humanness, gender, and kin relations – that develop over time with a child’s

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<sup>26</sup> The external categorization of refugee endures in the case of Bhutanese refugees. While convenient and stubborn, the characteristics of the label are gradually changing, transforming the victimhood narrative into that of entrepreneurship and hard work.

development (Hancock 2010, 12). The social constructivist school outlines the agency of groups, the subject of my research. However, in Barth's (1969) parlance, boundary maintenance is contingent on the concrete myths and memories of the past. Primordialism speaks to this innate nature and finds solace in the familiar. Since resettlement exposes a range of generations to a new life, I expect to find both the agency of constructivism and familiarity of primordial roots pertinent in post-resettlement identities.

## **Social Psychological Lens**

What makes a social psychological framework appropriate for studying identities is its assumption that identities are in flux, constantly molded by social experiences and interactions. Hence, while the social psychological lens makes space for primordial aspects of identity, it is deeply rooted in the social constructivist tradition. For instance, Jenkins (2008, 14) adopts a social anthropological approach in articulating ethnicity. He posits that ethnicity is influenced by “a dialectical interplay between similarity and difference” or cultural differentiation. Although as a scholar, Jenkins falls within the constructivist camp, he is aware of primordial characteristics of ethnic identity. Ethnicity, he argues, is about shared meanings, which can appear fixed for the groups. Jenkins (2008, 14) asserts that ethnic identity, “externalized in social interaction and categorization of others...internalized in personal self-identification,” is rooted in the insights from both primordial and constructivist camps. The internal-external dialectic is especially relevant in the refugee context. Refugee communities define themselves internally (along ethnic and national lines) even though they’re externally categorized as refugees (Zetter 1991, 2007). The internal definition and external categorization (which reflects the powerlessness of refugees) are at odds in the case of refugee identities, based on Jenkins’ (1994, 1996, 2004) framework.

“If identity is a necessary prerequisite for social life, the reverse is also true. Individual identity – embodied in selfhood – is not meaningful in isolation for the social world of other people” (Jenkins 1996, 20). His work is fundamentally influenced by heavyweights of social psychology like George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley. I find social psychological interpretations to be fundamental in understanding how our identities are established organically and naturally. Mead (1934), famed for symbolic interactionism, presents a nuanced perspective on how social interaction impacts individuals. Through his study of the self between ‘I’ and

‘me’ he proposes the active and socialized aspects of the person (172). ‘I’ is the response of an individual to the attitudes of the society, whereas ‘me’ is an organized set of attitudes of others which one assumes (175). Mead’s work is instrumental in developing the significance of social interaction and expectation in the construction of a social individual. Furthermore, his work is useful in showing a person is incomplete when studied completely outside their social context. This is relevant in the study of refugee adjustment within resettlement.

Cooley’s (1902) contributions are similar to Mead’s work, but equally important. Through the application of the ‘looking glass self’ Cooley strove to show that self-consciousness and social consciousness are interconnected: “[s]ocial consciousness, or awareness of society, is inseparable from self-consciousness, because we can hardly think of ourselves excepting with reference to a social group of some sort, or of the group except with reference to ourselves” (5). From this perspective, membership in multiple groups and subsequent development of group identities is a natural process. In summary, we are what we think the society thinks we are.

Mead’s work influenced and inspired later scholars of identity. Barth (1969) and Jenkins (1994) are both proponents of a transactional nature of social identity. Barth was interested in social processes which “produce and reproduce boundaries of identification and differentiation between ethnic collectivities” (Jenkins 2008, 12). In emphasizing the boundary maintenance—rather than the cultural content of the group—Barth (1969) captures the social agency of group behavior (10). Put differently, the group inclusion or exclusion is not necessarily about the representative traits of the groups; instead, it is about the determination of the boundaries that separate the group members from the outsiders. Like social identities, these boundaries are malleable and constructed. For instance, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Irish immigrants to the US struggled

for acceptance as they faced racial opposition: they were considered not ‘white enough’ by the host society (Zolberg 2006).

On the other hand, Jenkins (1994) is interested in social processes that define social identities (198). He views group identity to be a dialectical struggle between external categorization and internal definition. Individual-level social psychological frameworks, therefore, extend to group-level identities espoused by Barth and Jenkins. Based on my interpretation, both agency and negotiation of internal-external categorization are useful frameworks for examining refugee identities in resettlement. The relevance of the Barthian notion of boundary has been challenged, especially with the emerging studies on social networks of immigrant communities (Hancock 2010, 12). Scholars like Cornell (1996) emphasize the importance of group interests and institutions on ethnic identities. In resettlement, economic and social networks are influential factors on refugee adaptation, as examined by scholars Allen (2009), Potocky-Tripodi (2002, 2004), and Rumbaut (1989). In my view, social identity perspectives remain relevant in the examination of refugee identities, while the impact of ethnic networks and social capital remain relevant as well. Refugee lives are intimately affected by the political and economic structure of resettlement, but they attempt to maintain their cultural way of life.

Here, I want to briefly discuss the human needs framework as an explanatory tool. In the field of conflict resolution, Maslow’s (1943) needs-based model is an important contribution. In his pyramid of needs, there are largely five ‘needs’: physiological, safety, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Each needs-based level must be fulfilled for an individual to pursue the next level of needs. This framework is highly interpretive, especially in regards, to what can be considered a need; for instance, Mary Clark’s (1990) work argues for early human



socialization to be considered a human need. Viewing refugees through this framework is an interesting exercise. On the one hand, most of their fundamental needs (i.e. safety and food) are largely taken care of even in the exile of refugee camps. This life, however, also prevents them achieving self-esteem or self-actualization, i.e. achieving the optimum levels of their potential. Resettlement provides the necessary opportunity and situation for the refugee community to pursue their economic and social worth.

Social identity theory (SIT), a theoretical contribution from the minds of Tajfel and Turner (1979), is useful in bridging social identities with other facets of adjustment like human capital and ethnic networks. SIT is commonly applied in studying the “contextual and fluid nature of identity” (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003, 338), where “people identify with social groups to satisfy opposing motives for distinctiveness and belonging” (Vignoles et al. 2006, 308). SIT has mostly been employed to explore the dynamics of group membership and intergroup relations. According to the SIT, group identity is “commonly defined as a person’s self derived from perceived membership in social groups...[w]hen we belong to a group, we are likely to derive our sense of identity, at least in part, from that group” (Chen and Li 2009, 431). In sum, we assess our worth based on our membership within a group, as well as the overall worth of the group in the society. In theory, someone who is unsatisfied by their group membership can attempt to join a different identity group. In this perspective, an individual might leave one social identity for a more favorable social status, as observed by Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003) in their study of the Bosnian refugees resettled in Australia. The question of group ‘exit’ is an interesting one, more relevant in a socio-economic context rather than in ethnic identities.

Some scholars have extended the argument of SIT further. Vignoles et al. (2006, 309) argue people are motivated to construct identities characterized by feelings of self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, belonging, efficacy, and meaning. The authors are especially interested in the contribution of continuity in social identities, i.e. “a desire for a sense of continuity across time and situation” (310). In other words, identity groups prefer to envision their future to be connected to their past, with an emphasis on their history and culture. “History provides an important building block for people to understand who they are ... by understanding where one is coming from, historical continuity provides meaning and content to identity” (Jetten and Hutchison 2011, 36). Groups define their present (and by implication, future) through their connection or impression of the past. Put differently, past understanding determines our understanding of current intragroup and intergroup processes (Jetten and Wohl 2012). Historical discontinuity is perceived as a threat to one’s identity. Does resettlement represent continuity or a break from the past for the refugees? I expect it to be a mixed case, varying from one person to next. I find it important to articulate the importance of experience on our social identities.

## **The Role of Experience in Identity-Based Investigation**

Does identity define perspectives and worldviews? Or, does experience help reconsider and renegotiate identity? Based on my review, there's enough empirical evidence to make a case for both. It has been argued elsewhere that essentialist and constructivist perspectives share theoretical linkages even if they're presented in a contrasting light. I consider this to be accurate for my research pursuit as well. In the sections above, I have already touched on the relevance of experience on identities. Identity is not necessarily something we do consciously everyday but is naturally a 'content' of our individual and collective lives (Barth 1969). Jenkins (1994) makes the same point a simpler manner. Our identities have a 'nominal' side (i.e. the name of the group) and a 'virtual' dimension (202). The virtual facet of our identity refers to the experience of the group. Individuals can share the same nominal categorization but can be subject to different virtual experiences. In the context of resettled refugees, individual experiences can vary within and across the community. Therefore, their self-identification in resettlement can vary as well.

The political label of refugee symbolizes loss and victimhood. In this perspective, "refugees' social and cultural universe ends at international borders and life on the other side is axiomatically alien" (White 2002, 75). Like Malkki (1992, 1995a, 1995b), White expects the refugee social system and group identity to be constantly influenced by transnational and local politics, possibly resulting in refugees' hybrid social identities. I find this theoretical perspective helpful in examining the development of post-refugee identities in resettlement. Put differently, past and current experiences influence post-refugee identities. Unequal experiences in the past and during resettlement, therefore, are likely to be consequential for my research.

Earlier in this chapter, I articulated the economic demands and challenges attached to resettlement. I expect more immediate demands related to human capital and social capital to be important in the social organization of Bhutanese refugees and their social identities. However, the re-definition of internal identities is likely more complex, and is related to individual experiences. In negotiating the expectations and constraints of resettlement, refugee communities re-evaluate their place in American society (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). In the case of resettled refugees (in contrast to average migrants), this translates into the navigation of past experiences of forced migration and exile (Byrne 2013; Jaji 2015; Malkki 1992) as well as the daily challenges and restrictions of the resettlement process (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Potocky-Tripodi 2004). For Bhutanese refugees, the past includes the memory of social exclusion, repression and torture at the hands of the Bhutanese government (*Amnesty International* 1992; Hutt 1996, 2003, 2005; Saul 2000). This is an enduring experience they are likely to pass on to their successive generations. In resettlement, numerous generations of the refugee community are concurrently adapting to US society. Past scholarship suggests identity-based responses to migration and displacement varies within any community (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Markovic and Manderson 2000; Shain and Barth 2003). In sum, the refugee worldview is a product of both the existing identity frames and new group experiences.

Similar to social identity, worldviews are crafted through social interaction, not in isolation. Worldviews, therefore, are expressions of individual and group experiences. “Narratives are not transparent renditions of ‘truth’ but reflect a dynamic interplay between life, experience and story” (Eastmond, 2007, 248). Narratives and stories represent a psychological order. These stories, told and retold, are very important, especially those transferred through generations. Group narratives are theorized to contribute to ethnic traditions (Smith 1985, 22),

and they are especially significant in relation to forced migrants like refugees. Ethnic identity becomes more salient in the context of conflict; group narratives similarly can make displaced groups become more internalized, as is often argued by diaspora scholars (Shain and Barth 2003; Sheffer 2003).

“Changes in context raise new, different, and previously un contemplated problems that may lead people to alter their worldviews” (Docherty 2001, 51). During resettlement, refugees have to make the transition from camps to a life in a culturally alien environment. Such displacement can challenge their sense of social order. This might harden their worldview, or they might adapt to their new reality (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003). Worldviews of marginalized groups are often repressed in the host society. It is common to paint immigrant and refugee groups as helpless victims as well as welfare abusers (Ludwig 2016, 6). To study re-negotiation of refugee identity in resettlement, the reception of host society should also be considered (Kibreab 1999; Portes and Rumbaut 2006).

The re-negotiation of identity is also an expression of agency, influenced by the individual’s experiences and perceived place in their community. From the theoretical perspective of Laitin (1998), the construction of a group identity is based on the individual’s rational choice, and calculations for the future. The Bhutanese-Nepali refugees’ ‘new’ identity will be influenced by sum of their experiences and perceptions of their place in society. This includes their worldview regarding their social status, economic stability, and their decision to opt for secondary migration. After all, development and re-negotiation of group identity is not about the nominal aspect alone, but about the virtual, i.e. the overall group experience (Jenkins 1994). Resettlement allows refugees to shift their nominal dimension (or, refugee categorization), through a change in the context of the virtual aspect of their identity. As I have

alluded to before, resettlement-affected identity does not follow one monolithic path.

Differences in past and present experiences (and subsequently, social agency) can lead to significant impact in the divergence of identity choices.

## Chapter Conclusion

Refugee life in resettlement is not static; instead, it is a continuous process of adjustment and adaptation. Like other immigrant and refugee groups, the Bhutanese refugee community presents a complex narrative of adjustment in resettlement. The Bhutanese community shares many commonalities with these groups but also provides unique inferences. Investigations on immigrant groups often lean on the Manichean success-failure dichotomy. Consequentially, I adopt a bottom-up approach to study their identity-based preferences. The structure of resettlement is restrictive—from the pressure of self-sufficiency to the de-centralized dispersal of families—and consequential. Yet, as a long-term solution, resettlement offers refugees space to (re-)define themselves. It is difficult to analyze initial refugee resettlement without absorbing the totality of their experiences—their pre-refugee identities as well as their resettlement-based adjustment. Identities in resettlement is an expression of individual and collective agency.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Having observed the Bhutanese experience in resettlement, my aim was to articulate their agency and identity narratives in their new environment. My research ‘problem’ points to an understudied population of Bhutanese refugees (Rizal 2004), as well as an understudied subject—third-country refugee resettlement. These factors make my overall research agenda academically intriguing (and in some ways, challenging); they also make ethnographic fieldwork an appropriate methodology for my investigation. I use this chapter to lay the research and methodological framework for my investigation. This includes discussing the merit of the case, i.e. a Bhutanese refugee community and the site, i.e. North Hill in Akron, in my investigation of local resettlement. I also discuss the applicability of an ethnographic case study approach for my research and describe the data collection methods in the form of field observations and interviews. I contextualize this chapter by discussing case-specific events like my entry into the community, the varying degrees of observational inferences, and recruitment of interviewees. As is the case in qualitative research, interpretive and descriptive inferences form the backbone of my research.

Theory is considered to be a basic set of concepts and generalizations in studying a phenomenon (Jorgensen 1989, 16). As I stated in Chapter II, refugee resettlement is not studied extensively in social sciences. Consequently, my research approach is informed by a diversity of disciplines studying immigration and refugee life. Like other ethnographers, I borrow methodological and theoretical inferences from theoretical frameworks as well as standalone case studies. In terms of resettlement in host countries, political science, sociological and policy-based scholarship offers contributions from state-centric lenses like economic adaptation and



integration (Allen 2009; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003; Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Franz 2003; Ives 2007; Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006; Potocky-Tripodi, 2001, 2003a, 2003b; Rumbaut 1989). In addition to these perspectives, there are some diffuse yet relevant works emphasizing the social experiences and agency of refugees (Gold 1988, 1992; Hein 1993, 1997; Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Nawyn 2006, 2010).

My overall research design is a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Due to my principal interest in lived experiences and participant voice, I prioritized the field-based inferences (Marshall and Rossman 2006) as the primary method of data collection. My qualitative methodology comprises archival research, extensive participant observation and in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Refugee communities' social organization and agency have been observed and interpreted in the context of refugee camps (Byrne 2011; Evans 2010b; Hutt 2003; Malkki 1992, 1995a, 1995b) and in some cases, within host societies (Colic-Peisker 2007; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003; Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011). My research will be one of the few works invested in examining the identity-agency nexus in resettlement. In my view, ethnography is a method well-suited to capture social life in its nuanced and complex details. Like, Geertz (1973), I find context to be crucial in the elaboration of an observation.

I use statistical methods to investigate the phenomenon of secondary migration of refugees in the US. Secondary migration of refugees, following their initial resettlement, is an action that is at odds with US government policy (Bloem and Loveridge 2017; Ott 2011). As part of its decentralized vision, the US government spreads refugee families to localities across

49 states.<sup>27</sup> the experiences of refugee families, therefore, generally vary depending on the states, and their respective institutions and services, leading to an inequality of experiences (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Nawyn 2006, 2010; Singer and Wilson 2006). Secondary migration is a refugee-driven relocation to different states; I view secondary migration to be a form of refugee agency that can impact social organization of a refugee community. The motivation for secondary migration ranges from economic considerations to a desire to be closer to family (Bloem and Loveridge 2017; Desbarats 1985; ORR 2012-2014; Ott 2011; Barkdull et al. 2012). Secondary migration was a relevant subject during my field observations, which supplement my theoretical assumptions in the quantitative analysis. However, examination of secondary migration also makes sense at a broader level of analysis. In determining various national-level factors that influence secondary migration of refugees, I am able to provide a macro-level context to supplement my micro-level field inferences. I have designed Chapter VI, my quantitative chapter, a little differently from the rest of the dissertation. It reads as a standalone chapter of statistical analysis, reflecting a stylistic contrast to the narrative flow and presentation of the qualitative data.<sup>28</sup> However, I will briefly discuss how my quantitative analysis on secondary migration research folds back into my case study. I intend to show the value of quantitative findings to the dissertation both in and of themselves and as a support to the investigation of refugee resettlement, as I have discussed in Chapter VI.

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<sup>27</sup> Wyoming is the only US state that does not participate in resettling refugees. In my quantitative chapter, I use Washington DC as the 50<sup>th</sup> unit of observation.

<sup>28</sup> I opted for this style with the goal of separating this chapter for publication with minimum alterations.

## A Case for Ethnographic Case Study

It is an academic truism that one's research question determines the suitable methodology. "Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied" (Stake 2008, 122). In studying a Bhutanese refugee community in resettlement, I opted for an ethnographic case study. The nature of my research question makes case study a natural fit. Since I am interested in the everyday life of a refugee community in a particular location, i.e. the Bhutanese community living in the Akron area and its worldviews and perspectives, an ethnographic case study is the most applicable research approach.

One of the advantages of case study is that it is designed for a nuanced, meticulous investigation of the subject. In addition to the 'what', case study allows investigators to address the (more) salient questions of 'how' and 'why' (Yin 1989, 12-13). This relates to an anthropological tradition that strives to explain not just the behavior but context as well, such that the behavior becomes meaningful to an outsider (Geertz 1973, 5). Qualitative case studies don't produce general, macro pictures that can explain most if not all cases of interest; instead, case studies are interested in and excel at a scrupulous exploration of phenomena at a micro-, or ground-level. Druckman (2005, 209) delineates the applicability of case studies by contrasting them against the traditional research tendencies:

Research on a small number of cases is preferred when the problem is difficult to analyze with a large number of cases. Examples of such problems include (a) explorations of aggregate systems-like units, referred to also as holistic systems (b) deep probes into cultural practices or behaviors and (c) problems seeking causal explanations of variation between closely matched units of analysis.

Ethnography allows field researchers to acquire an ‘inner’, natural perspective of the group. “Ethnography literally means a description of a people...it is a way of studying people in organized, enduring groups, which may be referred to as communities or societies” (Angrosino 2007, 1). Groups may self-define themselves in many different ways, ranging from ethnicity to religion or nationality. However, all groups work with an internal logic and way of life, which are often seen through a lens of culture. From this perspective, refugee communities meet at the intersection of various identity groups—nationality, sub-national categories (like religion and caste), and a common refugee experience of displacement and liminality. Gold (1988, 1992) has observed the complex intersection of identities within refugee groups; for example, he observed an internal struggle between three different ethnicities within Vietnamese populations.

The examination of the ‘how’ of Bhutanese resettlement merits a diligent case study. My research interest in the Bhutanese refugee community is an intrinsic one (Stake 1995, 2008). In other words, the case by itself is interesting and deserves more academic attention. My work intersects two understudied research areas—the Bhutanese refugee community and its life in resettlement. The general criteria for consideration of qualitative methodology, like an in-depth case study, includes sufficient uniqueness and/or importance (Jorgensen 1989, 19). The Bhutanese community exhibits both. The story of the Bhutanese refugee group has always been obscured (Rizal 2004)—from its forced displacement from Bhutan, to its lengthy exile in Nepali camps, to its current resettlement in countries like the US. From a bottom-up perspective, the Bhutanese population has laid an impressive foundation for a visible economic and social presence in urban areas like Akron and Columbus in Ohio. In Akron, my field site, the Bhutanese community is well-known for their entrepreneurship, organization of cultural events, and attracting secondary migrants from other states. Put differently, it has established a distinct

cultural and political image in the local context: although Akron is home to other refugee populations (like Karen and Congolese populations), the Bhutanese group is easily the most organized and visible representation of refugees. In the last decade, Bhutanese refugees, alongside Karen and Iraqi counterparts, form the three largest incoming refugee populations [Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2014; Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) 2014]. The Bhutanese community, therefore, will be an influential representative of refugees and resettlement at the local and national level.

My research meets at the interdisciplinary intersection of anthropology, economics, sociology, social psychology, and political science. Common political science-centered frameworks like income, welfare, immigrant networks, and social capital feature in my work. However, in studying the active construction of an immigrant community, I am more focused on the inferences of agency and identity-based narratives within refugee communities, drawing me to a variety of case studies—from political scientists and sociologists—and to some extent, policy experts. In my view, ethnographic conventions nudge researchers to delve beyond the ostensibly self-explanatory categorizations like ‘immigrants’ and ‘refugees’. According to Pachirat (2009, 157), these classifications generally allude to an unequal power structure but stop short of “capturing any core ‘essence’ of experience.” My research on Bhutanese refugees, a historically marginalized group, attempts to go beyond these uncontested labels and provide voice to the community by examining its ‘ordinary’ life, from its growing pains to successful social organization.

The discipline of political science is slowly accepting the interpretivist turn of ‘political ethnography’ as the methodology explores a different type of narrative on identity and politics (Wedeen 2010). “Ethnographers deal with individuals, social groups, and their environments”

(de Volo et al. 2004, 267). Ethnography provides an alternative view of existing power dynamic (Schatz 2009, 15), or revealing hidden power inequalities (Pachirat 2009, 143). As a researcher, I consider ethnography to provide the right methodological tools for researching potentially vulnerable groups in the form of refugee communities. The push for political ethnography is relatively new, but the need for nuanced, ground-level research is not (Shively 2005). In my view, a true reflection of power and politics is best captured through the experiences of affected individuals and communities. Far from the national-level rhetoric on refugees and immigration, the lived experiences of refugees are simple and complex at the same time. Refugee life in resettlement is complex and challenging as they navigate the rules and expectations of their new home; on the other hand, their goal is simple—to establish a ‘normal’ and stable life for themselves and their families. In summary, ethnography is best suited to bring us closer to these experiences and aid our understanding of the subject.

## Case Selection: Bhutanese Refugees

The introduction of Bhutanese refugees into the US is relatively new. The process of third-country resettlement for Bhutanese refugees began between 2007 and 2008 (UNHCR 2009). In 2010, as a graduate student interning for UNHCR in Nepal, I first came across the phenomenon of resettlement. I witnessed the feverish excitement over resettlement in the refugee camps, shared by the refugees and aid workers alike. This enthusiasm was understandable after a seemingly interminable stay in refugee camps, but there appeared to be a sparse understanding of what resettlement entailed. Despite the distrust of resettlement among a refugee faction (Bhaumik 2007a, 2007b; Evans 2010b), the ‘durable solution’ has been largely adopted by a majority of the population. Perhaps guised as a humanitarian panacea, resettlement is best understood as a political trade-off (as I have argued in Chapter II). All things considered, the offer of resettlement is an extremely tempting one for any refugee group, especially after a lengthy exile in refugee camps.

At this point, I find it important to tether the Bhutanese case to its historical context. The exodus of *Lothshampas* from Bhutan to Nepal, was the source of one of the largest refugee flows at the time that went largely unnoticed (Rizal 2004).<sup>29</sup> The following is a popular take:

Known as *Lhotsampas*, their ancestors migrated to Bhutan from Nepal in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. And in the 1990s, more than 100,000 of them – one-sixth of the country’s population – were trucked out of Bhutan as part of its “one-nation-one people” policy, effectively an exercise in ethnic cleansing (Kulman and Tsukii 2014).

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<sup>29</sup> *Lothshampa* translates, approximately, to ‘dwellers of the southern border’ in Dzonkha, Bhutan’s main Tibetan-based language. From this point, I will use *Lothshampas* and *Lhotsampas* interchangeably to refer to the Bhutanese refugees before their forced migration.

Scholars who have investigated Bhutan and its inherent connection to the refugee crisis are careful not to categorize the government's action as 'ethnic cleansing.' Some researchers have gone as far to suggest approximately 90,000 *Lothshampas* mistakenly 'chose' the life of exile (Hutt 2003). The sparse literature on the government's physical violence points to its contained nature (*Amnesty International* 1992), especially in comparison to the level of violence seen in Rwanda and Bosnia in the same decade. Upon closer inspection, the Bhutanese government's actions leading up to the forced migration reveal a calculated attempt at diminishing the identity and the political presence of *Lothshampas* (Hutt 1996, 2003, 2005; Saul 2000). This was a case of bureaucratic erasure of an ethnic group, which was chilling and perhaps more efficient than violent massacres. This case is reminiscent of Zetter's (2007, 177) articulation of numerous cases of "persecution ... through insidious forms of social, political and economic exclusion, often without explicit violence." As it becomes clear in my discussion of 'pre-resettlement identity' in Chapter IV, the Bhutanese government applied direct and indirect forms of violence on its citizens in southern Bhutan; some fled after physical repression, while others left out of fear. In that sense, my research will also help provide voice to Bhutanese refugees' narratives of government persecution and repressions.

The extant scholarship points to a reasonable identity-based thesis in explaining the Bhutanese refugee crisis: it stemmed from the Bhutanese government's fear of ethno-national 'extinction'. Ethnic conflicts tend to escalate when a group fears its end because of the rise of a different ethnic group (Horowitz 1985). In this section, I will articulate the ethno-national fears that compelled the Bhutanese government to take discriminatory actions against the *Lothshampas*; these acts exacerbated the ethnic contestation, further leading to repression that concluded in the enormous exile. In summary, the government deemed *Lothshampas* not



Bhutanese enough and persecuted them into fleeing to Nepal. The conflict contains a suggestion of self-fulfilling prophecy.

By historical accounts, the Nepali population reportedly stands out from the rest of the Bhutanese population, part of which is by political design. Here is Michael Hutt's (2003, 4) extensive observation:

Most accounts of the population identify three main ethnic categories. These are the *Ngalong* ... in the west; the *Sharchop* ... in the east; and the *Lhotshampa* in the south. While the terms *Sharchop*, 'Easterner', and *Lhotshampa*, 'Southern Borderlander', both assign their respective categories to particular quarters of the country, *Ngalong* is a term that appears to relate to the origins of the ethnic group to which it applies.

Although the *Ngalongs* are a minority in the size of their population, they represent the political elites of the country. In contrast, the *Lothshampas* are generally described as immigrants who settled from Nepal. The earliest account of Nepali migration to Bhutan is contested but the first mass migration of Nepali peasants to Bhutan was observed in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The first Nepali farming settlement in Bhutan reportedly started in 1880 (Hutt 1996, 402). The Nepali population was reportedly mostly comprised of mongoloid castes like Rai and Limbu, purportedly fleeing taxation and expansion of the modern Nepali state (Hutt 2003, 23). The initial settlement of the Nepali *janajati* (or the mongoloid indigenous castes), were later joined by migrations from the *Brahmans* and *Chhetri* castes.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> In the Hindu-Nepali caste system, the *Brahmans* and *Chhetris* represent the elite position. In the formation of the *Lothshampa* population in Bhutan, they arrived much later to their Mongoloid counterparts but are perceived to gradually positions of influence. Although the Nepali caste system remains prominent among the *Lothshampas*, the practice seems to lean less on its discriminatory aspects in comparison to the original Nepali system.

The Bhutanese government didn't appear to feel the ethnic threat that resulted into the refugee calamity until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. This was partly because the 'people of the south' seem to be separated from the rest of the population geographically and politically. The Bhutanese policy was "to isolate the Nepali Bhutanese as completely as possible from the rest of Bhutan's society by restricting them to southern Bhutan" (Rose 1977, 47 cited in Hutt 2003, 61). For instance, the *Lothshampas* were restricted in their travel to northern Bhutan, often requiring proper permission from the authorities. The *Lothshampas* predominantly lived as a farming community, growing crops like cardamom, and raising cattle; they practiced their own unique Hindu customs and spoke the Nepali language, traditions that marked them as different from the rest of the Bhutanese population.

In 1958, the Bhutanese government attempted to stop 'illegal' Nepali migration and assimilate the *Lothshampas* into their society. Based on the Citizenship Act of 1958, anyone who could prove their residence in Bhutan for the ten years prior to 1958 were promised Bhutanese citizenship. At this point further immigration was banned, but the government offered cash incentives for Nepali-Drukpa intermarriage, as well as training for members of the *Lothshampa* population in bureaucratic professions (Hutt 1996, 402). This narrative of assimilation stands in sharp contrast to the suspicions later expressed by the Bhutanese government. It appears that the suspicion and threat emerged as a younger *Lothshampa* generation entered the Bhutanese arenas of education and bureaucracy. In a small country like Bhutan with scarce institutions, the emergence of the Bhutanese-Nepali population must have attracted the scrutiny of the Bhutanese elites. In the 1960s, a large number of Indians of Nepali origin immigrated to Bhutan to work on the country's first and only major highway (Hutt 2003). Partly due to open borders with India, and partly due to its own lack of infrastructure, the

Bhutanese government struggled to manage this migration flow or keep efficient records of the migrants.

The Citizenship Act of 1985 is viewed as a catalytic point that led to the eventual Bhutanese refugee crisis. This act changed the rules for inclusion into a Bhutanese national identity: citizenship could only be acquired automatically by birth from both parents instead of through the father alone; it required evidence of permanent domicile on or before the 31<sup>st</sup> Dec 1958 for naturalization, required criteria that were hard to meet, like fluency and literacy in Dzongkha (Hutt 1996, 402). As part of this ‘One Nation, One People’ policy, the government proposed *Driglam Namzha*, an etiquette code based on the country’s Tibetan roots. All Bhutanese citizens were required to wear the designated national dress and speak Dzongkha, the Tibetan-based language. These practices were enforced with the penalty of fines.

The attack on the *Lothshampa* culture with the 1985 Citizenship Act was further exacerbated by the 1988 Census. As its first ever national census, the Bhutanese government appeared more intent on isolating and expelling the allegedly illegal immigrants than collecting data on its populations. The census separated individuals into one of seven categories (Hutt 1996, 409; Hutt 2003, 154).<sup>31</sup> Most of the *Lothshampa* population was incorrectly categorized as F2, ‘Returned Emigrants’, or F7, ‘Non-nationals’.<sup>32</sup> There are two main criticisms of the census-taking exercise. First, even though most *Lothshampas* produced their tax receipts for before and after 1958, these were suddenly not accepted as sufficient proof of legal residence. Second, the

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<sup>31</sup> Categories of citizenship as prescribed by 1988 census (Hutt 1996, 409): F1 – Genuine Bhutanese citizens; F2 – Returned migrants (people who had left Bhutan and then returned); F3 – ‘Drop-out’ cases -i.e., people who were not around at the time of the census; F4 – A non-national woman married to a Bhutanese man; F5 – A non-national man married to a Bhutanese woman; F6 – Adoption cases (children who have been legally adopted); F7 – Non-nationals, i.e., migrants and illegal settlers

<sup>32</sup> Over time, *saat numbere*, ‘number seven people’ became a reference of insult and humiliation to the Bhutanese refugees.

census-takers were reported to inadequately trained and their categorizations were allegedly arbitrary (Hutt 1996). Moreover, the census-takers reportedly failed to articulate the consequences associated with each census category. For many *Lothshampas* discrepancies surrounding the census became relevant *ex post facto*.

This nationalization campaign merits a brief examination of the political and ethnic context. Bhutan is a landlocked country whose politics and economy are largely driven by neighboring India's political and foreign policy interests (Hutt 2003). However, the adjacent Indian neighboring areas like Sikkim on the west and Assam on the southeast are dominated by populations of Nepali origin.<sup>33</sup> The Nepali-origin population was in a revolutionary mood in the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, attempting to secede from India. This is apparent from the violent Gorkhaland movement in India to the popular movement for democracy in Nepal (Hutt 2003).<sup>34</sup> These dissident developments made India insecure of its regional grasp, and Bhutan's *Ngalog* suspicious of a similar movement from its *Lothshampa* population (Hutt 1996). This period of dissent and unrest coincides with Bhutan's repressive actions and marked the beginning of the end for the *Lothshampas*.

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<sup>33</sup> These regions historically were part of Nepal that was lost to British-controlled India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>34</sup> Gorkhaland Movement is led by Nepali-origin population and its primary demand is for Darjeeling in West Bengal to be declared autonomous.



Figure 2: Bhutan and Surrounding Region (Source: Newsin Asia)<sup>35</sup>

From the perspective of the Bhutanese government, it likely felt vindicated in its exclusionary policies when the *Lothshampas* pushed back. Following the enforcement of *Driglam Namzha*, especially the removal of Nepali language and subjects from schools, and subsequent restrictions on Hindu festivals, the *Lothshampa* population resisted. Inspired by the democracy movement in Nepal, *Lothshampa* leaders (mostly college students) organized large-scale demonstrations against the government. Here, it is important to refer to a different type of resistance against the Bhutanese government—an armed campaign planned by the Bhutan People’s Party (BPP) (Hutt 1996, 2003). Historically, violent and nonviolent resistance often exist parallel to one another (Stephan and Chenoweth 2008). BPP’s violent actions included assassinations of government officials and aggressive recruitment and armed training of the youth. BPP’s violent tactics reportedly frightened the local *Lothshampas*, many of whom fled

<sup>35</sup> Nepali-origin populations in India reside in Sikkim and Assam area. Reportedly, many refugees left for Assam after their displacement, only for Indian government to force them out.

Bhutan fearing the government response to BPP.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the BPP's actions had the effect of vindicating the government's suspicion against the *Lothshampas*, and further accelerating the government's repressive tactics.

In response to this resistance, the Bhutanese government mobilized its security forces. These forces were ruthless in their approach, incarcerating and torturing suspects involved in any form of dissidence. Many of these suspects (and later, their families) were asked to sign voluntary migration forms, essentially self-eviction documents (Evans 2010a, 34). These forms were later used by the government to justify the 'voluntary' nature of *Lothshampa* departures although the 'voluntary' nature of these forms is naturally disputed (*Amnesty International* 1992; Saul 2000). Upon release, many *Lothshampa* families fled to neighboring India (and eventually) to Nepal; the fear of persecution and abandoned homes of their neighbors convinced many other families to leave as well. This marks the beginning of the exodus, and consequently *Lothshampa* becoming refugees. As communities and villages started emptying in southern Bhutan, the government resettled eastern and northern populations in these vacant homes and farms (Hutt 2005, 49). The *Lothshampas* who remained behind faced further government harassment and persecution. They had to produce the now-infamous No Objection Certificate (N.O.C.). This document is essentially a government-sponsored proof of character; production of the N.O.C. guaranteed safety from eviction and access to government employment and education (Evans 2010a, 34; Hutt 2005, 47). The use of voluntary exit forms and N.O.C. is an example of rather impressive and repressive form of control exerted by the Bhutanese government. It is accurate to say that the conflict preceding the Bhutanese refugee exodus was relatively bloodless. This is

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<sup>36</sup> This inference is borrowed from my interview data. The effects of BPP's violence on *Lothshampa* is not well-recorded, further emphasizing the need for Bhutanese refugee narratives in the understanding of the conflict.

perhaps because the government didn't need to shed blood, as it was able to erase the *Lothshampa* population from the country's present and the future through an efficient and systematic use of bureaucracy.

The exodus of the *Lothshampas*, therefore, was initiated by the Bhutanese government's nationalization campaign, and carried on through its calculated persecution. Perhaps the contagious fear of imminent persecution drove more families than actual accounts of violence; nevertheless, it was a ruthlessly efficient form of forced migration.<sup>37</sup> In the beginning, many migrated to areas like Assam and Sikkim in India; perhaps, owing to their own security concerns, the Indian security forces pressured the migrants to move east in the direction of Nepal (Hutt 2005). As more *Lothshampas* arrived as refugees in Nepal, the international community, especially the UNHCR accepted responsibility for their survival and welfare. The international humanitarian and legal appeal for the Bhutanese refugees was countered by the Bhutanese government's deliberate use of frames of illegality of the departed immigrants and its concerns for national security (Hutt 1996, 410). Efforts to resolve the issue lacked real conviction and often resembled a ruse. In the contention of reintegration-repatriation, the Bhutanese government agreed to form a Ministerial Joint Committee (MJC) with its Nepali counterpart and committed to a verification process of 'real' Bhutanese citizens. It conveniently found that only 2.5 percent of the encamped population was 'bonafide Bhutanese' and most were emigrants (Hutt 2005, 48). This essentially killed any realistic chance of negotiated resolution. After

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<sup>37</sup> In the discussion of Bhutanese repression, the story of Tek Nath Rizal is infamous. While the story is surplus to the needs here, it is covered well by multiple sources – Amnesty International (1992); Hutt (2003). The short story is that he worked for the Bhutanese government and when he attempted to appeal on behalf of the *Lothshampa* population, he was arrested, imprisoned, and tortured. He was perhaps the 'example' made by the government; his lore remains important in refugee story of exodus.

fifteen failed MJC meetings and close to two decades spent in exile, the writing was on the wall: third-country resettlement was the only viable option for the Bhutanese refugees.<sup>38</sup>

After spending seventeen years in camps, some *Lothshampa* families, tentatively at first, accepted the offer of resettlement. The US initially agreed to accept 60,000 refugees, with the possibility of accepting more in the future (Bhaumik 2007b). Eventually, other countries—Australia, Canada, Denmark, New Zealand, Norway, and the U.K.—agreed to accept more refugees (UNHCR 2009). According to Moore and Shellman (2007) refugee flows are generally driven by a ‘push’ of fear of persecution and a ‘pull’ of economic incentives (813). In my view, the period of liminality, i.e. the exile in refugee camps, in between the push and pull factors is just as crucial. The extended period of exile forces refugee communities to choose the lesser of two evils. Although resettlement has been a contested choice in the Nepali refugee camps (Bhaumik 2007a, 2007b; Evans 2010b), the frequent success story of resettled families, propagated in the media and transmitted through personal communication, has largely won over most of the community. On balance, it is easy to see why: resettlement promises economic opportunity and protections of a national identity to Bhutanese refugees; on the other hand, it takes away the possibility of a return to Bhutan.

The rise of ethnic nationalism in a country forces the flight of an excluded minority (Smith 1994 cited in Hutt 1996, 397). Ethnic exclusion is expedient when the minority lacks political authority to defend itself (Arendt 1958). The academic contestation on the veracity of ‘ethnic cleansing’, or the extent of the violent role of BPP, in my view, is rather moot. The fact remains that *Lothshampas* were efficiently and effectively removed from Bhutanese society and

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<sup>38</sup> A few thousand refugees remain in Nepali refugee camps. These families refused the option of resettlement and will subsequently be allowed to ‘reintegrate’ into Nepali society, eventually.



swiftly written out of the country's history. More importantly, the Bhutanese government has gotten away with this act of repression. Now, it seems unlikely the country will be held accountable for its actions against the *Lothshampas*, the population that wasn't quite Bhutanese enough.

Moving forward, what I find more relevant and important is a better understanding of refugee resettlement. Viewing resettlement simply as a long-term 'solution' (UNHCR n.d.) is a restrictive premise. This can preclude us from observing deeper into the life-altering situations faced by *Lothshampa* refugees, whether as residents of Bhutan, or as refugees. Similarly, the term 'refugee' is a shorthand for victimhood as well as political protection (Hein 1993) but this doesn't mean refugees are free from their diurnal struggles like negotiating their social organization and social identities in camps or in resettlement. Hence, I choose an ethnographic approach to study resettlement as a complex reality defined by individual and group experiences. In placing the Bhutanese refugees under the microscope of my case study, I attempt to interpret resettlement from their perspectives. The challenges associated with their resettlement are given, but I also try to articulate their actions and identities in resettlement. In doing so, I hope to amplify their voice which has been muted for far too long.

## Site Selection: Resettlement in North Hill, Akron

Although refugee resettlement is largely portrayed as a humanitarian gesture (Bruno 2015; UNHCR n.d.), immigration has always been a political action of inclusion and exclusion (Hein 1993; Zolberg 2006). Resettlement is no different. I find resettlement is best viewed as a political trade-off. In resettlement, refugee families are afforded national protection through (eventual) citizenship status and concomitant welfare benefits (Capps et al. 2015; Ives 2007). On the other hand, resettlement requires refugee families to become self-reliant in a relatively brief time, i.e. ninety days (Franz 2003; Singer and Wilson 2006). As part of resettlement, US voluntary agencies (volags) disperse refugee families across the US and guide local organizations in addressing refugee needs and preparing them for employment. At least theoretically, this decentralized dispersion is designed to prevent refugee influx from overwhelming a local community's capacity, and to match refugee labor with the existing local demand (Ott 2011). Based on the data recorded by Refugee Processing Center (RPC), of the Bureau of Population, Refugee, and Migration's (PRM), the Bhutanese refugee population has been resettled in 41 US states between January 2008 and August 2015. During this time, a total of 6,768 Bhutanese refugees were resettled in 19 localities in the state of Ohio.<sup>39</sup> In the same period, Akron has received 1,980 Bhutanese refugees, which is second only to Columbus, Ohio (RPC 2015).<sup>40</sup> In 2016, 250-300 Bhutanese refugees were annually resettling in Akron; the arrival number was slowly dwindling as other refugee groups were arriving in Akron. Although the Bhutanese-Nepali population is visibly prominent in Akron, it is difficult to estimate the total

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<sup>39</sup> The only states with a higher number of resettled Bhutanese refugees are: New York (18 localities) – 7,000; Pennsylvania (20 localities) – 9,156; Texas (13 localities) – 7,701.

<sup>40</sup> The sub-state level data on refugee populations is no longer available at RPC. Akron has an estimated population of 700,000; North Hill, the primary site of my fieldwork, has an estimated population of 14,000. Derived from data available at *Statisticalatlas.com*.

population accurately.<sup>41</sup> The principal reason is the steady secondary migration of Bhutanese-Nepali refugees to Akron from other states. Some of my interviewees have estimated the total population of the Bhutanese-Nepali community in Akron to be as high as 10,000.

The city of Akron is home to many refugee groups, including Burmese, Congolese, Iranian, Iraqi, and Syrian families. The incoming refugee population has gradually been replacing the Italian and Irish character of some of Akron's neighborhoods including North Hill. In the last decade, this immigration has helped the local economy recover, as captured in local and national news outlets. This influx is "helping offset a decline in native-born people ages 35 to 44 who are moving out of the Midwest" (Armon 2014). Moreover, the overall economic contribution of refugees is helping cities like Akron add manufacturing jobs, as well as stabilizing its local housing market (Montlake 2017). The refugee advent has overseen an increase of \$207 million in the local housing market. In 2013, refugees contributed more than \$3 million in state and local taxes; Summit County housing value has increased by \$207 million between 2000 and 2013; 11.1 percent of immigrants and refugees are self-employed or run their own businesses; 1,156 local manufacturing jobs were reportedly created or preserved by immigrants or refugees (*New American Economy* 2016). Among Akron's refugee populations, the Bhutanese has been the most organized and visible community. Their presence is especially evident in North Hill, where my fieldwork was primarily based.

A significant proportion of the Bhutanese refugee population resides in North Hill, strategically placed around International Institute of Akron (IIA). As one of the local agencies responsible for refugee resettlement, IIA arranged for the initial housing of incoming refugees

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<sup>41</sup> It is difficult for NGOs or the state to keep track of secondary migrants as they're free to change their residences. Secondary migrants aren't eligible for welfare in destination states, which poses a challenge for local NGOs.

close to its own location. This proximity is an evident convenience for refugee families especially as most don't own any means of transportation. When I volunteered at IIA's English classes, most of the students walked the short distance from their homes to IIA. The initial settlement of Bhutanese-Nepali families in North Hill, therefore, is centered on the delivery of resettlement-based services. Around IIA, small groups of Bhutanese refugees could be regularly observed, distinct in their features and ethnic attire especially the older generation donning the men's traditional *Dhaka topi* (Nepali hat) and women's *lungi* (ankle-length patterned skirt); they can often be seen crossing the road absent-mindedly and dangerously or congregating at IIA. The Bhutanese-Nepali community encapsulates a variety of castes, tribal affiliation, religions, and micro-cultures within its national-linguistic society. The Bhutanese-Nepali of Mongolian descent (i.e., *janajati* or indigenous caste), with darker complexion, and short stature are visibly more distinct in North Hill.

The immigrant businesses in North Hill are represented by an African-centric grocery store, and some Burmese shops, along with some Mexican restaurants. However, this 'ethnic' area is primarily known for its Bhutanese-Nepali businesses. These businesses include a plethora of grocery stores, a Nepali restaurant, a few garment stores, and a few less conspicuous jewelers, cellular phone and electronics vendors, and a community healthcare provider.<sup>42</sup> Among the Bhutanese-owned businesses, grocery stores remain the most popular enterprise. Immigrant communities across the US are known to invest in local grocery stores (Portes and Rumbaut 2006), as they tend to cater specifically to immigrant populations who seek familiar

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<sup>42</sup> Two more Nepali restaurants have opened in neighboring localities but outside of the North Hill neighborhood.

foodstuffs and may lack access to personal transportation. Moreover, these grocery stores double as social spaces for the members of the immigrant community.

There are six Bhutanese-Nepali grocery stores in North Hill. More than any other businesses, grocery stores are indisputably rooted in the community's past, with its specific offering of Nepali and Indian products. Simply put, these aren't *just* grocery stores. To step into a grocery store is tantamount to stepping into a cultural oasis. The stores eschew the general expectation of order and presentation common in US stores. Each shelf and every corner of the store explicitly exhibits Nepali and Indian products. As a Nepali individual, I associate this sight and smell to the memory of Nepali markets. Each grocery store tends to mimic another: they offer similar produce, and generally reserve a small section for cheap clothing and garments. Two of the oldest grocery stores have a meat section that offers pork, fish, and most importantly for the community, goat meat, a traditional delicacy. Another unique feature of some of these stores is that they offer *chatpate* – a crispy, spicy snack mostly made of puffed rice, onion, tomatoes, chickpeas, salt and lime juice. I spent part of my fieldwork observing many of these stores and what stood out was the cultural space that was difficult to observe outside the immigrant context. For instance, transactions were often informal, and based on credit; conversations between cashiers and customers were informal and intimate. A considerable number of Bhutanese-Nepali business owners and entrepreneurs are secondary migrants, i.e. they resettled in Akron from other states. The motivations for secondary migration range from affordable living conditions to strong family ties. Although there is no official statistic on secondary migration, the number is estimated in the thousands.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Anecdotal estimation by IIA employees and Bhutanese interviewees.

As Bonacich (1973) warns, it is tempting to declare a new refugee group an economic success given their penchant for entrepreneurship and tenacity. North Hill is locally known for its ethnic markets, especially the Bhutanese-Nepali establishments. The Bhutanese-Nepali community participated in the local economy primarily as the labor force for nearby industries, such as meatpacking and rubber manufacturing; refugees make up 5.6 percent of Akron's manufacturing workers and 6.7 percent of workers in the city's service industries (*New American Economy* 2016, 10). These factories are incidentally located relatively far from North Hill.<sup>44</sup> Pachirat (2005) argued that society is organized in a way to conceal uncomfortable facets, such as the 'hidden' Great Plains industrialized slaughterhouses, the site of his ethnographic work. Similarly, in my research, the Bhutanese-Nepali community resided in North Hill, but away from the local community. This detachment is also evident in the proliferation of new Bhutanese-Nepali businesses, particularly the grocery stores. Immigrant businesses in North Hill exist along North Main Street, and its intersections at East Talmadge Avenue and East Cuyahoga Falls Avenue. This area is only a short walking distance away from IIA as well as many houses inhabited by Bhutanese Nepali families. Within the North Hill area, the tang of its 'old' immigrants lingers as Italian and (to an extent) Irish establishments are juxtaposed with the emerging immigrant market that is evidently dominated by Bhutanese (often advertised as 'Nepali') businesses.<sup>45</sup> Among the Italian restaurants, pizza parlors, donut shops, and the Nepali stores, there lay some vacant spaces, abandoned and in disrepair. In painting a sincere picture of North Hill, it showcases a hopeful rise of immigrants but also displays evidence of its former economic decline.

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<sup>44</sup> Case Farms, the meatpacking plant colloquially known as 'chicken' or 'chicken factory', has two factories that are an hour and hour and half away from North Hill respectively.

<sup>45</sup> At this point, I eschew the use of the 'Lothshampa' label, replacing it with Bhutanese or Bhutanese-Nepali categorization. These are the most common descriptors used by the community.

When immigrant communities build ethnic enclaves successfully, they provide an alternative path to economic and social success, which provides agency to its population (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). Immigrant-based markets are perhaps the first step toward an ethnic enclave. For a self-sustaining economic system, a locally owned bank or credit union is often the final step. It can be argued that the overall diffusion of resettlement tends to inhibit economic ties, and construction of enclaves (Hein 1993, 54). In the case of Bhutanese-Nepali resettlement in North Hill, Akron, the community appears to be gradually moving toward the creation of an enclave. Through internal organization and secondary migration, the community seems to have found agency *despite* US resettlement efforts. These are still early days but the Bhutanese population in Akron is already portrayed as a ‘success’ story due to this visibility. My work, however, is less interested in the US-based conceptions of success and is more attentive to individual and group experiences in resettlement. Nevertheless, these perceptions of the community, along with the visibility of the community contribute to make North Hill, Akron an interesting and relevant site to study the local resettlement of Bhutanese-Nepali population.

## Entry and Initial Observations

My active fieldwork began toward the end of 2015 and lasted until mid-2017. My fieldwork led me to a variety of sites and circumstances. This included volunteering at IIA, extensive visits to local businesses and Bhutanese-Nepali cultural events, and related research and community development programs.<sup>46</sup> In addition to my meticulous field observations, my primary data collection was in the form of audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews with a diverse set of Bhutanese-Nepali refugees and experts. I conducted most of my observations and interviews during the aforementioned time frame. After this ‘active’ research period, I continued to visit North Hill to conduct some interviews and remained involved in community-based engagement projects, but my visits were irregular. At this point, I had already established a network of contacts that I could reach out to whenever necessary without regular field visits. The dramatic shift in national conversation on immigration and subsequent policymaking around 2016 had severely affected IIA, forcing me to depend less on them for information and research needs.

In conducting my ethnography, I started as a volunteer at International Institute of Akron, a local NGO, to observe the local dynamics, gradually cultivating relationship within the Bhutanese-Nepali community. With time, I have garnered a reputation as a refugee and immigrant rights advocate, a perception that has served me well in data collection. Along with my several professional engagements with IIA, I have personally been able to remain in close

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<sup>46</sup> There are two primary projects that worked parallel to my fieldwork: I spent approximately four months (September of 2016 to January of 2017) as a research consultant for IIA’s economic development project. This project was funded by Knight Foundation, an institution invested in community engagement and public space in cities like Akron.

In October 2018, Dr. Johanna Solomon and I conducted a community dialogue in North Hill. We invited a variety of local stakeholders, including refugee stakeholders as well as local leaders and representatives of the community. This was funded by the Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict, and Violence.



contact with some of my interviewees, which has been helpful in fact-checking and taking the occasional pulse of the community. My initial entry into the Bhutanese community in North Hill was indirect, i.e. through my work at IIA. Ethnographic research constitutes observation of a group in their ‘natural’ setting (Angrosino 2007, 26), but obtaining entry into the community and establishing rapport are crucial methodological challenges. Kent State University’s institutional review board (IRB) and relevant works on field research stressed caution in approaching and investigating vulnerable populations (Clark 2016; Coy 2001; Punch 2012). In steering my prospectus through the IRB, I considered volunteering at IIA. I had met some of the IIA directors and employees at Kent State University’s panel events. These interactions, as well as my visit to IIA in early 2016, led to a researcher-volunteer position. I officially started volunteering at IIA at the end of 2016.

The International Institute of Akron is housed in a three-story brick building on East Talmadge Avenue in North Hill.<sup>47</sup> The sign bearing IIA’s name also carries the subtitle – “Helping the foreign born to transition into society”. In my volunteer position (which was later converted into a research internship), I mainly worked on outreach activities and research-based projects for the New Initiatives team.<sup>48</sup> It is an ethnographic truism that the researcher should make every effort to be helpful and useful in their ‘new’ environment (Angrosino 2007, 33). Starting out as a volunteer at IIA, I worked enthusiastically and made myself available for any necessary task. My initial tasks consisted of ‘simple’ projects: translation of English documents into Nepali, data entry, and other clerical work.

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<sup>47</sup> IIA is no longer located in this location. In 2018, they moved to a different location within North Hill. This move was a few years in the making.

<sup>48</sup> The New Initiatives division was a relatively recent one. It was responsible for conducting socio-economic research and local community-based programs. It’s field-based nature and research-friendly personnel were significant in my research.

My work space was on the first floor, and it was shared by a host of individuals—IIA employees, interns, and contractors, one of whom was a Research Fellow at University of Akron.<sup>49</sup> The open layout helped me absorb IIA’s professional environment and engage in regular, germane conversations. Many of my colleagues shared similar research or professional interests; they were also curious about my experiences with UNHCR and the time I had spent in refugee camps in Nepal. My professional time at IIA was instrumental in understanding the local context of resettlement. From one of these conversations, I learned IIA was gradually (and only recently) becoming more invested in the social adaptation of the refugees, and the Bhutanese community reportedly benefited the most from this change. Although I volunteered at IIA two days a week, I also showed up to other relevant and interesting IIA events. For instance, I helped IIA and a local church distribute welcome presents for incoming refugee families around Christmas in 2015. In another instance, I attended the monthly ‘Cultural Orientation’, a federally-mandated program to welcome new refugee families. It was my view that increased visibility will add to my credibility among my IIA colleagues and provide more opportunities to meet members of the Bhutanese community.

When I started at IIA, I expected and hoped my experience would lead to some form of exposure to the Bhutanese community over time. My initial contact with Bhutanese individuals took place relatively early; IIA’s presence was more central in the Bhutanese community than I had realized. Several Bhutanese individuals were employed at IIA in a variety of professional capacities: case management of refugees, translation, driving duties, etc. This was an unexpected yet important discovery for me. Furthermore, I utilized part of my time at IIA in

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<sup>49</sup> As IIA was a small organization, I prefer to not assign specific titles to shield individual identities. I interviewed a few of these individuals for my dissertation.

volunteering to teach English language classes. These classes were attended mostly by Bhutanese individuals. Between the IIA employees and English students, I stumbled onto a pool of potential interviewees. However, I was patient and used my time well in identifying and recruiting appropriate interviewees. My ongoing observations and introductory conversations helped immensely in the recruitment of interviews.

With time, I started undertaking research-centered and Bhutanese community-based projects, which led to increased exposure to and interaction with the Bhutanese community. One of my first major projects was to create a healthcare-based packet to be used by local medical personnel in addressing the concerns of the Bhutanese community. This project led to my introduction to the challenges faced by the community, especially in relation to the access of healthcare services and subsequent isolation felt by the community. My academic and professional credentials were helpful in entering IIA and proximity to refugee communities. On the other hand, the shared cultural and linguistic heritage was crucial in my initial contact conversation with the Bhutanese community. In addition to my knowledge on immigration and resettlement, I fit into the role of a cultural broker or liaison: I spoke Nepali and was better-suited to initiate conversation with and collect data from Bhutanese-Nepali individuals. In sum, I straddled a variety of roles seamlessly during my time at IIA and North Hill.

My time spent at UNHCR had informed me of the existing similarities between the *Lothshampa* and the Nepali population. Yet, my observations and conversations at IIA still surprised me at how deep the shared cultural connection ran. I was especially surprised to learn of the Hindu caste system practiced by the Bhutanese refugee community. Some of the Bhutanese refugees shared the same last name as me as well as the tribal traditions still practiced by my family in Nepal. I learned that the refugees I was studying were far more ‘Nepali’

(culturally) than I had imagined. This knowledge, while vindicating my identity-based approach, also led to a momentary realization of my own ignorance.

Angrosino (2007) warns that working with familiar populations and cultures can paradoxically restrict our research access. Inadvertently or otherwise, ‘native’ researchers can become complacent; or, communities may be more open to true ‘outsiders’ in their interaction (32). In the context of my research, my position was noteworthy for its uniqueness. I was neither an insider, nor an outsider. The insider- and outsider-ness in observational study is perhaps better understood as a continuum than a strict dichotomy (Labaree 2002). In other words, it is quite difficult to remain a complete outsider or insider during research. From my overall experience, I was somewhere in the middle. I shared many of the core aspects of identity with the Bhutanese community – language, religion, caste, and immigration status in the US. On the other hand, I didn’t experience their ‘refugeeness.’<sup>50</sup> Put differently, the traumatic experience of displacement and subsequent exile experienced by refugees functions as an identity boundary, effectively including some and excluding others. In being similar yet distinct, I estimate I was stationed on the edge of what constitutes a Bhutanese-Nepali identity, albeit I felt more of an insider than an outsider. This goes back to Jenkins’ (1996) argument: internal definitions are concurrently affected by external categorization. The Bhutanese refugee community is affected by how they’re perceived along with their own identity re-constructions.

Local NGOs like IIA play a central role in the implementation of resettlement. In addition to carrying out its bureaucratic duties—from the initial reception to employment training to arrangement of welfare (Rumbaut 1989; Singer and Wilson 2006)—local agencies

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<sup>50</sup> Liisa Malkki (1995a) articulates ‘refugeeness’ as the official status of refugee and understands ‘refugeeism’ as a psychological condition or an ideology.

help in the social and cultural development of refugee communities (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Nawyn 2006, 2010). My position at IIA placed me close to some of the Bhutanese population, and helped me grasp resettlement through an institutional perspective. I was surprised by the breadth of services offered by IIA. I was aware of IIA's basic resettlement-based facilities—initial reception and housing arrangement, job training, and language classes. I learned that IIA's work, to the organization's dissatisfaction, is perceived to be solely for incoming refugees. The International Institute's work can be roughly divided into five main departments – Resettlement, Employment, Translation, Immigration, and New Initiatives.<sup>51</sup> The resettlement department was the sole division catering specifically to refugee interests. Most of IIA's services, especially immigration managed by lawyers and legal advocates, were open to immigrants in general. In contrast to the federal government and volags, local agencies are the only institutions to oversee refugee and immigrants' day-to-day social and cultural life (Nawyn 2006, 1517). In the context of North Hill, IIA's centrality—in its physical spacing and close socialization with refugee groups—reaffirms Nawyn's empirical inferences.

My time at IIA helped me establish contact as well as rapport with various members of the Bhutanese-refugee community. Many of these were gatekeepers and leaders of the community. As time passed, my IIA colleagues helped me identify principal Bhutanese businesses and often introduced me to the owners, some of whom became my interviewees. This was especially relevant as the local Bhutanese grocery stores informally functioned as social spaces, more so than IIA. Angrosino (2007) advises ethnographers to ensure identified

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<sup>51</sup> This diversity of immigration-based services has allowed IIA to survive in the anti-refugee age as defined by the Trump administration. Given the historically low number of refugees entering the US, IIA has reworked its emphasis on its immigration-based services. Despite the recent struggles, IIA has survived in contrast to other similar agencies like World Relief that had to close its local affiliates.

For World Relief's press release on its closing, visit <https://worldreliefakron.org/press-release>.

gatekeepers are well-respected and liked in the community (32). My role at IIA, which evolved over time in its importance, helped me identify the appropriate gatekeepers for informal conversations and interviews. Regardless of “whatever the level at which one operates, and however intricately, the guiding principle is the same: societies, like lives, contain their own interpretations. One has only to learn how to gain access to them” (Geertz 1972, 29). Perhaps due to my initial affiliation with IIA, I am generally perceived as a professional advocate of refugee rights within IIA and among refugee stakeholders. I believe my indirect contact through IIA was a beneficial one; I remain in close contact with my IIA colleagues alongside a diverse group of the Bhutanese-Nepali community members.

In the December of 2015, I started my fieldwork, most of which took place in 2016 and the initial months of 2017. I volunteered and then interned at IIA for most of 2016; for the final three months of the year, I worked as a research consultant overseeing a community economic development project.<sup>52</sup> My time spent at IIA therefore, helped me conduct my research on the Bhutanese-Nepali community and elevate my professional profile. In doing so, I helped IIA achieve some of its refugee-centered goals, and personally, I found myself transitioning from a participant-researcher to an advocate.

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<sup>52</sup> Although this project, comprising of surveys and focus interviews, was micro-economic in scope, it allowed me to establish contact and communicate with many immigrant business owners.

I use part of the raw data and the final report (published and distributed by IIA) in my analysis. I thank IIA for its generosity in allowing me to use the data.

## **Data Collection through Observation**

Early on during my tenure at IIA, I found it quite impossible not to observe. Every interaction or conversation was potentially data. Angrosino (2007) makes a valid point: observation is not just a tool of data collection, but also an action that facilitates data collection (35). A researcher's mere presence in the field can lead to data. "Participant observers commonly gather data through casual conversations, in-depth, informal, and unstructured interviews and questionnaires" (Jorgensen 1989, 22). My initial fieldwork was fueled by numerous conversations and inferences which helped me forge a concrete path for my fieldwork. In addition to my observations as an IIA personnel, my field-based observations took me to English language classes, as well as to most refugee-driven local businesses and their socio-cultural celebrations.

At my IIA desk, I almost always had my laptop in front of me. I usually had my Word file open, so I could type quick notes on potentially interesting or relevant observations. As far as I can tell, my note-taking didn't appear atypical in the IIA's professional setting. On the other hand, when I was participating at an 'outside' event, like Cultural Orientation, or a social event at a local establishment, I always carried a notebook with me. I would scribble notes on my notebook as inconspicuously as possible. On days when participation at events made note-taking difficult, I would make a mental note of pertinent events. At the end of the day, either at IIA or at home, I would revisit the day's events and note them down in as much detail as possible. During this time, I would also attempt to reflect on my position as a researcher in the context of my fieldwork. The habit continues today.

In observational research, a researcher's degree of participation can vary. Angrosino (2007) divides observational research into four categories: complete observer, observer-as-

participant, participant-as-observer, and complete participant (54-55). In my view, I veered between observer-as-participant and participant-as-observer, depending on the context of the event. At IIA, I was grasping the context of Bhutanese-Nepali resettlement at a furious rate through a multitude of informal conversations and my observations. Through my archival research, I was cognizant of the existence of heterogeneous, even contentious perspectives that existed within the refugee community (Bhaumik 2007a, 2007b; Evans 2010a; Hutt 2003), and I wanted to be strategic in accessing this diversity of worldviews. In doing so, my field observations can be roughly divided into IIA-related and personal observations. In the former, my position can best be defined as an observer-as-participant; in the latter, I was more of a participant-as-observer.

A researcher's observer-as-participant role is a relatively detached one. Here, he or she is seen primarily as an outsider, relating to the subjects as a researcher (Angrosino 2007, 54). When I interacted with the Bhutanese-Nepali community for IIA-related projects, I was defined by my affiliation with the institute. This was especially clear when I volunteered in IIA-run English classes. This was an interesting ambience; most of the students were elderly Bhutanese-Nepali. Although sometimes I assisted the instructor, I tried to stay on the periphery of the class, simply observing the proceedings, as observation of a community in its natural setting is best done unobstructed (Jorgensen 1989). More importantly, my affiliation with IIA inadvertently established me in the position of authority to some refugees, further concealing my observer-as-participant role. This was confirmed later when I interviewed members of the English class: their deference toward me, someone who is several generations younger, was personally awkward and uncomfortable for me. However, this behavior wasn't entirely surprising as the



Bhutanese refugees' fear of authority figures is well-documented (Hutt 2003) and is also equally true in the case of refugees in general (Zetter 1991, 2007).

When my fieldwork led me to individual observation, I often found myself as participant-as-observer. Here, the field researcher is more of an insider, and is engaged with the community; "he or she is as much a friend as a neutral researcher" (Angrosino 2007, 55). I grew into this role gradually as I established meaningful contact within the Bhutanese-Nepali community. As part of my strategy, I would visit some Bhutanese-run businesses every week. This action allowed me to capture the social role of stores, through the observation of activity and interaction contained within them. To help me ingratiate myself, I would purchase small items at different shops, often initiating a conversation with the shopkeepers. As my presence became regular at the shops, conversations became common and easier with the store owners and the customers.

I also made a conscious attempt to attend social and cultural events organized by the Bhutanese-Nepali community. Cultural and musical events play an important role in the Bhutanese-Nepali refugee community, as a form of resistance as well as a narrative device (Evans 2010a). The Bhutanese Community Association of Akron (BCAA), the political representative of the community, is responsible for many of these events. The most important of these events is its annual celebration, coinciding with the onset of *Dashain*, the most important Hindu festival. In such social events, I was received warmly due to our shared culture and religion. As I will explain further in my data analysis chapter, this event is both inward- as well as outward-looking. There were many proclamations of an essential Bhutanese national identity, while celebrating a distinct Nepali culture. Moreover, the presence of other immigrant communities, like Hmong and Mexican, as well as local political leaders, added a dash of cosmopolitanism to the event. From a social psychological perspective, these events served as

internally identity-affirming and externally advertising its communal identity to the outside world. The community's political organization, however imperfect and irregular, has a future-oriented outlook.

In summary, my access during immediate interactions with the Bhutanese-Nepali tended to vary depending upon the settings and the individuals involved. Field researchers sometimes describe their role in relation to their membership to the community they study. Based on my overall field experiences, my membership could be described as mostly active but sometimes passive (Angrosino 2007, 55-56). My engagement with the community leaders, like business owners and IIA employees was an active one, i.e. I could visit their work any time and felt welcome in engaging in conversations. On the other hand, with other members of the community, our interaction can be best described as a formal, limited exchange. I view this variation in membership as further evidence of the complex and uncertain rules that govern expectations (and identities).

My professional engagement with IIA and my field presence in North Hill helped me develop contact with pertinent stakeholders and community members. Consequently, my field experience coincided with two community-based research projects. These projects, although with specific data collection goals, dovetailed with my overall research interests. For the first projects I worked as an IIA research contractor between September of 2016 and January of 2017. Financed by the Knight Foundation, the team created a two-stage research project: initial business surveys, followed by a focus group, to identify problems, business trends, and opportunities among local businesses. IIA wanted my help as a 'cultural broker'. I was already familiar and comfortable with IIA's professional work, and by this time, I had established an entry and rapport with the Bhutanese community, including some of the business owners.

Personally, my involvement in this project provided me an opportunity to research the economic profile of Bhutanese entrepreneurs and business owners and examine their interaction with local ‘American-born’ business owners, some of whom had been operating their businesses for a few decades.<sup>53</sup> As part of the economic development team, we surveyed thirty local businesses, out of which nine were Bhutanese businesses. I was intrigued by the sprawling Bhutanese businesses in the North Hill neighborhood. Through numerous conversations and participant observation, I noticed interesting and fairly evident social-organizational patterns emerging in North Hill. Parts of North Hill are dotted with Nepali sign boards advertising Nepali businesses, with more Bhutanese businesses in line to open. Due to their visible presence, Bhutanese business owners were perceived as de facto leaders and representatives of the community. The emergence of these businesses was an exciting development for the North Hill community, often attracting positive news coverage through the local media. My time spent on the economic development project was useful in understanding the entrepreneurial agency of Bhutanese refugees (and other immigrant owners), as well as the incredible challenges they faced in doing so: from their lack of understanding of building codes to contractual language issues to susceptibility to fraud. My inferences are presented in Chapter V, while I have attached a copy of economic development survey, my notes during the project’s focus group, and requisite Institutional Review Board (IRB) forms for using the project’s data in the Appendix.<sup>54</sup>

The premise of the second project was quite different. One of the most interesting observations to emerge from the economic development project was the evident lack of contact

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<sup>53</sup> I use ‘immigrant owners’ and ‘American-born owners’ because these were the frames we employed for the economic assessment, which we later published and distributed to the participants of the assessment. The use of these frames was deliberate so as to be politically correct as well as inclusive.

<sup>54</sup> The executive summary of this project is available here:  
<https://www.kent.edu/spcs/executive-summary-north-hill-economic-development-survey-and-focus-group-report>

and understanding between the refugee community and US-born locals. In order to address that, I (in collaboration with Dr. Johanna Solomon) organized a community dialogue, based on the contact hypothesis within the conflict resolution discipline. To conduct the dialogue, we received a grant from the Society for the Peace, Conflict, and Violence. This community-engaged participatory project took place on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2018, with the goal of taking the pulse of community relations and to facilitate a dialogue between a variety of stakeholders, including many refugee leaders. The Bhutanese-Nepali community was well-represented among the 30 participants at the event. Analysis of the project is currently pending, but this participatory event helped me observe Bhutanese-Nepali individuals in a social context with other members of the community. Some of these observations were salient and are presented in Chapter V; my field notes on this dialogue is provided in Appendix B. Attending and conducting these participatory projects was a significant way for me to learn about the community and resettlement and to make myself visible. These experiences were instrumental in my transition from an observer to an advocate for refugee rights.

## **Data Collection through Interview**

My early field experience was instrumental in absorbing the social dynamics of North Hill and the quality of resettlement for the neighborhood's Bhutanese-Nepali residents. North Hill attracts a fair bit of attention due to the influx of refugee families. Evidently, the political and social visibility of the Bhutanese society, built in its first decade of resettlement, is clearly impressive. My field-based observations helped me understand the community's intrinsic challenges that were often obscured by this local narrative of success. For example, instances of suicides are alarmingly common, even expected within the community; resettlement has left the older generation largely immobile and isolated, while most of the younger generation labors in one of Akron's local factories. My initial exposure to such conversations and interactions, therefore, aided me in developing my understanding of the community as well as the interview questions. My time in the field, as Geertz (1973) has noted, provided a contextual ballast to the examination of refugees and their resettlement.

Interviews consist of conversations where the objective of the researcher is to gain information (Gorden 1992, 2). Interview is a natural method of data collection in qualitative research where social interaction and conversations are pivotal. Interviewing may appear simple but successful interviews require social skill and attention to detail. In my case, the quality of interview data gradually improved over time as I refined my interviewing and conversational skills. I have conducted 30 structured and semi-structured interviews; 25 Bhutanese refugees and five experts on Bhutanese resettlement. The latter included three IIA-affiliated individuals, one UNHCR representative, and one social benefactor. Data from the expert interviews was especially helpful during the early phase of my fieldwork. I conducted follow-up interviews with some of these experts, providing a longitudinal context to our conversations.

These expert interviews were mainly structured; I had specific interview questions to gather relevant information, or to confirm my suppositions, especially in the case of IIA employees. Also, these experts had much to share, from the imperfect inner workings of IIA, to the mistakes of Bhutanese business owners to the pessimistic view of the present political situation but also including an optimistic outlook on the future of refugees. Experts tend to look inside from the outside, and many of these interviewees were focused on how to fix the myriad imperfections associated with resettlement. These perspectives were informative in piecing an overall outlook of refugee adjustment. However, these narratives were detached from the lived experiences of refugees. My research motive here was to collect data on the relevance of IIA in serving the Bhutanese population. Nawyn's (2006, 2010) empirical insights on the role of local institutions was quite relevant here, especially in understanding the intimate relationship between refugee communities and local agencies like IIA. I have also learned over time, however, that the utility of an IIA-type organization weakens with time. As refugee communities acclimate to host societies and their expectations, they're gradually empowered, and depend less on local agencies. This behavior is an illustration of the refugee agency that develops with time and opportunity (that are provided by refugee resettlement).

I used a combination of snowball sampling and targeted sampling in the recruitment of Bhutanese interviewees. Identification of gatekeepers and community leaders took place organically during my field work. As Angrosino (2007) advises, it is wise to select well-respected and -liked leaders. I requested names of potential interviewees from the community leaders I interviewed. Some names coincided with those already on my tentative list; on the other hand, I was unsuccessful in recruiting some of the suggested individuals. I had more success with individuals I had already met over the course of my field work. Interview sites

varied. I met with some interviewees at their place of business—from grocery stores to restaurants to IIA—and some at neutral locations like a café or a restaurant. Understanding my desire to capture a variety of perspectives, many of my early interviewees advised me to speak to ‘forgotten’ individuals like the elderly refugees. I had already observed English language classes and established contact with some of the older refugees. I approached these students for interviews.

These interviews took place in the classroom at the basement of IIA, following the English language lessons. After the first few interviews, I found more students interested in *kuraa kaani*, or conversation-based interviews. I often noticed students waiting their turn patiently to speak to me. They were especially interested in sharing their stories of their life in Bhutan. Perhaps the interviews served as a therapeutic extension of the social space provided by the English classes. Personally, I am glad I interviewed these students. Differences in experiences, especially between young and old generations, are likely to persist as previously observed by Colic-Peisker and Tillbury (2003) and Markovic and Manderson (2000). The worldviews and opinions of many of the older students is qualitatively different from that of the younger generation, ranging from memories of Bhutan to their perspectives on what it means to be Bhutanese. The overall demographic of Bhutanese interviewees reflects my attempt at capturing heterogeneity, in age and social status. The sample includes the older generation, young college-age students, local business owners, and IIA employees. I interviewed 18 male interviewees and 7 female interviewees.

In constructing my interview questions, I was interested in exploring the day-to-day refugee life in resettlement, as well as the narratives of their past in Bhutan and in refugee camps. Individual and collective experiences can modify group identities. This is especially the

case for forced migrants in the liminal space of refugee camps. In her famous anthropological work, Malkki (1995a, 1995b) found that Hutu refugees encamped in rural Tanzania had adopted an ethnonational identity, while their counterparts in the urban camps opted for a more cosmopolitan identification. Exploration of stories of forced migration and muted narratives is interesting, but caution is merited in the interpretation of these narratives. “While involuntary movement entails change and loss for those displaced, we cannot *a priori* assume what these are, what they mean and how they are best coped with” (Eastmond 2007, 252).

Refugee narratives can be a personal, almost mythical form of history, especially when a few generations are unaware of life in Bhutan. Or, these stories could serve as an unexpected challenge to the collective consciousness. As Evans (2010b) observed, revolution-minded Bhutanese refugees used cultural narratives to deter resettlement, whereas more cosmopolitan individuals favored the resolution.<sup>55</sup> Narratives of forced migrants, therefore, merits contextual interpretation: “...[refugee] stories cannot be seen as simply reflecting life as lived but should be seen as constructions or interpretations of the past, generated in specific contexts of the present” (Eastmond 2007, 250). In studying the marginalized and the vulnerable populations, we forget they go through their daily lives like everyone else (Pachirat 2009). Ethnography has especially been useful in capturing the day-to-day life of Bhutanese refugees in Akron. With the aid of context-derived fieldwork, I am able to contrast and parallel a variety of perspectives on the Bhutanese history, identity, and future within resettlement. The interview data is rich in detail and serves as an appropriate representation of lives lived in Bhutan, Nepal, and Akron.

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<sup>55</sup> I find Evans’ (2010b) work to parallel identity-based works of Malkki (1995a, 1995b) and Byrne (2013). In all of these cases, different narrative vehicles were observed to lead to disparate conclusions related to identity and their future within refugee groups.



Case studies, especially ethnographies, benefit from open-ended questions for data collection (Angrosino 2007, 42). Open-ended questions are designed to elicit contextually rich and large amount of data from the interviewees. My interview questions can be divided into three thematic sections: memory of Bhutanese life, refugee-ness in Nepali camps, and resettlement life. Put differently, these components represent a pre-refugee experience, a liminal life of exile, and the current post-refugee life respectively. The resettlement questions were generally grounded in the context of employment, social organization, and access to local institutions.

Following the receipt of written or oral consent, I would explain the subject of the study broadly, maintaining a conversational tone.<sup>56</sup> The understanding of the consent varied among my interviewees, but I ensured my interviewees understood their participation was voluntary. Only during the first interview was I asked to establish the credibility of my research. It turns out the interviewee had been previously interviewed by an undergraduate from a local university in the past; the interviewer failed to provide the results of the interview or their project post-interview, giving rise to the rumors that the report painted the community in a negative light. I have since started offering a copy of the interview transcripts as well as finished chapters of my dissertation to my interviewees. In the beginning of the interviews, I would often speak of my experience working for UNHCR, or the current affiliation with IIA, or my graduate training at Kent State, to establish my credentials.

I raised the question of their perceptions of collective identity when inquiring about resettlement experiences. I wanted the respondents to be at ease before bringing up identity-

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<sup>56</sup> The oral consent was useful for interviewing interviewees who were illiterate. Initially, I met individuals with good command of English and provided me with written informed consent (available in Appendix A).

related question, which has been a historically divisive subject (and remains so currently). As is the case with a semi-structured format, I prepared a tentative list of questions for each theme ahead of time; on the other hand, I framed the questions in a broad manner, allowing the storytelling space to my interviewees. I asked clarifying questions during the interview, when necessary. I must emphasize I didn't always follow a readymade set of questions. Instead, I tailored my questions as necessary, especially as I became more confident in my interviewing abilities. I learned quickly that an interviewee-driven narrative yielded rich data. It is my view that my flexible attitude to interviews and the questions grounded in *kuraa-kaani* (conversational approach) helped many of my interviewees to open up during the dialogue. Some interviewees spoke to me even after the recorded engagement was over, often inquiring me about my past (some asked if I was a refugee) and current life. I interpret these post-interview conversations to be the evidence of rapport I was able to build.

Interviews with Bhutanese refugees were intimate exchanges. I started the conversation preceding the interview in Nepali to put the interviewee at relative ease. Use of Nepali language often had a calming effect, for the interviewees as well as for me. I employed Nepali for interviewing members of the older generation, who spoke little to no English. During the interviews, I would sometimes switch to English if the interviewees expressed their preference for the language (which was most likely the case with educated individuals). So, most of the interviews I conducted had some mixture of English and Nepali. I also liked to start the interviews with questions about family and work. I tried to be attentive to the references of economic independence, social status, and future expectations among the refugees. During the interviews, I used a digital tape recorder to record the interview, but I also used a notebook to make notes on anything interesting or relevant. While I didn't take copious notes during the

interview, I would make a quick note of an interesting or relevant reference. At the end of the day, I would revisit these fieldnotes and record them in my field journal. Often, these notes would develop into larger interlinking (or, introspective) entries. I would also transcribe my interviews by the day's conclusion. On days when I interviewed multiple individuals, transcription required an additional day. I kept a meticulous record of all my interviewees, which included their names, location and date of interviews, and memo on any special circumstances of the interview, or a memorable quote from the exchange.

Most interviews lasted, on average, between thirty and sixty minutes. The conversations with some of the older Bhutanese were relatively short, between twenty and thirty minutes. With this sub-population, conversation on resettlement and group identity was often short because of their isolated experiences and simple perspectives. Their movement was limited in resettlement, which contrasted with their romantic recollection of life in Bhutan, or their imagination of life for their busy and employed children and grandchildren. Similarly, while the younger generation understood the blurring intersections on which the question of identity rested; their narratives were lengthy, complicated, and full of justifications and contradictions. In stark contrast, many elderly Bhutanese refugees couldn't comprehend how could they be any other identity, even if they were forced into refugee life by identity-driven conflict. Eastmond (2007) illustrates "[s]ome survivors remain silent because they need to dissociate themselves from painful memories" (259). On the flip side, this group of interviewees was responsible for illustrating a life in Bhutan before the government repression and deconstructing the forced migration experience. Narratives of this group, in a way, represent a reversal of traditional agency and social organization. I had proposed to conduct between 25 and 30 interviews in my prospectus. Upon completion of the designated 30 interviews, I observed an overall saturation of the data.

## Presentation of Qualitative Data

Between my field notes (91 pages) and 30 recorded interviews, I collected a large volume of textual data. To manage and analyze the voluminous data, I used the *NVivo* software. I also analyzed a few news stories and blog entries by the members of the Bhutanese community. Throughout my fieldwork, interviews and field notes data reinforced and supplemented each other. In qualitative research I have found field inferences, collection of data, and analysis to take place in a simultaneous and cyclical fashion.

I was largely working with an inductive approach in the analysis of emerging themes. During my fieldwork, I was furiously noting observations of everyday life of Bhutanese refugees and personal impressions of the system of resettlement. I was attentive to emerging themes while taking notes, or having informal conversations, or reflecting on my field notes. When reading and organizing my field notes, I recorded my analytical memos in my journal.<sup>57</sup> Analytical memo writing assists in generation of relevant codes (Saldaña 2013, 51). “To codify is to arrange things in a systematic order, to make something part of a system or classification, to categorize” (Saldaña 2013, 9). Through initial or ‘open’ coding, I was able to identify general themes within my data. Broadly speaking, the data can be best represented in two broad categories of ‘experience’ and ‘identities’ as shown in Figure 2. The former is sub-divided into narratives of locations, i.e. Bhutan, refugee camps, and Nepal; the latter is sub-divided into different self-definitions of identities. As I am interested in narratives, I chose paragraphs to be the appropriate unit for coding my themes. In other words, paragraphs of varying lengths were coded and saved in representative categories and sub-categories.

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<sup>57</sup> During the analysis of *NVivo* data, I used its memo function for writing my memos.

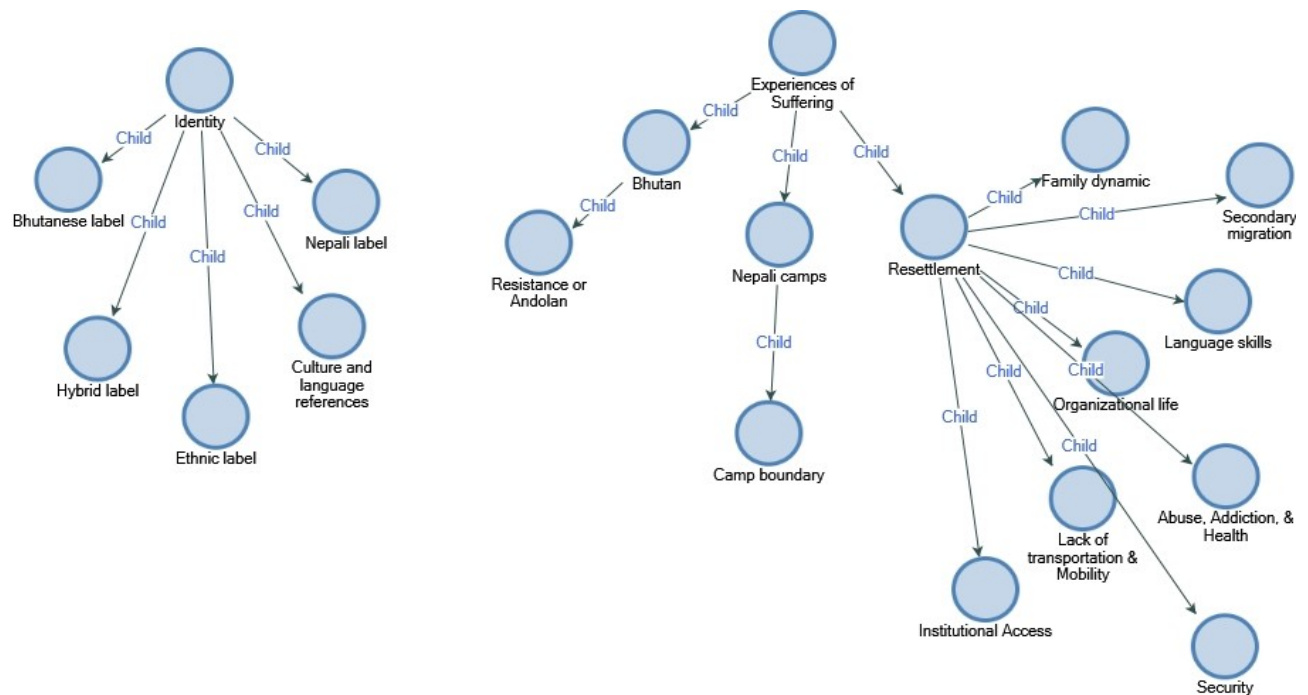


Figure 3: Conceptual Mapping of Emergent Themes (NVivo Nodes)

As will be seen in Chapters IV and V, the conceptual patterns of Figure 3 form the foundation of organization and presentation of my data. Ethnographic data can be presented in different styles. For my research, I employ the ‘realist tales’ “characterized by extensive, closely edited quotations from the people who have been observed or interviewed with the intention of helping the reader ‘hear’ the actual voices of the people whose lives are being represented” (Angrosino 2005, 79). The tales, presented in Chapters IV and V, add detail and nuance to the experience of refugees and life in resettlement.

### Unexpected Field Encounters

During one of my interviews, the interviewee broke down into tears while recollecting her life in Bhutan. She continued talking through her sobs. Although I was concerned for her well-being, I decided to let her continue. I was unprepared for this situation, but I relied on my cultural instinct, letting her finish her testimony. Her testimony was a mixture of painful

memories and gratitude at being ‘saved’ by resettlement. It was an unexpected situation, but I believe the completion of the interview didn’t worsen the interviewee’s situation in any way. She had recovered her composure by the end of the interview. As a researcher, I considered this to be an evidence of the essentialist link between the past and the present, and its emotional gravity.

Conducting field research often brings researchers face-to-face with the existing power differential between them and their subjects. The individuals under the academic gaze can just as easily recognize this power dynamic. This often leads them to ask the researcher to assist them, whether through monetary contribution, as Clark (2016) encountered in Bosnia, or by elevating their story (Eastmond 2007). I faced a similar situation where an interviewee expressed her challenges in accessing appropriate healthcare as well as the US citizenship. It seemed she had some learning disability that affected her in each situation. She repeatedly asked me to ‘put in a good word’ to the authorities improve her situation. Although I elaborated my lack of authority in the matter, she repeated the request. After the interview, I notified the appropriate authorities at IIA about the exchange. Although the interaction left me quite uncomfortable, I imagine it doesn’t quite measure up to the respondent’s overall experiences in resettlement. From what I can see, resettlement is not experienced the same way by everyone.

During my fieldwork, there were a number of times when I felt uncomfortable in my interaction with the refugee community. Apart from the aforementioned unique circumstances, I found it sobering to observe individuals with similar lineage and ethnic identity recounting incredible difficult moments of their past. Many of the older interviewees especially reminded me of some of my relatives in Nepal.

## Brief Discussion of Agency in the Quantitative Chapter

As I had expected and hoped, my field observations yielded many inferences articulating agency of these Bhutanese refugees. In addition to personal efforts, there is evidence of collective agency within the community. This ranges from the development of ethnic markets in North Hill to the political functions of BCAA. In the quantitative chapter (Chapter VI), I investigate another form of collective agency of this group—secondary migration. I ask, why do resettled refugees opt to undertake secondary migration in resettlement?

This question further elaborates on the actions and agency of Bhutanese refugees and is supplemented by my field observations and interview data. Some of my interviewees came to Akron as secondary migrants from states like Texas and New Hampshire. Their motivation for the migration was a mix of relational (desire for proximity to Bhutanese community) and rational (desire better economic situation) factors. The quantitative chapter, as is the case with statistical examinations, is an investigation based on the latter. I also see the chapter functioning as a critical take on US's structural resettlement. Although the overall picture of resettlement is largely synonymous to permanence and stability, this picture is often far from reality. Resettlement presents a myriad of challenges to incoming refugees, especially for individuals with low levels of human capital and social adaptability. Economic opportunity and social agency (or social role) of refugees are inter-connected, and difficulty in fulfilling either one can possibly lead to dissatisfaction with life in resettlement. The following are proposed hypotheses:

*H1(a): States with better economic opportunities will attract higher levels of secondary migration.*

*H1(b): States with higher provisions for welfare will witness higher rate of secondary migration.*

*Hypothesis 2: States with concentrated refugee populations and networks will witness higher levels of secondary migration.*

*Hypothesis 3: Higher presence of refugee-based institutions and services in the state is unlikely to attract secondary migration.*

My unit of analysis is state-year. I perform a longitudinal analysis on pooled cross-section-time-series data. The dependent variable is incoming refugees from their initial site of reception, i.e. the number of secondary migrants entering a US state between 2012 and 2014. As is the case with many quantitative studies, statistical examination is hampered by lack of appropriate data and precise units of observations. I am forced to work with data for limited years and at a national-level. Disaggregate data within state-level observations would be more appropriate and could lead to a nuanced analysis of data. However, in the paucity of relevant work on refugees, I expect my examination to serve as the initial work with salient theoretical and empirical implications. The chapter serves as a supplementary view on refugee agency in US-based resettlement.



## Chapter Conclusion

I spent a considerable amount of time at various sites and contexts in North Hill, Akron. As I have described in this chapter, these visits were designed to bring me closer to the Bhutanese refugee community. In addition to extensive level of observation data, I also procured interviews from local and international experts to go along. Data from these methods provided me with an intimate understanding of local resettlement, which included its success as well as limitations. These further helped me build a contextual platform for the interviews I conducted with Bhutanese refugees of different generations, social status, and experiences. Consequently, the resulting volume of data consists of similar as well as disparate takes on their past, present, and future. Given the considerable volume of data, I thematically divide and present my qualitative findings in two chapter. Chapter IV will serve as the ‘pre-resettlement chapter.’ This chapter outlines the inductive and theoretical and presents the historic narrative context of Bhutanese life. Chapter V is the ‘resettlement chapter’ that works as the narrative counterpart of Chapter IV; here, the contrasting interview-based narratives on identities is fully explored, with the help of field observations.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDY FINDINGS I:

#### PRE-RESETTLEMENT REFUGEE EXPERIENCES

What is the effect of third-country resettlement on a Bhutanese-Nepali refugee community?<sup>58</sup> The scope of this question is deliberately broad, as I employed inductive methods for my investigation. Through my fieldwork-based observations and interviews, I captured extensive data on the Bhutanese community's life in North Hill, Akron. Although scattered, there has been a significant amount of interpretive research on immigrant and/or refugee adaptation over the last few decades (Ager and Strang 2008; Benson et al. 2011; Hynie 2018; Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006).<sup>59</sup> In addition to my interest in the group's overall socio-political adaptation, I have been curious about the group's narratives of their identities. Self-definition of group identities is an expression of agency, and the extant work on refugee identities is underdeveloped. Identity occupies a central role throughout refugee crises. The refugee exodus is generally comprised of ethnic and religious pariahs, or some other form of minorities, persecuted and driven out of national borders (Hutt 1994; Malkki 1992; Zetter 1991). Their stay in refugee camps is further defined by a continuous

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<sup>58</sup> In this chapter, I use 'Bhutanese' and 'Bhutanese-Nepali' markers interchangeably, for convenience. I call these 'post-refugee' identities, evolving from earlier labels like *Lothshampas*, and political category of refugees. As I explain in this chapter, there is a contextual difference between the two labels, but they were often used interchangeably by the interviewees and aid workers.

<sup>59</sup> In contrast to many of interpretive works in this area, political science has taken a rational approach in identifying the impact of refugees or immigrants on the US society. Relatively recent works by Hopkins (2010) and Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) fall in this category.

denial of their identity preferences (Malkki 1995a, 1995b, 1996). In the discussion of refugee resettlement—a ‘durable’ solution—and its impact on the refugee group, it is imperative to examine refugee identity narratives.

The discussion of Bhutanese refugees’ experience and identities is organized in two chapters: pre-resettlement phase (Chapter IV), and resettlement phase (Chapter V). Although my research question is initially rooted in resettlement experiences, I have learned that past experience intimately shapes the refugees’ understanding of their present and future. Once the population is forcibly removed from their homes and become refugees, their identities begin transitioning. Furthermore, once the population arrives in their resettlement country—in this case the US—they face different type of identity challenges. Thus, it is important to study both and it makes conceptual sense to study them separately.

It is useful to understand that identities can influence refugee worldviews and decision-making, which in turn can impact identities. Some refugees hold on to their pre-displacement identities; in other cases, refugee experiences convince them to re-define themselves in exile (Jaji 2015; Malkki 1995a, 1995b). Both of these factors (a strong sense of national identity and a life in exile) can crucially affect refugee decision-making on their future (Byrne 2013). This is captured in the first part of Figure 4. I extend this dynamic further to examine what happens in resettlement. In other words, how does the resettlement experience affect Bhutanese identities? In the process captured in Figure 4, identity can be seen as an object of change as well as a source of change.

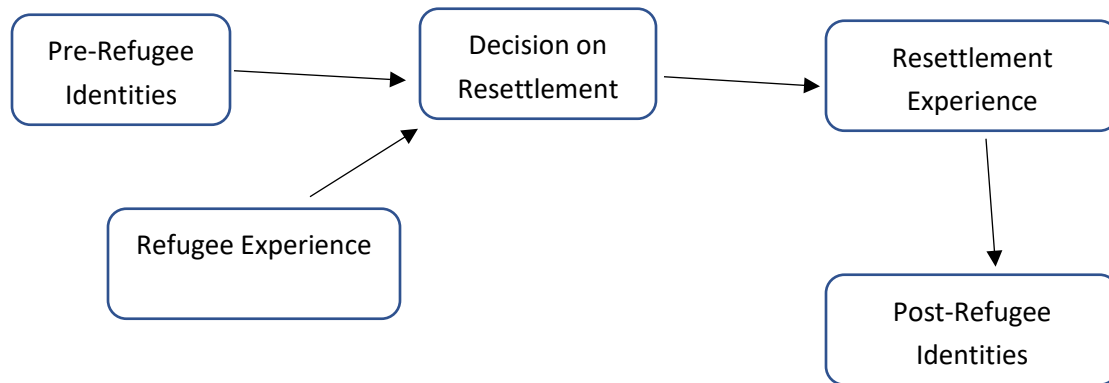


Figure 4: Outline of Bhutanese Refugee Experience and Identities

Resettlement is far from a convenient conclusion to refugee-ness.<sup>60</sup> Instead, it is more accurate to view resettlement as an extension of the refugee struggle (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011). Put differently, understanding refugee identities must be informed by both resettlement experiences and pre-resettlement experiences (Benson et al. 2011; Colic-Peisker 2007, 2009; Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003; Eastmond 1998, 2007, 2011; Hein 1993; Nawyn 2006, 2010; Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006). There is empirical evidence that refugee identities are affected by their experiences in exile (Byrne 2011; de Carvalho and Pinto 2018; Evans 2010; Jaji 2011, 2015; Malkki 1992, 1995a, 1995b, 1996). Examination of the refugee experience as a constant state of denial of identities and agency is incomplete without a consideration of their overall experience.

My case study on Bhutanese-Nepali community is centered in North Hill. Since the incoming Bhutanese families have been scattered to 41 states in the US (PRM 2015), a country-level macro study is a challenging endeavor. Bhutanese refugees represent one of the largest contingents of incoming refugees to the US in the last decade [Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) 2013]; they are also one of the lesser-known global refugee populations, having spent

<sup>60</sup> Lacroix (2004) views 'refugeeness' to be defined by refugee experiences that transcend national boundaries and expectations.

close to two decades in refugee camps in Nepal (Rizal 2004). Alongside Cincinnati and Columbus (in Ohio), Akron is a popular destination for the Bhutanese-Nepali community in the US. Bhutanese refugees, prior to their departure, reportedly request Akron as their preferred destination (Interview 2). Although ethnographic case studies like mine aren't known to lead to generalizable results (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994), my research is likely to be relevant in studying other Bhutanese-Nepali communities. My work examines immigration from a bottom-up perspective and lends itself to informing national-level migratory trends. For instance, it is interesting to note that the Bhutanese-Nepali communities thrive in small pockets, in contrast to ethnic enclaves (like the Vietnamese and the Cubans) of the past. This phenomenon is driven partly by a decentralized and restrictive bureaucracy (Nawyn 2006; Ott 2011) and the recent immigrant gravitation toward smaller urban locations [*Refugee Resettlement in Small Cities* (RRSC n.d.); Singer, Hardwick, and Bretell 2008; Singer and Wilson 2006].

I use this chapter to present the pre-resettlement narratives of my interviewees. Considering the relative lack of representation of Bhutanese refugees in history (Hutt 1994; Rizal 2004), these stories are both necessary and relevant. In the next chapter, I analyze the experiences in refugee resettlement in the US. Moreover, I provide a broad picture of Bhutanese-Nepali communal behavior in resettlement through the analysis of my extensive field notes and interviews. This includes the refugees' economic participation as well as patterns of their social and political behavior. The economic lens has been a prominent gauge of immigrant behavior in social science scholarship; many of which are quantitative-oriented contributions that are often devoid of the local context (Allen 2009; Borjas 1999; Portes and Stepick 1985; Potocky-Tripodi 2001, 2003a, 2003b). The economic contribution of the Bhutanese-Nepali community is difficult to separate from its social organization and to a lesser extent, the

structural constraints imposed by resettlement. As well as providing a context to the interview data, inferences in this section sketch a real, bottom-up picture of a community in resettlement. My study is more relevant in articulating a sincere picture of modern resettlement that affects incoming refugees and the host community alike, and it is closer to the sociological, inductive traditions of Pachirat (2009), and Portes and Rumbaut (2001, 2006), when compared to one-dimensional studies on immigrant ‘success.’

## Initial Discussion on Refugee Identities

In the social sciences, ethnographic research is not driven by rationalist expectations—generalizability of results and causal mechanisms—but by an inductive curiosity about people, communities, and their existing relations (Schatz 2009). In recent times, the discipline of political science has followed the lead of other social sciences in examining politics in local contexts. In this sense ‘political ethnography’ allows researchers into previously unseen political sites to reach beneath labels and examine complexities (Jourde 2009, 201). As I am interested in immersion in a group and sharing in its bottom-up view, I view my research as a participant observation (Schatz 2009, 7).<sup>61</sup> Through my research, I provide a different perspective on Bhutanese refugees, captured in their social interaction and agency, as is expected from ethnographies (Allina-Pisano 2009; Pachirat 2009; Wedeen 2010).

Due to my interest in observing resettlement through the refugee perspective, I employed a grounded strategy of data analysis and theory-building. My dissertation chapters are built on mutually serving methods of field observations and interviews. Staying true to the inductive nature of my data collection, I provided the interviewees with as much freedom as feasible to tell their personal stories. In contrast to structured, probing question-and-answer interviews, storytelling is a more interviewee-centric style of data collection. The interviews are biographic and narrative-based in nature: the interviewees’ conversations included recalling their experiences in Bhutan (if applicable), their daily life in refugee camps in Nepal, and their life in resettlement in the United States. Ethnographies seek out obscured stories and perspectives; in that regard, it is revelatory how individuals remember their past, the type of stories they tell and

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<sup>61</sup> This dovetails nicely with my evolution from a volunteer and a researcher to an advocate of refugee rights in the community.

what meanings they ascribe to their experiences. Refugee narratives are shaped by both their present realities as well as past experiences. “Past experience is always remembered and interpreted in the light of the present as well as by the way that the future is imagined” (Eastmond 2007, 249). In addition to being a useful form of data collection, these interviews often served as a form of emotional release. Personal narratives allow individuals to tell their truth in the context of how it links with their experiences (Eastmond 2007, 248). While there were similarities in experiences, each interviewee had their ‘own’ story to tell; some of my interviewees found the interview process to be useful, even cathartic.

While inductive in approach, I analyze the interviews and observations through a broad social identity-based lens. Identity is one of the most important, yet undervalued elements embedded within refugee emergencies. Alongside the tangible and evident scarcities, displacement and liminality also cause a loss or suppression of identity (Byrne 2013; Malkki 1995b). From an identity-based perspective, refugee-ness is a denial of desired identities.<sup>62</sup> In persecuting and driving *Lothshampas* out of Bhutan—in the process, rendering them refugees—the Bhutanese government prevented them from existing as Bhutanese citizens. Ascendancy of ethnic nationalism generally comes through the exclusion of minorities (Smith 1994 quoted by Hutt 1996, 397). Bosniaks (or, Bosnian Muslims), and Rwandan Hutus are more prominent victims of such nationalism and subsequent refugee-ness. The plight of refugees is an inconvenient fact in the state-centric global order (Arendt 1958; Chimni 1998), a fact that was clearly visible in Bhutanese refugee camps during my short tenure with UNHCR in 2010.

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<sup>62</sup> It can be argued that refugee situations equate to denial of basic human needs, as identity and culture are increasingly viewed as necessary components of our society.



In such circumstances, it is tempting to view refugees simply as helpless victims of a tragic turn of events (Ludwig 2016).<sup>63</sup> On a deeper inspection, refugee populations struggle to express their relevance and existence. There is evidence of refugee agency in camp settings, from the economic management (Alloush et al. 2017; Jaji 2011) to a maintenance of culture and social order (Byrne 2013; Jaji 2015; Malkki 1992, 1995a, 1995b, 1996). In response to their refugee-ness, refugees react in a variety of manners. Refugees are known to subscribe to primordialist as well as constructivist frames of self-identification (Kumsa 2006; Malkki 1995a, 1995b). The question of identity, therefore, is a convoluted one. While some refugees prefer to hold on tightly to their pre-flight identity and memory, others can be more flexible in defining themselves. Naturally, a ‘post-refugee’ setting like resettlement will similarly generate complicated responses to identity.

In the observance of refugee identities, therefore, the theoretical relevance of both primordialism and social constructivism is evident. Following the loss of their legal identities and privileges, refugees can become fervent in their attachment to culture and kinship – key facets to primordial identification (Geertz 1973). Even though our identities are socially constructed, some categories are constant and non-negotiable (Jenkins 2008), and a sense of loss of identity and way of life is irrefutable. In this context, primordialism and social constructivism aren’t necessarily mutually exclusive. However, the latter is rooted to the belief that our identities are fluid (Barth 1969; Jenkins 1994, 1996). So, when supplied with opportunity, refugees can adapt, and construct new categories of identities.

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<sup>63</sup> Ludwig (2016) articulates ‘helpless victims’ and ‘welfare abusers’ to be the two enduring images associated with refugees, albeit at different phases.

In refugee situations, denial or loss of one's national identity, however, is only part of the story; refugees need to further contend with their enduring categorization as refugees. From Barth's (1969) transactional perspective, identity is based on internal as well as external definition. Despite their internal self-identification processes in the camps, refugee groups are defined by an external, political process of categorization. Zetter (1991) views this labelling as an expression of control and power differentials. Refugees have no voice in being labelled a refugee; as refugees become more dependent on the provisions of international aid organizations (or, the global refugee regime in general), their refugee-ness gradually becomes more concrete (55). Refugee attempts at internal self-definition, therefore, are undermined by this external categorization. "While legal refugee status brings material gains, the informal label refugee is often accompanied by psychological burdens...For refugees, their refugee status often overshadows other identities" (Ludwig 2016, 7). Hence, we tend to form stereotypical, monolithic image of refugees (living in any camp in the world), even if they are industrious agents of their cultures and identities.

As identity is intimately embedded in refugee situations, any proposed permanent solution carries identity-affecting consequences. The study of identity in early resettlement, therefore, is as fascinating as it is relevant. Third-country resettlement provides many privileges to refugees, but it's more appropriate to view this arrangement as a trade-off. In their resettled sites, refugees can gain previously denied citizenship and concomitant rights (Singer and Wilson 2006; UNHCR n.d.); moreover, resettlement also translates into a social space for management of their cultures and identities (Nawyn 2006, 2010). On the flip side, these privileges and space for agency are afforded at an environment that is culturally alien. In resettlement, the refugee-turned-citizen will adopt the offer of agency and identity management. I expect refugees to

break away from the label of refugee and adopt other positive forms of group identity (Jenkins 1994, 1996; Tajfel and Turner 1986). However, research suggests that refugees are unlikely to replace their lost ethnic-national identity with a new legal identity (like, US citizenship) (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003; Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Eastmond 2007; Markovic and Manderson 2006). Instead, the management of identities revolves around core, central identities which were previously denied.

Extant scholarship reveals that the reinterpretation of group identities is likelier when there is an egress from refugee-ness. This can range from solutions like reintegration (Byrne 2013; Malkki 1992, 1995a, 1995b) to resettlement (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003; Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003). Refugees are likely to “actively participate in the process of constructing new self-identities as they negotiate the intersection between their culture of origin and their host culture” (Zajacova 2002 quoted in Benson et al. 2011, 540). Put differently, resettlement provides an opportunity for ‘exit’ from the refugee-defined identification, as suggested in Tajfel and Turner’s (1986) Social Identity Theory. This social psychological theory contends that individuals seek positive group identification and may change their group affiliations in that pursuit. Refugees, therefore, can relinquish their imposed political categorization (Zetter 1991,2007) for what I consider a ‘post-refugee identity’ in a new society. My field observations and interviews provide an in-depth inspection into these post-refugee identities and the experiences undergirding them.

I designed my interviews as conversations with my interviewees to reveal their narratives in three phases: their pre-refugee experiences in Bhutan; their refugee experiences in Nepal; and their post-refugee experiences in Akron (and other US states, if applicable). I view their refugee experiences to be aptly represented in a continuum of the three sites (resettlement being the latest

and possibly last phase of refugee-ness). Toward the conclusion of the interview, I inquired how the interviewees identified themselves. The answers reveal that the post-refugee identity of Bhutanese refugees exists within somewhat fluid boundaries of group identities, although identity remains rigid for many of my interviewees. This variation in self-identification comes from the diversity of past and present experiences within the community and is emblematic of the extant scholarship (Colic-Peisker 2007; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003; Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Eastmond 2007; Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Malkki 1995a, 1995b). As is generally true for ethnographic research, context is critical in understanding the population in question.

## Post-Refugee Identities: A Shift toward Hybrid Labels

Identity management in the Bhutanese-Nepali community is evident from the interview data. As mentioned in Chapter III, I interviewed 25 members of the refugee community (in addition to five experts). Table 1 shows the gender breakdown of my interviewees:

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Male –	18
Female –	7

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*Table 1: Interviewee Breakdown by Gender*

I employed a snowball sampling method for interview recruitment. During my fieldwork, it was far easier to speak to men, compared to women. I found that some, but not all, women interviewees were more reserved in their interviews. This can be partially attributed to the cultural impediments as well as general refugee discomfort in relation to perceived authority figures. I was often viewed as an authority figure due to my background and role (Field note 02/17/2019). It is entirely possible that interviews with more women would have added nuance to my findings, but I don't expect it to alter my overall inferences.

My initial access to the North Hill community was as an intern at IIA. Through my institutional connection, my first contacts within the Bhutanese-Nepali population were NGO workers and local business owners. Most of these individuals are perceived to be unofficial leaders or gatekeepers of the community (by the community as well as IIA). These individuals were some of my first interviewees. Immigrant entrepreneurship is viewed through a positive lens (Singer and Wilson 2006). On the other hand, refugees in resettlement-based institutions are perceived as 'bridge builders' (Shaw 2014). Also considered 'cultural brokers', these individuals traverse two worlds—their native culture as well as host society's system (289). Individuals in

this category tend to be well-educated and adaptable. I noticed these individuals were part of the initial wave of Bhutanese refugee influx.

These individuals’ experiences and perspectives were intriguing and initially helpful but with time, I realized I needed to deviate and find alternative perspectives within the community; this was a sentiment that was mirrored by my interviewees and IIA employees as well. As Table 2 illustrates, I interviewed thirteen individuals from IIA’s English language training classes. In my view, these interviews fit into the ‘dependent’ category of refugee resettlement (Borjas 1999), i.e. these individuals were unemployed, struggled with language and institutional access, and were largely dependent on their families and the community. The reflections from this pool of interviewees provided a different and arguably more compelling narrative of resettlement-based experiences in the community. It is clear that viewing resettlement from a singular lens would be a mistake. In pursuing different views, I view my interview sample as a balanced mix of dependent individuals and a range of community leaders.<sup>64</sup>

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Business owners –	7
NGO workers –	3
Students –	2
Unemployed –	13

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*Table 2: Interviewee Breakdown by Professional Status*

As I elaborate in the next chapter, most working members of the Bhutanese community in North Hill are employed in local factories. By far, the largest employer is Case Farms—a

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<sup>64</sup> In Colic-Peisker and Tilbury’s (2003) dichotomy, the dependent refugees are viewed as ‘passive’ resettlers, who tend to be older individuals; the leaders are viewed as ‘active’ resettlers, who are generally ambitious and adaptable.

poultry farm and slaughterhouse—operating in two different locations. Casually referred to as ‘chicken’ Case Farms is perhaps the easiest (and for some, the initial) source of employment for Bhutanese refugees, many of whom are illiterate and come from a farming background. Based on my fieldnotes and interviews, Bhutanese refugees are well-liked in these factories due to their hard working and compliant, quiet nature (Field notes 11/3/2016). IIA was initially active in connecting Bhutanese-Nepali refugees to these employers but now the refugees have established their own network for recruiting other refugees from the community. The thriving economic picture of the Bhutanese population in North Hill is rooted in labor-intensive manufacturing jobs, which is suitable for most refugees in the community. While not ideal for all, this self-sufficient economic relationship is convenient for both parties, for the moment. Although it is not reflected in Table 2, many of my interviewees had previously worked or are currently working at these factories.

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Bhutanese –	9
Nepali –	3
Hybrid frames –	12
Refugee –	1
Total –	25

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*Table 3: Post-Refugee Identity Categories*

Table 3 shows the breakdown of post-refugee identity labels that emerged from the interview data. When I inquired about their self-identification, nine interviewees identified themselves simply as ‘Bhutanese’ and three viewed themselves as ‘Nepali.’ On the other hand, twelve interviewees claimed some form of hybrid frame linking the Bhutanese and Nepali labels.

Labels within the hybrid identification included ‘Nepali-speaking Bhutanese population’, ‘Bhutanese-Nepali’ and ‘Nepali-Bhutanese.’ In the initial coding of 25 interviews, there were eighteen references of Bhutanese identity from twelve sources; there were 22 mentions of Nepali identity from fifteen sources. Interestingly, I recorded 22 references of hybrid or hyphenated identity from thirteen interviewees. One interviewee found her identity to be best represented by the ‘refugee’ label, even though she had resettled for a few years. From my interpretation of their testimony, they arrived at this conclusion through a comparison of their experiences in the refugee camp and during resettlement. This interviewee’s quality of life in resettlement, as stated, is more challenging compared to their life at the camp:

*Ramrai thiyo camp maa [it was pretty good at camps]. When I think about it, if we had such benefits, we would remain in camps. I don’t think we would come to a [difficult] place like this. We had a home although it was jhupadi [ramshackle hut]. But it was like a mahal[palace] to me. If you take care of jhupadi, it is as good as mahal. We had it all, but ... the relief organizations are no longer providing anything now from what I hear. Once people [refugees] started coming to America, the organizations are no longer providing facilities [like they used to] (Interview 16).*

In addition, I observed 21 references of other sub-national ethnic identities from fourteen sources that were embedded within the broader identity categorizations. Most of these are caste-based and religious ascriptions that are an integral part of the Nepali social system, including Kiraat, Gurung, Magar, Brahman, Christian, and Hindus.



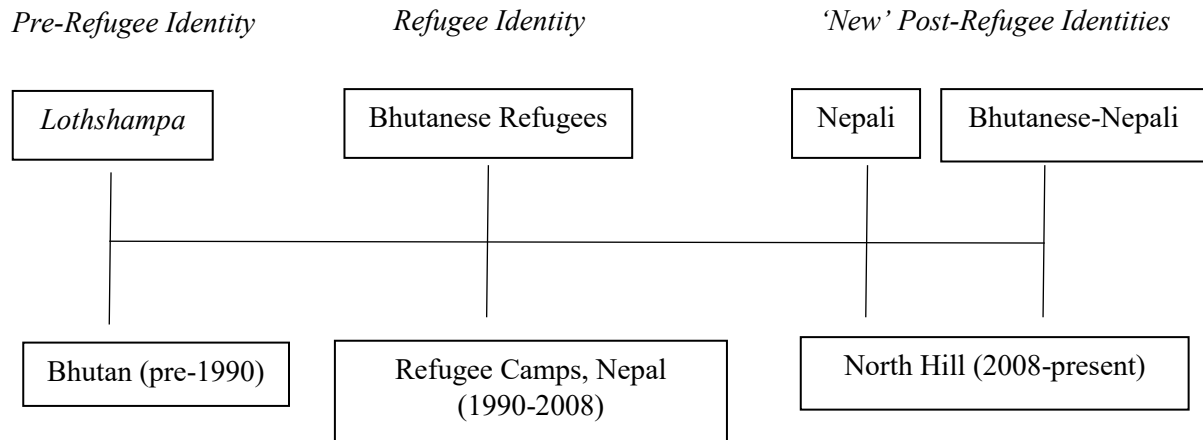


Figure 5: Evolution of Bhutanese Refugee Identities

Figure 5 is a visual depiction of my interpretation of the evolution of group identity in the context of Bhutanese refugees, representing how political actions and subsequent experiences lead to a shift in identities. This transformation of identity frames is charted from the refugees' time in Bhutan (pre-1990) to present-day resettlement (that began in 2008). The labels above the timeline represent the dominant identity frames; the labels below the line represent corresponding sites. In Bhutan, the principal identity label was *Lothshampa* (Hutt 1996, 2003, 2005; Rizal 2004). This label was embedded within the Bhutanese national identity but also served as a marker for the Nepali culture and way of living (represented by the ethnic, caste-based categories like Gurung, Magar, and Pun). Put differently, while this categorization implied a distinct ethnic nature, it was connected to the broad Bhutanese national identity.

Identifying simply as 'Bhutanese' is an illustration of a primordial preference. This speaks of a powerful attachment to a territorial home in Bhutan. Such an ardent perspective was especially common among the elderly population of the community, i.e. the generation with a distinct memory of their life in Bhutan:

*I am from Bhutan. But I came here as a refugee. That's how I identify myself... We are from Bhutan. We shouldn't say we are from Nepal. (Interview 13).*

I found it interesting to note that many interviewees were forced to confront the possibility that their identity wasn't Bhutanese enough following their forced displacement to Nepali camps:

*Only after coming to Nepal, we understood we are Bhutanese or we were supposed to be Bhutanese. We learned this after hearing from the taathaa and baathaa [the smart and the clever]. In Nepal, they used to call us Bhotange.<sup>65</sup> They called us Nepali in Bhutan but in Nepal they said that we are Bhotange; if we were Nepali, then we should have Nepali citizenship. Although there was a relation, since we lived in Bhutan for generations we were supposed to be Bhutanese. This became painfully apparent to us but what could we do. We had already left Bhutan (Interview 12).*

This abstract conveys the lack of belonging experienced by refugees powerfully. The statement also reveals the alienating power possessed by labels such as *Bhotange*. During my work with UNHCR in 2010, I was surprised by the cultural and linguistic similarities between Bhutanese refugees and Nepali population. Estrangement from the Nepali community, therefore, must have been jarring to many refugees. The quote further expresses a distinct resentment towards the political elite; some refugees blamed the political leaders for their exodus.

Other examples of Bhutanese identification are as follows:

*We belonged to Form 1; we were 'pure Bhutanese'... So I still identify myself as a Bhutanese. After all, I was born in Bhutan. (Interview 11).*

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<sup>65</sup> *Bhotange* appears to be a derivative of *Bhote*, referring to a resident of Tibet (or, Bod). These are derogatory slangs common in Nepali language, generally subjected to residents of northern, mountainous region of Nepal (bordering Tibet). Here, the phrases appear to convey the outsider status of the refugees.

*I am from Bhutan. But I came here as a refugee. That's how I identify myself... We are from Bhutan. We shouldn't say we are from Nepal... Those who were born in Nepali camps, they see themselves as Nepali. They have never seen or known Bhutan. But we are from Bhutan. When they ask, "where are you from?" We have to say, "I am from Bhutan." We were born in Bhutan.* (Interviews 13 and 14).

*We are Bhutanese.* (Interview 17).

*We had lived in Bhutan before coming to Nepal. We have to say Bhutan, don't we?* (Interview 20).

*When we introduce ourselves, it has to be Bhutanese. Our ancestors were born and raised in Bhutan. So we have to introduce ourselves that way.* (Interview 23).

'Form 1' mentioned in Interview 11 refers to F1 categorization, i.e. "Genuine Bhutanese citizens" (Hutt 1996, 402). The 1988 census is oft-criticized for its haphazard and erroneous placement of most *Lothshampas* into F7 (or, non-nationals) (*Amnesty International* 1992; Rizal 2004). Irrespective of dubious census measures, the interview data reflects the bureaucratic role of census categories in the separation of *Lothshampas*. Many interviewees expressed their repugnance at being labelled 'saat numbere' (strictly translated, people of number seven) in Bhutan. As well as the power of categorization, this label embodies a bureaucratic form of ethnic cleansing (Zetter 2007).

In these statements, the interviewees weren't contemplative of their answers. Instead, they expressed a certainty of their heritage, their memory of Bhutan, and their identities. For some of the interviewees, Bhutan served as their birthplace and a marker of their ancestry, i.e. non-negotiable facets of their identities. These references are in concert with studies that find refugee communities to be steadfast in their ethnic and national identification in resettlement

(Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003; Eastmond 2007; Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Markovic and Manderson 2000). Alternatively, these identity frames can be part of their core identity, which are “socialized in a manner that gives them more weight than identities acquired later in life” (Hancock 2014, 445). These works variously point to refugees’ (albeit not exclusively) loss of authority and agency in resettlement to correlate with these identity frames. While resettlement can provide an avenue for new agency to some individuals, it can strip away the authority and social positions of others (Allen 2009; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003).

The aforesaid view provides stability to some, but many of my interviewees have sensed a state of identity flux in early resettlement. Some interviewees provided keen insights on the fluidity of identities:

*There is this idea of we are Bhutanese first...[but] this is not an attitude shared by those under the age of [around] 35... But then you have younger generations ... there is an identity crisis in a lot of ways. But this seems to be a crisis only for the older generations. People ... fought for the homeland. The young don't have that Bhutanese national identity. They speak Nepali and remember Nepal, so why aren't we Nepali? We are born and raised in Nepal. So why can't we be called Nepali? (Interview 3).*

*But younger generations, especially in their 20's and younger, they prefer to say Nepali even though their document says 'Bhutanese' ... But children sometimes say 'Nepali' because they have never seen Bhutan. They want to introduce themselves as Nepali. (Interview 5).*

*Some don't want to come [to US from refugee camps]. They identify Nepal as home-land – matri bhoomi. (Interview 11).*

Here, the experience-identity link is evident. As these statements reflect, there is an obvious generational difference when it comes to the experiences of Bhutanese refugees. While each

refugee has been subjected to a protracted life in refugee camps in Nepal, the younger generation is largely devoid of the memory of Bhutan, their supposed ancestral home. It is difficult to establish a cut-off age, as suggested in some of the interviews and field-based conversations. However, the lack of emotional attachment with Bhutan among the younger refugees is unequivocal. Their refugee-ness is contained within their lives in refugee campsites in Nepal. During my fieldwork, I listened to young refugees about their understanding of Bhutan. It was mostly through their elders in camps and in resettlement, where the stories reportedly took on a mystical, mythical quality (Field notes 07/24/2018). The fact that the young refugees grew up in Nepal, devoid of Bhutanese environment, not only underlines the protracted nature of their stay in camps. It further articulates the complexity of the Bhutanese refugee experiences and their potential impact on their identities.

During my data collection, I came across interviewees who viewed their Nepali identity through a similarly permanent lens:

*I think it's [identity is] Nepali. That's how I feel. I am a Nepali. (Interview 19).*

*We stayed in our country, in Nepal. We are Nepali too. (Interview 20).*

*My history and roots were Nepali. Right? I was born in Nepal but I had no identity there. (Interview 27).*

*There is a debate happening in places regarding, who is from where, and where do they belong. But in the end I think, we will be Nepali. (Interview 28).*

Some interviewees alluded to their birthplace and ancestry in Bhutan in their association with Bhutanese identity frames. On the other hand, other interviewees described their time spent in Nepal as expressing their 'rightful' attachment to Nepal. It is relevant to remember both sites

(Bhutan and Nepal) were remembered fondly, through cultural attachment.

These primordial-type frames represent an issue of primary socialized identities. Although Jenkins (1996) grasps identities from a constructivist viewpoint, he provides an integrative theory in the form of ‘primary socialized identities.’ These are core identities—humanness, gender, and kin relations—that develop early with a child’s socialization. In other words, one of the first things “a child learns from its parents is the nature and importance of kin relationships, extending from the nuclear family through the extended family and to memberships in ethnic, sectarian, and national communities” (Hancock 2016, 446). The Bhutanese identity—territoriality and social-psychological attachment—was a constant for the older generation of refugees. The Nepali-ness of the identity was culturally prominent, but it was embedded within the imagination of a broader Bhutanese national identity.

In the case of the young refugees, however, their cultural exposure was largely limited to the immediate Nepali environment. National identity, as Anderson (1983, 6) claims, is imagined through community and comradeship. Despite mythical stories and narratives, the younger generation of refugees are likely to find attachment to the imagined identity of Bhutanese to be far-fetched. On the other hand, Nepali identity, thanks to the same language and culture, took root as the imagined nation. This became their primary socialized identity through their experiences inside of and exposure outside of the camps. Bhutanese refugees were in a unique position of sharing the culture and language of the host society; moreover, the refugee camps had porous borders (as the rest of this chapter will articulate), allowing many refugees to study and work in neighboring Nepali villages and cities. To illustrate this, I came across cases of inter-marriage between Nepali citizens and Bhutanese refugees. One of my interviewees had married

a Nepali citizen and brought their spouse along when resettling in Akron.<sup>66</sup>

Deviating from the aforesaid essentialist categories of identities, I found many individuals traversing the line between Nepali and Bhutanese identities. Their self-description as ‘Bhutanese-Nepali’ or ‘Nepali-speaking Bhutanese’ (and other similar permutations) displays a conscious attempt at re-defining their group identity. I have observed that the Bhutanese Community Association of Akron (BCAA), the primary organization representing the community, has defined the community as ‘Bhutanese-Nepali’ at many social events.<sup>67</sup> Part of the reason behind the hyphenated identity seems to be the overall influence of Nepali culture through religion and the caste system.

*We like to be called Bhutanese first. Then, the ethnic sub-sets are available. Whether it is Hindus, or Kirats, Christians, or Buddhists. We often view ourselves as a form of resistance to the Bhutanese government. I see us as Nepali-speaking Bhutanese population. (Interview 1).*

This Bhutanese-first attitude is well-documented within the community at large. Perhaps, this represents a desire to reinvent mixed with a reluctance to break away from the Bhutanese identity. Hyphenated identities are often viewed as a function of personal compromise and political resistance (Laitin 1998). This is particularly the case for interviewees who had participated in dissident movements against the Bhutanese government. The Bhutanese-Nepali label celebrates their Nepali culture and Bhutanese origins, i.e. identity categories that were denied during their exile.

The hybrid labels here are similarly created but it appears these new labels are still

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<sup>66</sup> The interviewee alluded that this international marriage delayed their resettlement application. On the other hand, the family is currently benefiting from the Nepali connection in regards to their business.

<sup>67</sup> BCAA is what Hein (1991) and Nawyn (2006, 2010) consider a mutual assistance associations (MAA), i.e. immigrant organizations assisting a primary population (in this case, Bhutanese refugee community).

undergoing construction and revision:

*When somebody asks me where I am from, I tell them 'I am from Nepal'. I never knew Bhutan. How could I be even related? ... Most of the times people ask 'where are you from'; [Then I say] 'I am from Nepal.' 'What do you speak?' 'Nepali.' 'Any Bhutan language?' 'No.' I don't know...that's a little hard question to answer because we're US citizens now. It is a little complicated I guess but I still identify with Nepali. And yeah ...Bhutan...Bhutanese-Nepali I guess. It is Nepalese. (Interview 2).*

*Considering our long stay in Bhutan, I identify myself as a Bhutanese-Nepali. Bhutanese because I had Bhutanese citizenship earlier but culturally, linguistically and other regards we have great similarity [or commonness] with the Nepali populations. I always like to say [I am] Bhutanese-Nepali... We lived within Nepali boundary temporarily, but as Bhutanese populations. So we always had that identity, so I say Bhutanese-Nepali. (Interview 5).*

*I identify myself as Bhutanese-Nepali. I have become a US citizen but I consider myself Bhutanese-Nepali. (Interview 6).*

*Perhaps, the kids who born in Nepal might simply say that they are Nepalese. But I remember Bhutan. If I don't identify with Bhutan, I feel like I am not being fair to myself. I am Bhutanese-Nepali, and now even an American. (Interview 7).*

*I say I am Bhutani-Nepali. This is because our forefathers went from Nepal to Bhutan. We lived in Bhutan but we don't know how to speak their language. We always spoke Nepali. (Interview 8).*

In the statements above, the interviewees' self-identification in hybrid frames comes from complicated points of view. They seem to understand the convoluted margins separating various group identities. Some of them even considered US identity to be in the mix. It appears they are



trying to negotiate different categories of identities. The politically correct hybrid labels allow individuals safety in their political correctness. As I mentioned earlier, the theoretical distance between the Bhutanese-Nepali and Nepali labels is a short one. In other words, this hybridity is sort of a middle path. In my observation, these hybrid frames are still under construction. They lack the certainty to native Bhutanese frames but these serve as evidence of revision of identity in resettlement.

Examination of group identities of refugees, as I have argued, is intimately linked to refugee experience and agency (Eastmond 2007). Even when sequestered within camps, refugee groups actively establish a social system (Alloush et al. 2017; Jaji 2011, 2015), and manage their identities in a variety of ways (Byrne 2013; Malkki 1992, 1995a, 1995b, 1996). However, these efforts are largely obscured and dominated by their refugee-ness, i.e. a rightless state of existence. Irrespective of their origins and experiences, refugees are lumped into and defined by the bureaucratic label of refugees (Hein 1993; Zetter 1991, 2007). Alongside economic opportunities, resettlement provides refugees a socio-political space necessary for management of identities (whether essentialist or constructivist), as has been observed variously by Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003), Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2003), Eastmond (1998), and Markovic and Manderson (2000). In my research, the post-refugee identity labels of ‘Nepali’ and ‘Bhutanese-Nepali’ represents that identity shift. I observed that these two identity labels are theoretically similar and were often used interchangeably. Based on this development, these post-refugee identities, for Bhutanese-Nepali refugees, appear to represent a significant shift toward their Nepali culture. On the other hand, hybrid identities point to a compromise between ethnic origins and citizen-based rights (Laitin 1998). In this case, however, the middle path is charted primarily between native roots of Nepal and historical memory of Bhutan. A variety of

factors including human and social capital are considered relevant in refugees' identity-based response to life in resettlement. In the case of Bhutanese refugees, I have observed evidence of both a primordial turn and a desire to adapt their identities in resettlement.

## **Bhutanese Refugee Experience: A Tale of Three Locations**

In the case of Bhutanese-Nepali post-refugee identities, the social constructivist lens of identity seems particularly applicable. Social constructivism, i.e. the management or re-creation of new identities is well-received in today's social science scholarship. Our identity is governed not solely by our construction, nor categorization by external forces (Malkki 1992). I argue that social constructivism makes room for the necessary agency for refugee identity. The development of hybrid identities in post-Soviet near east countries (Laitin 1998); the Liberian refugees' civic interpretation of identity in opting for resettlement (Byrne 2013); the Hutu refugees' cosmopolitan incarnation of their identity (Malkki 1995a) are all borne out of their necessary political realities. The manifestation of different labels observed within the Bhutanese-Nepali community is similarly affected by their experiences. Scholarship on refugee identity generally focuses solely on their camp-based experiences (Byrne 2013; Malkki 1992, 1995a, 1995b), or on their new environment in resettlement (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003; Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Eastmond 1998; Markovic and Manderson 2003). I explore the Bhutanese-Nepali refugee experiences, including their experiences in Bhutan, Nepal, and the US to better comprehend the experience-identity link.

The refugee narratives captured by the interviews portray their experiences spread across three places: Bhutanese life (applicable in some cases), refugee camps in southeastern Nepal, and resettlement in the United States. Naturally, the narratives are punctuated by tales of challenges and suffering in each locale; I coded the interview data accordingly. Table 4 reflects the breakdown of interviewees' challenges:

Location	Sources	References
Bhutan	18	78
Nepali Refugee Camps	22	52
Akron	22	125

*Table 4: A Picture of ‘Suffering’*

As addressed earlier, some of my interviewees were too young or weren’t born at the time of the initial displacement to speak of their experiences in Bhutan. On the other hand, all of the interviewees experienced life in Nepali refugee camps as well as during resettlement, albeit from a variety of vantage points (often dictated by their social and economic standing).

The emerging themes in the narratives of Bhutan point to government repression and the subsequent contagious fear which presumably led to the displacement of the *Lothshampas*. The anecdotes allude to physical torture as well as systematic (and bureaucratic) erasing of *Lothshampas* from Bhutanese history. Here, a variety of ‘us v them’ identify frames are evident, illustrating a distinct boundary between *Lothshampas* and the rest of Bhutanese society. Whether this removal of close to 80,000 individuals was the culmination of repressive machinations of the Bhutanese government, or if it was a knee-jerk reaction to the non-violent (as well as violent) resistance (Hutt 1996), is unfortunately beyond the scope of my research. In the recollection of their departure, the interviewees portray the danger they faced, and the difficult decisions they had to make.

I was surprised to note that the Bhutanese government wasn’t the sole recipient of blame for the refugee exodus. Some of my interviewees strongly felt that the *Lothshampa* dissident leaders (as well as the militant outfit, BPP) deserved the blame for their part in the conflict. This

was the view generally shared by the rural farmers who were harassed and evicted by the government despite their lack of participation in (or, awareness of) the resistance. On the other hand, many of the community leaders had participated in the nonviolent movement and viewed the situation through an entirely different lens: the Bhutanese government's repression, and its lack of accountability for its actions, were to blame. In summary, there are explicit points of dissension in the understanding of the initial displacement. There is arguably a class (or social status-based) division among the interviewees, which likely will be important moving forward in my analysis.

Switching to the narratives of their time in refugee camps in Nepal, the principal theme is that of a struggle for daily survival. This protracted period of liminality is naturally a challenging phase, as the transcripts reflect. The general sentiment veers from a relative gratefulness towards the international relief organizations to a general dissatisfaction with their diurnal circumstances, ranging from inadequate rations, to lack of employment and educational opportunities. Here, I was met with the unexpected revelation about the porous boundaries of the refugee camps. A majority of my interviewees left the camps either to make ends meet or to pursue educational opportunities. Even in this context, refugee experiences seem to vary based on social status. Many respondents shared stories of leaving the camps behind to find work in nearby cities, and in some cases, as far as Kathmandu (the capital city) or even Indian cities. Most of them worked as laborers, or seasonal farmers in nearby villages, fields, and quarries. On the other hand, educated interviewees (or from educated families) reported leaving camp to pursue further education or to find employment as teachers. Although I view the experiences related to refugees as a continuum, this is obviously a critical phase for them. During this time, the label of refugee is likely to have crystallized, as noted by scholars like Byrne (2013), Jaji

(2015) and Malkki (1992, 1995a, 1995b). The Bhutanese refugees were largely contained in refugee camps; they were viewed suspiciously by the local population, and they were often forced to conceal their identities outside of the camps. Although decisions and experiences may have diverged to an extent, no individual was free from the harsh reality of their refugee existence.

As is clear from data in Table 4, references to the challenges of US-based resettlement far surpass the challenges of the other two locations. This is perhaps a revealing (and more accurate) view of refugee resettlement: it is a promising, yet challenging phase, but far from a panacea, or a happy conclusion. In resettlement, there are many challenges that define the experiences of Bhutanese refugees, from the expectation of economic self-sufficiency (Borjas 1999; Singer and Wilson 2006), to a lack of access to appropriate services (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Nawyn 2006, 2010), and other integration-based trials like language and transportation (Agbenyiga et al. 2013; Benson et al. 2011; Nawyn et al. 2012). While transitioning (or, integrating) into a culturally unfamiliar environment of the US is expected to be challenging, I have found understanding these difficulties requires a nuanced understanding of the differences in worldviews and experiences.

There is a remarkable difference in their outlook: some interviewees are facing challenges in unlocking their potential in the academic and entrepreneurial world. The latter largely concerned the community's business owners and NGO workers. On the other hand, some interviewees are struggling with their daily social and economic realities; this ranged from families having to pay off their debts to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for their flights to the US, to making ends meet, to managing their dependence on their children for everyday tasks. This group's life has been further upended by their inability to travel on their

own, or to navigate the local language, or to socialize with one another on a regular basis.

Although simple actions, these are perhaps critical reasons behind the mental and psychological problems faced by the community, which includes a high rate of suicide (CDC 2013, 2014; Kulman and Tsukii 2014). Similar to their experiences in Bhutan and Nepal, life in resettlement translates into different expectations and challenges for different individuals. Consequently, resettlement-based experiences also have a critical contribution to my examination of identities.

## Memory of Bhutan: Repression, Dissidence, and Flight

Ethnic cleansing tends to lead to refugee crises, from Bhutan to Rwanda to Myanmar. However, some of these cases haven't used extreme violence and aggression in pursuing its goals, have but instead employed the systematic use of repression to remove the targeted group (Zetter 2007). Bhutan is a quintessential case of the latter; perhaps this lack of egregious violence—normally associated with ethnic cleansing—is a principal reason this case attracted little international attention or the subsequent outrage (Rizal 2004). In remembering their lives in Bhutan, the interviewees spent considerable time on the circumstances surrounding their departure. At this moment, it is safe to assert that the Bhutanese government got away with the erasure of almost an entire ethnic group from its population: by 1992, 80,000 *Lothshampas* had been rendered refugees (*Amnesty International* 1992). The subsequent image of Bhutan stands in stark contrast to the nation that once proposed to measure 'Gross National Happiness' of its population.<sup>68</sup>

The rise of ethnic nationalism can force the flight of excluded minority (Smith 1994), especially when they lack political representation (Arendt 1958). Scholars like Evans (2010a, 2010b), Hutt (1994, 2003, 2005), Saul (2003), and Rizal (2004) have documented rising Bhutanese nationalism and its subsequent institutionalization against *Lothshampas*. Based on the 1985 Citizenship Act, the 1988 census was designed to place everyone in one of seven categories. Those residents who couldn't prove their domicile at or before 1958 were categorized as returned emigrants (F2) or non-nationals (F7) (Hutt 1996, 403). As mentioned

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<sup>68</sup> In 1998, Bhutanese Prime Minister introduced Gross National Happiness (GNH) to a United Nations audience as an alternative measurement of development. The GNH concept has helped spawn happiness-related classes and global events. For more information, visit: <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/02/12/584481047/the-birthplace-of-gross-national-happiness-is-growing-a-bit-cynical>



earlier in the chapter, most *Lothshampas* were categorized as F7, which gave rise to the linguistic slur—*saat numbere*—which was recalled by most of the interviewees.

As I have summarized in Chapter II, these citizenship-based exclusionary actions led to instances of cultural suppression:

*I felt like we all were Bhutanese. Suddenly, early 90's or late 80's the narrative that there are many ethnic groups in Bhutan came from the king and other officers. They started the propaganda program – 'Bhutanization program' – discrimination of Nepali people. They passed the citizenship act to distinguish among [and divide] people ... I started sensing it too. Harmony and peace and understanding slowly kept dissipating away. Overnight thousands started becoming refugees that way. (Interview 1)*

The Bhutanese government appropriated Tibetan-Buddhist cultural practices at the expense of Nepali language and culture (Thinley 1994 quoted by Evans 2010a, 29). According to the testimony provided in the first interview, the Nepali language was removed from school curriculums, and the population was prevented from celebrating Hindu festivals.

Many from the *Lothshampa* population, including several of my interviewees, responded to the aforesaid marginalization through nonviolent resistance. “Between 150 and 200 southern Bhutanese members organized peaceful demonstrations within the college and circulated pamphlets on human rights and democracy” (Evans 2010a, 31). The historical account of resistance, however, becomes fuzzy alongside the role of the Bhutanese People’s Party’s (henceforth, BPP) violent campaign. Irrespective of BPP’s alleged participation and level of influence, the Bhutanese government used BPP as an excuse to bring the military into play, which led to incidents of aggressive interrogation and torture (Evans 2010a; Hutt 1994, 2003). This was the beginning of the displacement the *Lothshampa* community in Bhutan:

*When the military pressured us to leave the country, plus unfair activities with the women and the children [alluding to torture and rape], and the old people. The government also divided people through their census policy – somebody became Category I, some Category II, etc. up to Category VII. And there was no guarantee of security from the government. Suppression was high; we could no longer sell our crops. When the schools and hospitals were closed for the Nepali people, this was a lot of pressure on us forcing us to leave. (Interview 5).*

Stories of excessive violence tend to provide traction to the coverage of ethnic cleansing. In the case of Bhutan, there was no high death toll; on the other hand, documented cases of government actions featured the excessive use of force, detention, and the possible use of torture (*Amnesty International* 1992; Saul 2000). *Amnesty International*, during its fact-finding mission, was not granted access to many of the detention facilities in Bhutan. In the sites it managed to access, the team recorded testimonies describing various forms of physical abuse, rape, and denial of medical attention (*Amnesty International* 1992, 18). Oral history of refugees, post-displacement, point to the government's use of arrests, torture, rape, arson, and looting (Human Rights Organization of Bhutan 1992 used by Evans 2010a, 31).

The use of rape and torture by Bhutanese government remains a contested subject, placing the government narrative against that of the refugees. Many of my interviewees, while cautious, alluded to the use of torture:

*This is how it is. They [the dissidents] have talked about torture quite a bit. But it is difficult for us to prove [the torture]... They [the government] imprisoned some of them. They beat them up on the way [to detention] sometimes. There are stories of how they were killed by excessive beating... After the military rule, people ran away because now they would kill you by beating you up. (Interview 1).*

*[E]verybody has their own stories. The narrative is brought forward by Nepali-origin individuals. People have been subject of the Bhutanese government's rough tactics, even torture. I won't say that it didn't happen. But it didn't happen at a great proportion. (Interview 10).*

Refugee interviewees found it difficult to speak about rape and torture in an open manner. Past works on Bhutanese refugees similarly found victims of rape unlikely to come forward (Shrestha et al. 1998). The existing refugee narratives of the torture and rape have largely fallen to deaf ears; a public health study on the impact of torture on Bhutanese refugees largely identified Bhutanese soldiers and police to be the torturers, as well as the larger incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in tortured individuals (Shrestha et al. 1998, 445). This can perhaps be attributed to cultural differences in understanding and usage of these references. Eastmond (2011, 285) observed that Bosnian refugees resettled in Sweden, rarely used the word 'trauma' in describing their experiences, in contrast to the host society of Sweden. Despite the existence of scholarship utilizing the oral stories of refugees, there is a distinct lack of evidence of the alleged wrongdoings of the Bhutanese government. The lack of proof might be one of the reasons for the obscurity of the Bhutanese refugee situation from public consciousness.

The following statements illustrate the role of the Bhutanese government in the departure of the *Lothshampas*:

*After we protested, they [the government] gave us problems. They arrested us. Homes were torched. There have been cases of gang rape. Due to this torturous situation, we decided to leave. (Interview 7).*

*The Bhote [ethnic marker for the Ngalog] asked us "how will you feed yourself in Nepal?" We said that we didn't know. They kept us the whole night asking us questions (Interview 13).*

*It was very difficult. They started asking us aggressively if we were leaving or not. Then, since everyone had left it was very difficult for us to stay behind. Especially after they took our pictures, and told us to leave there was no way we could have stayed behind. They told us to leave. They took our pictures at Bheteni. They told us that our country was Nepal now. We didn't even know where Nepal was. (Interview 20).*

The testimony of interviewee 13 alludes to their interrogation, and articulates the power enjoyed by the government. As stated earlier, allegations of rape and torture aren't new in this case. Tek Nath Rizal, the most famous dissident of the Bhutanese exodus, was detained for an extended time (*Amnesty International* 1992; Hutt 1996) and is widely believed to have been tortured.<sup>69</sup> Like the relative obscurity of the ethnic cleansing of the *Lothshampas*, the stories of government brutality and violations have led to no political consequences for the Bhutanese government. This is particularly the case now as the majority of Bhutanese refugees have accepted resettlement and turned their backs on the implausible option of repatriation.<sup>70</sup>

Three interviewees alluded to or stated their participation in the college-based nonviolent resistance movement against the Bhutanese government. One of the interviewees had been arrested and detained for their dissident behavior. It has been argued that the Bhutanese elite feared an ethnic Nepali uprising (Evans 2010a; Hutt 1994, 2003). In the late 1980s, India had witnessed the Gorkhaland independence movement, led by an ethnic Nepali population, in the neighboring Indian areas of Sikkim and Assam (Hutt 2003, 195-196); similarly, Nepal's

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<sup>69</sup> Tek Nath Rizal was a *Lothshampa* member of the Royal Advisory Council of the Bhutanese government. In 1989, his attempt at alerting the king of unease at government's tactics led to his arrest and detention. He fled to Nepal upon his release, but was arrested and handed over to Bhutan. He was found guilty of treason and remained in prison until 1999. In 2003, he returned to Nepal to become a spokesman for the refugees. His experiences have made him the symbol of Bhutanese dissidence and the plight of Bhutanese refugees (Hutt 2005, 46).

<sup>70</sup> A few thousand Bhutanese refugees remain in refugee camps, holding on to the hopes of repatriation to Bhutan or reintegration into Nepali society, based on my interview of an UNHCR official (Interview 26).

feudalistic *Panchayat* system was being challenged by the revolutionary democratic movement (Hutt 2005). Fearing the rise of ‘greater Nepal’ and facing the threat of its own extinction, the Bhutanese elite unleashed its military power on the *Lothshmpas* (Evans 2010a). With the introduction of the military into the conflict, the gloves truly came off. Previous attempts at political and cultural exclusion made way for direct and naked political violence. The military went after the nonviolent dissidents, as well as their family members and friends:

*Later on, they [the military] would trouble the whole families. They would find families of earlier protesters. They would harass the family. They would identify the main member of the family, threaten them, scare them, and started kicking them out of the country ... whole villages and their leaders...would be arrested and beaten up. (Interview 1).*

“After the 1990 demonstrations, the Bhutanese Government began identifying and subsequently arresting participants and supporters, most of whom left Bhutan following their release from detention” (Hutt 2003, 214 quoted by Evans 2010a, 34). The eviction of the dissidents was preceded by ‘voluntary migration forms’: they were “coerced or tricked into signing emigration forms ... to leave the country in order to secure the release of relatives imprisoned for political offenses” (Hutt 2005, 50). In essence, victims were pressured to sign their own exodus papers, “sometimes following physical violence and coercion” [Association of Human Rights Activists, Bhutan (AHURA) 2000 cited in Evans 2010a, 34]. In addition to the coercion, these forms were reportedly written in Dzongkha language (which most *Lothshampas* couldn’t read), and stated they were leaving Bhutan of their own volition (Interview 1). This document was an instrument of control, used by the government to justify the ‘voluntary’ departure of the *Lothshampas*. I find it extremely unusual that fleeing populations would voluntarily sign their exit papers, in a language they don’t comprehend.

Irrespective of its reasoning—whether fear of ethnic extinction or anger at *Lothshampa* nonviolent dissidence—the intentionality behind the Bhutanese government’s decision to unleash its military is clear. In addition to the dissident students, the military also strategically targeted whole *Lothshampa* villages. While tragic, it’s fair to assume that dissidents involved in nonviolent resistance (or violent actions for that matter) weren’t necessarily surprised by the government actions. However, as military action spread to southern villages, farmers and laypeople became the next victims.

*The reason for us to flee the village was Dumpha [presumably Bhutanese locals] were walking around our village. They would go and set fire on homes that were left behind. (Interview 15).*

*In Bhutan, we were farmers. Bhutan sarkaar [government] told us that saat numberi people are not allowed to live here. (Interview 18).*

*They was a situation of terror for us. They [presumably the military] accused us of being terrorists. They told us that we came from pradesh [foreign country], that we came from Nepal and became dhakri. (Interview 21).*

The government’s strategies, therefore, weren’t limited to military arrests, detention, and torture of dissidents and their families. It extended to the military’s strategic use of political pressure and intimidation of *Lothshampa* villages. Amidst reports of violence and rumors of rape, village *Mandals* (local administrative officials) reportedly advised villagers to flee for their own safety. “Southern Bhutanese [*Lothshampas*] report being advised by village leaders or ordered by government officials to leave the country” (Evans 2010a, 34).

The government, therefore, clearly played a principal role in the pre-displacement predicament of the refugees. However, they were far from the sole culprit here. The interview data point to severe political pressure applied by violent anti-government groups like the BPP on

the villagers. Put differently, *Lothshampas* found themselves between the proverbial position between a rock and a hard place; they had to contend with the threat of violence from the BPP as well as the government. As I hinted earlier, the true extent of BPP's political capacity and impact are somewhat shrouded in mystery. Its existence was used as a justification by the Bhutanese government for its repressive tactics. What is clear is that BPP was involved in employing violent tactics against the government as well as local *Lothshampas* (Evans 2010a; Hutt 2003). BPP was formed as a political riposte to the government in 1990. Arguably, BPP embodied everything the Bhutanese government feared from a Nepali resistance. For some of the interviewees, it was the reports of murders that seemed to trigger their departures:

*This person [government soldier] was returning from setting fire to homes in a place called Syanbaa. Right after the Sire river pass somebody had shot and killed the Dumpha [Bhutanese]. I don't know who did it. Our place was pretty far away ... After that murder, we were forced to leave. The whole village was forced to leave. We had to provide our attendance twice in the day in the Dumpha office. You couldn't cross the river during the monsoon [later]. So, the whole village had to flee. That's how we left. (Interview 15).*

*During that time, sometimes I would hear that the Bhutan sarkaar [government] would come, arrest and take the intellectual [the political officials] away. I would hear that they would be arrested and taken away. So, we left because of the fear. In the Dawajung area, we didn't see it through our eyes, but we heard stories. I heard that a Mandal [village leader] was beaten and killed. (Interview 22).*

These testimonies interestingly point not to the direct observation of violence but illustrate the tense environment. Moreover, they point to a fear of the government's repressive actions as well as the possible reprisals for violent actions committed against the government. When entire

villages live in such fear, refugee situations are the natural consequence. Many rural farmers, largely uninterested in the political conflict, lamented this quandary.



## The Blame Game: Government or Dissidents?

In placing the blame for their displacement, therefore, many refugee interviewees identified more than one culprit. Some interviewees blamed the *Lothshampa* political leaders and intellectuals for their suffering instead of the government. Although there were no personally identifiable accusations, the interviewees viewed the political community (or, the elites) to be responsible for their exodus. In their criticism, nonviolent as well as violent actions appeared to fuse. In their view, the Bhutanese government wouldn't have unleashed the military if it wasn't provoked by the resistance movement, a sentiment expressed by Evans (2010a, 33). One of the interviewees, for instance, rationalized the government action this way:

*In any country, you have a crisis or political problem...so the rulers have to control the situation. Any ruler in any country in the world seeks to control the population. It's not feasible that they allow you to do whatever you want. So, I think the Bhutanese government applied a normal [or acceptable] level of control. (Interview 10).*

In this individual's perspective, the government was within its right to react to political resistance to its rule. In their view, the Bhutanese government's action is exaggerated but understandable. They further justified their view by comparing the overall Bhutanese refugee situation against the less favorable case of Syria. During the interviews, I observed other instances of opposition to the *Lothshampa* intelligentsia.

Evidently, some refugees were compelled into leaving by the threat of violence posed by outfits like the BPP. Some interviewees recalled this chilling phrase—'*jiu kholaa maa, tauko jholaa maa*' ('body in the river, head in a bag').<sup>71</sup> Decapitation of two southern Bhutanese

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<sup>71</sup> Another similarly threatening phrase was '*chha inchi ghataune*', or 'reduce six inches', i.e. decapitation.

officials on 2 June 1990, reportedly “gave credence to [such] threats” (Evans 2010a, 32). This was reportedly the slogan as well as the threat employed by some of the violent groups:

*They said that with us staying in the village will prevent political resolutions. Also, we have to leave soon. The political resolution will take place bholi [literally, tomorrow but this likely refers to an immediate future] and we will return swiftly. So, we were under pressure from that group. Many different political parties applied pressure on us. At that point, we packed up and left. We thought, whatever happens will happen. (Interview 17).*

Alongside the government pressure, revolutionary parties added to the environment of fear. The revolutionary ideal survived and was observed in the form of an anti-resettlement campaign (Evans 2010b).<sup>72</sup> Among my interviewees, I sensed a lack of clarity in identifying the political leaders here—either from the BPP, or supporters of Tek Nath Rijal. They often tended to lump both the violent units and nonviolent dissidents together in their complaints. During the period of government repression and confusion, political leaders pressured the *Lothshampa* population to follow them out of Bhutan. Other than concerns for safety, I believe the leaders expected their mass exodus to attract international attention and put subsequent pressure on the Bhutanese government, resulting in a quick return home:

*...we all ended up [in the camps]. Our hope was in a couple of years, at the most 5 years, we will return to Bhutan. We had [high] hope for our returns. We were convinced we were going to return... we organized and pushed for high school education [in the camps]. The thinking was that these are our people, and our kids. We will return in a few years. (Interview 1).*

*They [the dissident leaders] spoke as if we would return to Bhutan in a week or 10 days...that*

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<sup>72</sup> The years of Bhutanese refuge in Nepal coincided with the Nepali civil war (1994-2006). I heard there were persistent rumors of Maoist rebels attempting to recruit from Bhutanese refugee camps. However, there is very little evidence or even academic discussion on the matter.

*they could push back against the Bhutanese government's political pressure. But I didn't think so.* (Interview 10).

From a political standpoint, this expectation seems misplaced. The Bhutanese-Nepali refugees didn't want to leave their homes behind. The role of political appeal or pressure by dissident leaders needs to be analyzed within the context of government suppression. In other words, the anti-intelligentsia rhetoric could have been developed *ex post facto*.

While refugee situations tend to be intractable (Milner 2014), there were some mollifying instances that likely provided hope to the new refugees. In 1993, Nepal and Bhutan collaborated to form a Ministerial Joint Committee (MJC) to initiate a verification process for legitimate Bhutanese citizens at refugee camps (Hutt 2005, 47). It was of little surprise that the Bhutanese delegation only deemed 2.5 percent of the refugees to be 'bonafide Bhutanese citizens.' Although there were 15 high-level MJC meetings held, the Bhutanese government was never under serious pressure to make any concessions. Bhutan framed the exodus in terms of illegality and national security (Hutt 1996, 410). The *Lothshampa* refugees were accused of being illegal residents. The Bhutanese government further argued that the refugees voluntarily joined Nepali refugee camps due to privation. Furthermore, it criticized the UNHCR for its inadequate screening of refugees in the camps (412). In my analysis of historic documents, the Bhutanese government never seriously considered repatriating the refugees. Its political actions were merely a ruse.

Although the Bhutanese government, in 2003, reportedly conceded that 75 percent of the camp population in Nepal consisted of Bhutanese citizens (Hutt 2005, 50) it suffered no political consequences. Many interviewees identified India's geopolitical role (or lack of it) to be a significant reason:

*India ... never spoke in our favor. India never got involved. Tacitly it was in favor of Bhutanese government. During the international setting there was no third-party involvement or representation. It was viewed as a problem for Bhutan. Also, for Nepal as a host country. If you look at it geopolitically, India has a crucial role. India didn't participate. And although we were trying to speak up, if the countries and leaders didn't listen to us, we couldn't move the agenda forward. (Interview 1).*

*On top of that, Bhutan doesn't survive through its own resources. If India doesn't provide economic products, like fuel, rice, etc. Bhutan can't survive. Although Bhutan is preaching to the world about its happiness and sufficiency, it can't survive on its own. (Interview 5).*

*People who are aware [politically] you know that Bhutan is under India. Everything is controlled by India. Foreign policy is driven by India... What I understand is...from foreign policy to security policy, it is all controlled by India. ...if there was any trouble with Bhutanese authority, they would call the Indian authority...Due to Indian influence, ushering in political change was not possible. (Interview 10).*

It is difficult to see Bhutan getting away with the forced displacement of *Lothshampa* population, and more importantly, its stubborn refusal of repatriation. These reflections on India's political inactivity are supported by some geopolitical works.<sup>73</sup> The initial exodus of the displaced *Lothshampas* ended in neighboring Indian areas like Sikkim and Assam. Unlike Nepal, the Indian government wasn't in a hospitable mood. The local police reportedly dismantled the first encampment and loaded the refugees into vehicles bound for Nepal (Evans 2010a, 37).

Moreover, India, as the regional hegemon, curiously abstained from all Nepal-Bhutan

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<sup>73</sup> The foreign policy facet of Bhutanese refugee displacement is also an underresearched area of research. Scholars like Leo Rose and Michael Hutt are notable exceptions but foreign policy features tangentially in their research.

negotiations on the refugee situation (Hutt 2005). From a geopolitical standpoint, India was likely concerned about the possible instability brought on by *Lothshampa* dissidence. Given its own conflict with Nepali-origin populations in Sikkim and Assam, India likely viewed the refugee exodus to be in its favor, i.e. a return to stable situation in Bhutan, as well as relative chaos in Nepal.

## Contagion of Fear in *Lothshampa* Departure

The blame for the refugees' situation presents numerous targets. It is evident from the data that the intellectual circle generally blamed Bhutanese repression as well as the strategic role of India for their displacement. By contrast, the villagers and the farmers were less concerned with (or, even aware of) the macro political realities. They were likely to blame the immediate sources like the Bhutanese military and the *Lothshampa* political leadership. What is clear is that their departure took place within a context of fear and chaos. As mentioned earlier, the military forced many *Lothshampas* to sign voluntary migration forms and leave the country. On the other hand, many others departed after hearing about the murders, and fearing for their own safety. Similarly, many families fled when they saw their neighbors were leaving:

*In terms of reason to leave...all our friends and neighbors had left the village. We were left behind. When we were behind, there were ten Rai families staying behind. (Interview 17).*

*When we left...what do they call it...they used to call it saat numbere [number seven] ... teen numbere [number three] ... everyone started leaving. When people started leaving, there was no point for us to stay behind. So, we left too. Everybody had left... It was a good place to grow crops... We left all of that behind. Otherwise, we would have stayed behind, if everyone else had also stayed behind. (Interview 19).*

*At that time...not our family, but our neighbors appeared to be leaving. We were determined to stay put at first. We couldn't remain behind. Everyone started leaving. Everyone. We didn't know what to do. So, there was a lot of fear. It was difficult. (Interview 20).*

These refugee narratives on their departure are multilayered. Fear and uncertainty in the face of government persecution were evidently common; their precise reason to leave seems to vary. Based on the testimonies presented in this chapter, dissidents and their relatives were probably

the first to flee. On the other hand, the rising military aggression and political pressure by local leaders convinced many other families. All of this, taken together, led to a cascading effect, convincing other families to leave.

Not all *Lothshampas* have left Bhutan. Interviewee 5, for instance, mentioned that their sister was not around during the family's departure, and that she currently remains in Bhutan. On the other hand, the daughter of interviewee 20 was left behind and later joined the family at the camps. Based on my conversations, *Lothshampas* left behind in Bhutan were made to sign the 'No Objection Certificate' (N.O.C.) by the government. The N. O. C. was an instrument developed in the post-resistance Bhutan to control the *Lothshampa* population. The certificate was essentially a permission slip for *Lothshampas*:

*This [the N. O. C.] certified that the holder had a clean record, i.e. that they had not taken part in oppositional activity, and were not related to anyone who had. The N. O. C. was also required of children seeking admission to school, with the result that children whose parents had taken part, or were suspected of taking part, in 'anti-national activities' had difficulties gaining access to education. Many individuals were prevented from selling their cash crops on the open market and made to hand them over to the local administration (Hutt 2003, 217).*

Who received the N. O. C. was entirely contingent on the whims of the Bhutanese government, allowing them to “determine access to jobs, travel documents and educational opportunities” (Evans 2010a, 37). Put bluntly, the *Lothshampas* left behind have had to prove their loyalty to the government while severing relations with ‘anti-national’ dissident elements. By definition, refugees are driven from their homes by persecution as well as fear of persecution (UNHCR 1951). A few of my interviewees reportedly experienced direct political violence by the

government. The government used fear to drive most of the refugees away, and to control the *Lothshampas* who remained behind.



## Pre-Flight Identity Frames

Group identities serve a unifying as well as a dividing function. Separation of groups is about the manipulation of boundaries (Barth 1969). Both inter- and intra-group boundaries are evident in the narratives of the refugees. Here, both the Bhutanese government and the *Lothshampas* seemed to participate in the exclusion of the other. The interviewees used a variety of frames for identifying the Bhutanese officials: *Bhote*, *Dumpha*, *Sherpa*, and *sarkaar*. *Sarkaar* refers to the government, while the other three refer to ethnic categorization of the Ngalop. In my understanding, the commonality between the three identifiers is the mongoloid origin. This is a little ironic as mongoloid castes form a considerable portion of the *Lothshampa* population, representation in castes like *Gurung*, *Rai*, and, *Tamang*. Therefore, language and culture—not similar physical features—were the primary boundaries separating the *Lothshampa* from the Bhutanese population. Viewed from an identity lens, Bhutanese government used these boundaries as political instrument of separation (Barth 1969). On a micro scale, the *Lothshampas* employed identifiers that appeared to serve a similar purpose of ‘otherizing’ the non-Nepali population.

The Bhutanese government reportedly used frames like *Dhakri* to single out *Lothshampas*. Interviewee 15 recalled an incident where Bhutanese officials called his family ‘monkey.’ It was clear, however, that the most frequent and injurious categorization was *saat numbere* moniker, i.e. a person belonging to F7 in the 1988 census. The implication of this slander was clear: the *Lothshampas* were being ostracized as illegal immigrants in Bhutan, irrespective of the irregularities in the census process (Hutt 1994, 2003). Three of my interviewees (5, 18, and 19) recalled the use of *saat numbere* reference in their interaction with Bhutanese officials.

In my view, what these identity-based frames underline is the existence and amplification of socio-political exclusion of the *Lothshampas*. It is well-recorded that the *Lothshampa* population lived in relative political isolation in southern Bhutan (Hutt 1994, 2005; Saul 2000). The *Lothshampa* population in southern Bhutan evidently enjoyed economic development and political autonomy; for example, the south was home to cash crop and hydro-electric industries (Evans 2010a, 30). Both extant scholarship and interview testimonies allude to the Bhutanese government's desire to control the economic potential of *Lothshampas*. The government's political maneuvers—development projects in the south were halted (Evans 2010a); villages vacated by *Lothshampas* were provided to Bhutanese citizens (Interviewee 5)—point to deliberate cleansing of the Nepali-speaking population of the south. Political actions, such as the 1988 census and cultural suppression of the Nepali culture, were supported by expressions of social exclusion. Here, *Lothshampa* became the *saat numbere* in the administration's eyes and perhaps, also in the public's consciousness. Like 'monkeys', the use of *saat numbere* was an instrument of dehumanization (or, denationalization) of the Nepali population of the south. Group identities are a dynamic negotiation informed by internal expectations as well as external impressions (Jenkins 1996). The external categorization in the form of *saat numbere* and as anti-nationalists came to define the displaced population (instead of the *Lothshampa* identity). Such external categorization was only to be replaced by an even more durable classification, i.e. the label of refugees.

## Refugee-ness in Nepal: Narratives of Survival

Having to flee their homes in Bhutan, the *Lothshampa* population became members of an externally-defined, indelible, bureaucratic frame—refugee. Adapting Jenkins’ (1994) perspective on external categorization, I view the political classification of refugee to be one of the most powerful examples of exclusion and quarantine. Here, external categorization imposes itself over a group’s preferred internal preferences on self-identification. The Bhutanese refugees survived in one of seven camps in eastern Nepal until 2007.<sup>74</sup> Similar to the memory of life in Bhutan, time spent in refugee camps is crucial in the ossification and possible revision of worldviews and identity-based understandings. The liminality of refugee life is a unique experience, subsequently leading to a group understanding that transcends national identities, defined as refugee-ness (Fuglerud 1997; Lacroix 2004). Trying to examine refugees through a legal lens alone, devoid of a theoretical focusing on their experience arguably misses the point of refugee-based research (Soysal 1994, 149), and can lead to an inadequate understanding of refugee experiences and identities.

Life in Bhutan was defined by the interviewees’ time under government repression in a variety of contexts which led to their mass departure across the national border. Following India’s refusal to accept them (Evans 2010a; Hutt 2003), the dry and warm climes of southeastern Nepal became the refugees’ new ‘home.’ Scarcity and camp life are synonymous. Life in the refugee camps, as expected, is defined by the occupants’ extended suffering in the face of daily privation and a future of uncertainty. Here, the testimonies provide an intimate look into a life of everyday scarcity and a near-constant challenge to make ends meet. My

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<sup>74</sup> For the map of seven Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal, and a quick profile of incoming refugee groups like the Bhutanese-Nepali visit <https://www.cdc.gov/immigrantrefugeehealth/profiles/bhutanese/population-movements/index.html>

interviewees mentioned a plethora of challenges that defined their camp life: from insufficient food to seasonal fires, to contagious diseases which were exacerbated by a lack of necessary medical care, to seasonal elephant stampedes through the camps, to a lack of sufficient educational opportunities:

*It was difficult at first ... living conditions weren't great in camp...any disease in the camp was devastatingly contagious...health situation wasn't great at camp ... by the time I arrived, the food distribution system was pretty good. So it was adequate; it wasn't too bad. The living conditions were pretty bad; if there was fire, it would engulf hundreds of huts. But mostly it was ok...wherever you're in the world, you do what is necessary to survive. (Interview 10).*

*In the camp, we were only given food. We had to manage expenses ourselves. Sometimes there would be fire [through lightning in the dry season], and sometimes elephants would trample our huts. You needed money when someone was ill too. <sup>75</sup> There was nothing without cash. There were all kinds of problems in the camp. (Interview 12).*

These statements provide a necessary background in camp environment in Nepal. These interviewees also alluded to robbery and assaults on women, especially when the camp population was reduced after resettlement started in 2008, further underlining the vulnerabilities in refugee camps (de Carvalho and Pinto 2018).

*We came and stayed at Timai [refugee camp] for a year and a half. My parents were there. There, there was haija [cholera]. It was summer time. It was windy, wet season. Then, there were no medical supplies at the camp. Because of haija, our parents passed away. (Interview 6).*

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<sup>75</sup> Refugee camps in Nepal were semi-permanent dwellings, commonly made of dry bamboo. Summers in Nepal coincide with monsoon season, which led to lightning and subsequent fires. (Interview 28).

It should be easy to imagine the extremely cramped nature of refugee huts in Nepal. Multiple families survived in the limited confines of these bamboo huts. On the other hand, the small, cramped huts facilitated the social and familial closeness among the refugees:

*The camps were very very compact. Each camp was like [built] for 9 people or so. We had our aunts and grandmothers all there. Because our family was so big we had 2 huts [or camp] ... That was pretty much life for a lot of people. A lot of refugees. If they could find some work outside of the camp they would go. But most of us would just hang out in the refugee camps. Go visit people. Talk. Sit around. (Interview 2).*

In most of my conversations, the closeness of the refugee huts was repeatedly emphasized. The following testimony of interview 10 reveals the socio-cultural pull of the community. It was natural to stay close to one's family, relatives, and friends. This is perhaps also a function of the suffering based on the shared experience of the refugees (Lacroix 2004; Soysal 1994).

*... I remember telling my father – we have some money saved ... let's utilize our savings and live [outside of camps]. But my father didn't agree. He said, everyone is staying in camps, let's stay here a little longer. There might not be a major problem, if so, we will figure it out then. A lot of people are here, so let's stay here. (Interview 10).*

On the other hand, the close contact between refugee families and dwellings probably played a part in the contagion of diseases like cholera, which was often exacerbated by the distinct lack of adequate medical supplies and running water, as well as extremely close living quarters. In resettlement, refugee communities desire and attempt to replicate this close proximity of the refugee camps. It is especially reflected in refugee secondary migration patterns, i.e. the tendency of refugees to migrate from their initial resettlement location to a different one. In both historic and recent cases, refugee groups have undertaken secondary migration in search of better

economic opportunities (Barkdull et al. 2012; Desbarats 1986) as well as proximity to their networks (Bloem and Loveridge 2017; Ott 2011; Rumbaut 1989). In my quantitative examination of secondary migration in Chapter VI, I find secondary migration of refugees to be influenced by economic factors as well as desire for closeness to available networks.

As part of my fieldwork, I worked on several community projects with Bhutanese-Nepali refugees. One of my first projects required me to sketch the community-based picture of healthcare access among the refugee community.<sup>76</sup> In summary, most former refugees in North Hill remain hesitant to visit medical facilities or make appropriate appointments for a variety of reasons—language, transportation, and cultural intransigence—but were more likely to use the pharmacy at establishments like the CVS. They are astonished at the availability of medication at a local store. In contrast, their medical experience at the camp amounted to visiting a compounder (comparable to a medical assistant), and receiving some pain-relievers, irrespective of their medical requirements. In the rare occasions when patients were transported out of the refugee camps to hospitals in neighboring cities, it signaled the seriousness of their ailment or worse, an imminent death. Cosmologically, many in the community continue to equate hospital visits with mortality.

Another common challenge faced by the refugees were the limited rations at the refugee camps. At least four interviewees remarked on how their ration at camps was reduced over time, signaling the advent of resettlement and its pressure on the refugee families:

*Sometimes I remember the difficulty of camp life. It was very hot. I remember we didn't have a lot to eat or wear. (Interview 8).*

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<sup>76</sup> This project is discussed in the next chapter, which analyzes my fieldwork-based observations.

*When our children were small, resources were sufficient. Once they became older, it was harder to manage. Everyone had a developing appetite and the ration wouldn't be enough. At first, it was sufficient. Later on, they started reducing the ration amount. And people started growing [laughs]. (Interview 15).*

*Tyastai ho [That's how it is]. Sarkaar [literally, government but in this context it's the international aid agencies like UNHCR] provided us rice. From the outside, it might look alright because we had food to eat. But what [ration] we were given was not enough. We had to buy our own vegetables. Sometimes even the rice given to us was not enough. We had to buy rice too. If the children were young, then the rice provided to us was sufficient. They used to provide us daal, oil, and rice. We had to buy salt ourselves. Sometimes we had to purchase rice too. We didn't have to buy rice when our children were young. (Interview 18).*

*We hadn't planned to build camps and live in Nepal. The Nepali sarkaar [government] took care of us all that time. I keep hearing that rationing is gradually being decreased [at the camp]. (Interview 22).*

As the interviewees lived in different camps, there might have been some difference in distribution; however, UNHCR was the primary relief organization for all the camps. According to my analysis, in the initial years of encampment there was a high level of in-camp organization among the refugee community. This can be largely attributed to the political optimism and hope of returning home to Bhutan relatively soon (Interview 1). This sense of camaraderie and organization was reportedly evident in the management of the education-based provisions within the camp:

*We were convinced we were going to return [to Bhutan]. But because of that hope, UNHCR had arranged for education until the eighth grade...in Nepal, high school is until the tenth grade.*

*They didn't have the provision for high school. So we organized and pushed for high school education. The thinking was that these are our people, and our kids. (Interview 1).*

*At the camps, the children were educated. There was a school. Like here, the education arrangement was pretty good at the camp. The [international] organization would teach the children. Up to the tenth grade. (Interview 24).*

As most of my interviewees have attested, the early optimism and internally organized activities dwindled over time (interviews 1, 7, 15, 22). In fairness, it is difficult to sustain enthusiasm and belief over a period of nearly two decades. As refugee situations get protracted, the uncertainty and hopelessness, as well as possible mental health challenges, tend to increase among the populations (de Carvalho and Pinto 2018; Milner 2014). The camp management in Nepal was evidently relatively lenient. It allowed most of my interviewees to look beyond the boundaries of the camp to address some of the camp-based restrictions on their lives.



## **Boundaries: Open Camps but Closed Identities**

It is difficult for me to ascertain if the reduction of food rations in the refugee camps was a deliberate action taken by international aid agencies, or if it was a complaint borne out of refugee experiences rooted in dissatisfaction and possibly resentment. Perhaps, it is a case of both. What is evident in the interviewee narratives is many refugees had to take risks to provide for their families, commonly venturing outside of the refugee camps. Put differently, many Bhutanese refugees worked outside of their designated refugee camps, whether to feed their families or be able to provide education for their children:

*As a father, I would work on how to educate the children. I had five kids and we had to educate them all. To do that, I sometimes dug up farms, sometimes I cut the crops, sometimes I farmed.*

*This was outside the refugee camps. That's how I worked. (Interview 12).*

*It was saarho dukkha [extremely difficult]. They [the camp management] used to provide us some ration. It wasn't really sufficient. You couldn't survive without going outside the camps and making a living. (Interviews 13 and 14).*

Although it is difficult to note when or how this system got started, the refugee camps in Nepal appeared to have porous boundaries. A variety of studies reflect on refugee agency in the social and economic management of camps<sup>77</sup> (Alloush et al. 2017; Jaji 2015; Malkki 1995a, 1995b). In the case of Bhutanese camps, refugee individuals appeared to work in consort with the camp management authorities to leave the camps for work or education:

*I went to Kathmandu starting in 1999, and I only started staying in camp around 2008/2009. In*

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<sup>77</sup> During my short work experience with UNHCR in 2010, I observed an instance of economic inflation around the refugee camps. This inflation of rental properties and local products was driven by the international (and Kathmandu-based Nepali) UNHCR staff living in cities close to the camps. This economic bustle was primarily due to heightened resettlement-based activities.

*Nepal, there wasn't much restriction in entering and exiting camp. It was pretty easy. We all spoke Nepali. All we had to do was inform the camp authorities that we wouldn't be around so they could suspend our rations. And it was easy to re-start the service once you came back. There were no barriers as such. (Interview 11).*

*Yes, at first [we] weren't allowed to go look for work. Later on, they allowed us to go look for some work. So we could go and earn some money. But it was the case of earning little money that would be spent right away. (Interview 24).*

During my fieldwork and embedded informal conversations, many individuals revealed that refugees would inform the authorities of their departure, so the latter could make the necessary changes in their ration distribution for the family, as was evident in the testimony of interviewee 11. Formal details surrounding the departure and arrival of refugees were likely different based on the specific site of the camp in Nepal. However, it appears that entry to and exit from the refugee camps was commonplace, an occurrence that was undoubtedly aided by the linguistic and cultural similarities between the Bhutanese refugees and Nepali society.

As was the case in the previous section's discussion of the refugee exodus, there were diverging refugee motivations for leaving the camps. The two principal reasons for leaving camps temporarily are based on educational opportunities (and education-based employment) or manual labor-based employment:

*The total period of my stay [in the camps] was 18 years but I didn't stay the whole time in refugee camps. Half the time I was registered [in the camp] like my family but I was personally out of the camps for 8 years. (Interview 5).*

*In Nepal, there was freedom [to move out of refugee camps] ... that was a place of freedom. Everybody lived and worked in whatever way they could. They were free to teach; they used their*

*talent; they were free to teach. For example, I used to work in the hospital, but I also ran a small photo lab in the market. At one point, I was also a photographer. I earned decent money.*

(Interview 10).

*I know some people furtively studied outside the camps. Refugees didn't have a lot of facilities, so they would find ways to study outside the camps. Some would study; some would teach; some would find manual work. (Interview 28).*

In a moment of contradiction, Interviewee 28 also compared his camp experience to that of incarceration. While it is difficult to leave and return to jail, this person's opinion referred to the relative lack of agency and freedom of refugee life. To many of the interviewees who were able to study and work outside the camps, their refugee-ness consisted of struggles as well as some positive experiences; yet, the overall yearning for unfettered identity seems to have been common.

The interviewees who traveled outside the refugee camps to find menial work exhibited a matter-of-fact attitude about their work outside camps. Many of them came from an agricultural background that coincided with lack of formal education:

*In terms of work, it was mostly labor work. Tyastai ta ho [it's how it is]. What other work could we find? We had to do the work, out of necessity. Tyastai pani bhayo [that's how it went]. So people who had some education, they would go out and teach. Anpadh [illiterate] folks like us – how could we teach? We did practical work, and moved on. (Interview 24).*

*...yes it was definitely difficult. We had to carry loads of rocks on our back in high heat, but we couldn't complain about the heat [or anything]. We couldn't complain about the rain. During rain...we built homes with traps; we would accumulate rocks...big rocks, small rocks [these are materials used for construction work] and line them up for tractors to pick them up ... Then, we*

*also worked on spinning wheel to weave strings. We call them charkha to process sheep wool. We would comb the wool and twist them ... We worked this kind of work for 5-6 years. Then, we also worked as laborers...to build homes. Build homes with bricks; carry bricks; mixing cement; that's the type of work we did. (Interview 19).*

Based on the testimonies, men generally found work as laborers or seasonal harvesters in the nearby villages; women generally found work weaving or crushing gravel at local quarries. However, as interviewee 19 reflects, women were also known to participate in manual labor work, as necessary. This was especially the case when there was no husband around to provide for the family, as was the case for interviewee 19. Her husband decided to re-marry her sister, leaving her saddled with the responsibility of the children to take care of:<sup>78</sup>

*Yes...we would work...like harvesting wheat during the season. Bitta pasarna [crushing gravel]. They would promise more money than they paid. About 200 rupees [per day]. We would work in the wheat fields...It was quite a few people. We went in different places ... They would divide and leave in groups...Work was generally difficult. It wasn't like working for the company here. We would work for two to three days straight. (Interview 22).*

For those refugees engaged in manual labor, it seemed that they could find work relatively easily, especially during harvest when neighboring farms required helping hands. However, they remained at a disadvantage; they often were denied pay, especially if they were found out as refugees:

*Sometimes we went to pahaad – hills and valley areas – and earned a little. If the thekedaar [contractor] was good, you could earn decent money. Sometimes they wouldn't pay us. If they didn't pay, what could you do? So, sometimes we would have to leave empty-handed. Sometimes*

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<sup>78</sup> Polygamy is still common among some Nepali castes. The interviewee didn't attain a divorce until necessary, i.e. when filing for resettlement. She reportedly lived amicably with the second wife.

*we wouldn't get enough for fare to return to camps. So, we survived through such hardships.*

(Interviews 13 and 14).

The refugee experience in Nepal, while defined by scarcities and poverty, appears to have been relatively stable. Bhutanese refugees were fortunately not quite as vulnerable, i.e. they were far from active conflict, and were often able to integrate into the local society. Yet the experience of life as refugees had a constraining effect within and outside of the camps. This is most explicitly evident in their need to hide their political status outside of the camps. Put differently, their political situation continued to force them into an experience of marginalization and exclusion.

Some of my interviewees left the camps temporarily in search of education-based opportunities. Their experience, when contrasted with that of refugees working on farms, was relatively positive. Interviewees revealed that they were able to leave camps in pursuit of education with the permission of UNHCR:

*You could get a waiver from UNHCR to go and study. This is what I did. I did my master's [in Nepal].* (Interview 1).

This particular interviewee was further able to travel to the US for higher education. They were obtaining their Ph.D. from a local university when the resettlement process started in the US. Their spouse and children joined him in the US with the help of the resettlement process. Interviewee 1 is a well-respected individual due to their visible economic contribution within the community in North Hill. Upon completion of their Ph.D., this individual decided to settle in North Hill around the community, foregoing a potential career in academia. Refugees are generally not afforded professional opportunities appropriate to their qualifications (Gold 1988,

1992). This was a case where the individual opted for a career that afforded them closeness to family and opportunity, at the expense of a professional career.<sup>79</sup>

The following statements provide an array of narratives on pursuing opportunities outside of the camps:

*When I was in camp I went and studied in a boarding school (outside the camp) for a year and half or so after I was done with the seventh grade. (Interview 2).*

*The goal of my being out [of camps] was pursuing my education. That's why I enrolled in post-graduate study in one of the schools in Biratnagar... For the continuity of my education [and professional life] I moved to Kathmandu, where I worked as a principal of [name removed] School. (Interview 5).*

*They [refugee education system] had until grade 10 in camps. We finished grade 10. Then, I left the camp to study in Darjeeling [India]. My brothers studied in Nepal [outside of the camps] ... I went to Kathmandu. I taught English in Kathmandu for five years. (Interview 6).*

*I was a student. I used to teach too. At Bhadrapur, Jhapa I did my second year of Bachelor's in Physics. They didn't offer third years for Physics. So that created the situation for me to come to Kathmandu. So, I came to Kathmandu with my friends around 2003. (Interview 7).*

*After our education we wanted to be able to take care of our family, so we went to places Siraha, Saptahari, and Sarlahi to teach. We would generally get hired in those places. (Interview 9).*

*I met my wife in Kathmandu. When not staying in the camps, I went to Kathmandu to teach... I stayed in Kathmandu for many years. I used to travel back and forth between Kathmandu and*

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<sup>79</sup> This sentiment is relevant in the discussion of secondary migration that is covered in Chapter VI.

*refugee camp. I would come back to the camp during holidays, otherwise I would be in Kathmandu. (Interview 11).*

The interviewees here exploited their opportunities to travel to nearby cities, often as far as Kathmandu or cities in India. Life in cities afforded them educational opportunities, both in terms of enrolling in higher education as well as teaching in schools. It is of little surprise that many of these ambitious interviewees hold various (often, informal) positions of leadership in the refugee community. These individuals mostly represented the initial wave of refugee resettlement; on the other hand, the villagers with manual labor experience mostly arrived later. It is pertinent to note that many of these community leaders were first in undertaking both migrations—forced displacement from Bhutan and voluntary resettlement from refugee camps. This is perhaps a microcosm of the Bhutanese refugee situation—refugee populations teeming with ambition alongside a reluctant, nostalgic population.

However, even the educated individuals (generally perceived as the elite) were often restricted and weighed down by their refugee-ness. Like those refugees who engaged in manual labor outside the camps, they were forced to pretend to be Nepali citizens, i.e. to hide their refugee-based identities:

*When I was in camp I hated the 'refugee' word [label]. Even when I came here, I didn't want to be identified as a refugee you know. In camp life, I don't know if you're aware or not...around the camp, refugees were seen as 'bad' people. Like we didn't belong there. 'Oh you refugee, don't come over here' ... nobody ever knew we were refugees. We had to lie. My aunt ... she's from Darjeeling (northern India bordering Nepal). So we just told them that we are from Darjeeling. (Interview 2).*

This interviewee is a young individual who has climbed many rungs of higher education successfully in the US, often identified as a future leader of the community. Their experiences reveal that despite having the relative freedom to move and live outside of the refugee camps, many were inhibited by their refugee label. Despite the past hurt and confusion over their refugee experiences and an uncertain national identity, many of these young individuals are now at ease and are enthusiastic in unravelling the complex nature of their identities. This is possible in the space provided by resettlement for the reevaluation of their identities:

*As a school principal, having a refugee background was very difficult. Refugees were not legally authorized to work; on top of that, working as a school principal without disclosing your identity was very difficult. There was a lot of appreciation for what I did but I couldn't disclose my refugee identity. (Interview 5).*

In this case, the interviewee mentioned they had informed the hiring committee of his refugee status during the interview. However, even after the hiring, they preferred to conceal their refugee status to the staff. Comparatively, such an experience is similar to that of unauthorized or undocumented immigrants living and working in the US. This individual is an ambitious community leader and was especially vocal about some of the Bhutanese government's actions. As a secondary migrant from Texas, the individual is invested in the economic and social development of the overall North Hill community. In general, refugees with educational backgrounds have utilized the space afforded by resettlement to become the faces of the community.

*Then [in refugee camps in 2010], we didn't have anything in the refugee camps. We didn't have any identity. (Interview 9).*

Absence of identity is a common grievance among refugees (Kumsa 2006; Zetter 1991).



Identity is not something that is constantly thought of; instead, it is more likely to be expressed in everyday actions. Refugee experiences in the camps were instrumental in delineating the restrictions on their lives and identities.

*At first, I thought of the refugee camp as a place where Bhutanese congregated. It was ramailo [a pleasant experience]. Later on, as I got older, I realized it was difficult to pursue your dreams and aspirations at the camp. So there was frustration. (Interview 11).*

*How it was...in our camp sector, three or five families would face dire situation of poverty. Within them, my house was one of them. That was our situation. Perhaps, that's why I wanted to do something. (Interview 27).*

Many of the younger interviewees revealed enjoying a relatively stable environment during their childhood in the camps. However, this experience gradually gave way to the realization of their restricted identity and opportunities within the camp. This restriction is likely to have been crystallized in their work experiences outside of the camp, as alluded to above.

Social identity scholars argue that individuals are constantly seeking positive individual and group-based affiliations (Tajfel and Turner 1986). A refugee's yearning for a favorable identity is inextricably linked with a desire to break free from the restrictions on their lives. Resettlement, therefore, is an opportunity to 'correct' these tangible as well as intangible (such as identity-based needs) deprivations. Some refugee groups have been observed to undertake shifts in their native identities in resettlement (Colic-Peisker 2005, 2009; Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Eastmond 2007; Markovic and Manderson 2000). I will begin the next section focusing on the disagreements over resettlement. The decision to resettle wasn't a unanimous choice in the Bhutanese refugee camps (Evans 2010b). This observation is important in articulating the internal disagreement within refugee groups over their future (like resettlement), as similarly

observed in a separate case study by Byrne (2013). As I argued in the beginning of this chapter, national identities and refugee experiences affect these decisions. Also, many testimonies underline how the ‘choice’ of resettlement became an obligation for many refugees. This discourse surrounding resettlement is an important one, as it theoretically links with the identity-based narratives of ‘Bhutanese-Nepali’ refugees. At the very minimum, it helps us understand the contention surrounding resettlement, and how this durable solution translated into sacrifice for some refugees.

## **To Resettle or Not to Resettle?**

The narratives of the Bhutanese-Nepali interviewees are far from monolithic, from their divergent viewpoints on the reason behind their initial displacement to their differing experiences in the refugee camps. In resettlement (or in accepting the offer of resettlement), there is a distinct division in the testimonies of my interviewees. In her short but relevant work on pre-resettlement Bhutanese refugee camps, Evans (2010b) paints a picture of stark division among the refugee population. She reports an aggressive campaign by the Communist Party of Bhutan (CPB)—with revolutionary ideals like the Maoists in Nepal—for repatriation (306). The revolutionary intent of CPB is common to BPP's goals. CPB's position pitted them against pro-resettlement refugees, and by implication, the international relief agencies. The CPB employed its cultural campaign through songs, poetry, posters, and demonstrations. Evans' (2010b) describes these expressions as propaganda against pro-resettlement refugees as well as the international relief agencies (314). The CPB campaign seemingly implodes when they use harassment and violence against the family members of a pro-resettlement individual. This work serves as an appropriate platform to present the divisive subject of resettlement, as perceived by my interviewees.

Evans' (2010b) work provides a few more observations relevant to this work moving forward. For instance, a central theme of her observations at the camps was how the cultural forms of expression were employed as a political tool by the CPB and, to an extent, by the pro-resettlement group. These cultural expressions remain at the heart of resettlement experience of Bhutanese-Nepali refugees (as elaborated in Chapter IV), for the maintenance of their way of life as well as the pursuit of political goals. She provides a window into the development of youth agency and decision-making within the confines of the refugee camps (305). She finds this

development of consciousness, different from the youth's family-oriented identities and their conceptions of personhood in Bhutan, to be partly reinforced by the international relief agencies. From this perspective, the social system in refugee camps was built on the *Lothshampa* close-knit family units as well as by exposure to the international agencies. It is probably extremely relevant to consider that IIA serves the same function as the institutional presence for many refugees in North Hill.

Many interviews spoke of *taathaa-baathaa*, and how they were the first to leave the camps and venture into the uncertain promise of resettlement. Translated literally, *taathaa-baathaa* refers to those 'alert and clever' individuals. Contextually, 'the elite' is a more appropriate translation. According to Banki's (2008) pre-resettlement study, refugees with postgraduate education consistently expressed more interest in resettlement, in comparison to the rest of the camp population (11):

*The baathaa-taathaa had already left the camp long time ago. Us simple-minded folks and refugees with difficult cases were the only ones left behind. And also the riff-raff, the people who would say bad things about their parents were left behind. (Interview 12).*

As was the case in their displacement, or experience in refugee camps, the elites charted a slightly different, albeit relatively controversial, path:

*There are [also] debates on resettlement. Some people accused us of being 'traitors' for accepting resettlement. There are people who still live in refugee camps. You can see these debates ongoing in Facebook and other social media. (Interview 1).*

In the context of the divisiveness evident in the refugee camps (Bhaumik 2007b; Evans 2010b), as well as the history of Bhutanese exodus (Hutt 1994, 2005) these allegations aren't necessarily

surprising. Even within families, there was evidence of a lack of consensus on refugee resettlement:

*To come to the US I had a counsel [and lobbied for] since the very beginning. It was the other family members who weren't interested which delayed our resettlement. (Interview 19).*

It is likely that many individuals viewed resettlement as the proverbial nail to the hopes of repatriation to Bhutan. Put differently, Bhutanese refugees feared that the pragmatism and promise of resettlement would lure the community away to *pradesh* (foreign lands)—a fear that has become a reality. One of my expert interviewees is a former UNHCR colleague whose work remains relevant to Bhutanese refugees. They attested to the falling number of refugees left behind in camps in Nepal (Interview 26). Due to the relatively small number of remaining refugees, the Nepali government is considering an offer of integration of refugees into Nepali society. The following is a statement provided by a high-ranking UNHCR official (stationed at Kathmandu) via email:<sup>80</sup>

Today approximately 9,391 refugees reside in two camps in Eastern Nepal and the success of the resettlement program has created the necessary space to pursue alternative durable solutions;- focusing on local solutions and facilitating dialogue on voluntary repatriation between the governments of Nepal and Bhutan.

For refugees still residing in Nepal, UNHCR, the Government of Nepal and UNHCR project partners are working together to enhance the self-reliance of refugees, while supporting local

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<sup>80</sup> Unlike my former UNHCR colleague, the source of this formal statement was unable to meet with me personally. They responded to me via email and requested anonymity. While this is not an official interview, the statement provides a formal acknowledgment of the ongoing consolidation of remaining Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. The possibility of local integration, here, has evidently become possible due to a high level of resettlement to third countries.

communities through education, health, livelihoods, and social protection initiatives. (Email Correspondence 08/17/2017).

With the unlikelihood of repatriation to Bhutan, many refugees had considered staying in Nepal, given the cultural, religious, and linguistic overlap:

*Going as far as Nepal was troublesome in many ways. We thought that going to a foreign place [in comparison to Nepali society] was going to be even more difficult. Going to swadesh [home country, i.e. Bhutan] would be much better. There were rumors about our leaders turning things around. We heard the sarkaar was turning around. So we had said to ourselves to stay put and return to Bhutan. As we waited we faced more hardship and challenges. (Interview 12).*

Controversy over long-term refugee solutions is not novel, as communities are torn over how to best reconcile their past and future (Byrne 2013; Malkki 1995a, 1995b). The protracted nature of refugee situations can further exacerbate the refugee vulnerability (de Carvalho and Pinto 2018). Contrary to the pragmatic, immediate benefits offered by resettlement to some refugees, many older interviewees expressed their initial dislike for resettlement:

*Coming to a country that we hadn't seen or understood, we didn't feel like coming [at first]. No, I wasn't interested in coming here. Once everyone had left, there was no point staying back. (Interview 17).*

*I didn't want to come at first [for resettlement] ... my intention was to return to Bhutan. I wanted to return to aafno desh [one's own country]. If they took us, I would have gone back to Bhutan. It didn't transpire. No matter what, it didn't work out [for repatriation]. And everyone from the camps were coming to America. They [other refugees] kept leaving the camps. I didn't want to come. (Interview 18).*

*As far as I was concerned, I wasn't interested. If possible, returning to your own country would be nice, but we don't know what the government would do to us. (Interview 22).*

*At first...no, I wasn't interested. I don't know when the resettlement program started...my friends had come to the US. I used to wonder where they had gone. (Interview 23).*

These testimonies articulate the dilemma over refugee resettlement. Most of these interviewees expressed their desire to return to their homes in Bhutan. Many of them also considered the option of integration into Nepali society if repatriation wasn't possible, as they were in the unique position of living as refugees in a country where they could informally pass as locals. After protracted political irrelevance, the refugee families were thrust into decision-making with considerable long-term consequences. These decisions are naturally affected by identities, as argued by Byrne (2013). As I articulated in Figure 4, refugee experiences also come into play in making these decisions as expressed in the aforesaid confessions.

In a rare instance of voluntary family separation, one interviewee had opted for resettlement while his family decided against it. Even after the individual had established themselves as an entrepreneur—owned a stable business and was a popular member of the North Hill Bhutanese community—the family decided to remain behind at the camps:

*No, they [parents] won't come. I went back there few months ago. I spoke to my mother and so on. But they're not coming. They don't want to come. They are going to stay there. (Interview 28).*

When I inquired about their insistence on staying back, the answer was quite straightforward, and based on the convenience of familiarity:

*In terms of that arrangement, what is happening is...the living situation is the same. It's the ramshackle huts. But they still have the same language and culture. It's the place to speak the language, where one can go buy some vegetables, and so on. So it's easier there. America is obviously going to be difficult for people from the village. Even for us it was very hard at first [in resettlement]. They're staying there out of love of their homeland ... There is no question to force your parents. (Interview 28).*

For most latecomers, the turning wheels of resettlement applied pressure on them to leave the camps behind. This pressure came in different ways. Often, it was applied by younger family members who were curious and, in some cases, desperate for potential opportunities in resettlement. One of the young interviewees recollected that their father was reticent about filing the resettlement application. Their father would leave the hut every time the interviewee brought up the application process. However, the pressure on the father grew as other members of the family made their way to the US and provided positive 'evidence' of resettled life:

*But later on, when everyone was leaving, we thought, 'why shouldn't we go?' So we filled the necessary forms. Baba, however, even after going through the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) screening, or passing the medical, he wasn't that interested. At that time, we had to convince him quite a bit. We would take him to places, and to video conferences with people. We would show our research results. After that, baba also agreed. And then we came here. (Interview 27).*

As more refugee families left for resettlement, many of the remaining families appear to experience pressure to do the same:

*So I wasn't able to work every day. I was getting incapable to provide. They hadn't reduced our ration yet. So...when I considered the situation, I realized that because of me, the family was being held back. So I thought leaving the camps was a good idea. I felt my sons wouldn't see me*



*in a positive light in the future. Their friends and contemporaries had all left for resettlement. Most of them came to America. Some went to Canada or Australia. Most of them are here in different states. They stay connected through social media. So when I considered this, I felt compelled to come. I didn't think my children would appreciate it. So I came in the hope that it would be better for them here. (Interview 22).*

*At first, we wondered about the rumors...places like America, Australia, places that us our ancestors have not seen...k ho? Kasto ho? We didn't know the language. So, we wondered how would we even go to these places? But then we slowly started to understand. Some people then came to resettlement. After a significant portion of people came, and we spoke, we found out that it [the transition] was manageable. We figured that even people who didn't know the language could get some work, and live in sukkha-dukkha. So, when we found that it was alright to come to resettlement, we felt that we had to take this step. (Interview 24).*

Incidentally, the migratory pressure reported here reminds me of the circumstances surrounding their departure from Bhutan in the early 1990's. Both instances reflect the terrible choices associated with mass migration.

The pressure of resettlement—applied by family members and facilitated by the success stories of initial resettlers—coincided with the deteriorating social situation of the refugee camps:

*I had said that I wouldn't come here. I used to fight at home with my family [regarding this matter]. I used to cry, yell [at the family], I would tell them to leave. But everyone convinced me to come here. They said it was good here. That's why I came. (Interview 16).*

*And everyone from the camps were coming to America. They [other refugees] kept leaving the camps. I didn't want to come. No I wasn't interested in coming here. Once everyone had left,*

*there was no point staying back. The children also didn't exhibit great behavior. So we hope bidesh would help improve the children's behavior. That's why we left [for resettlement].*

(Interview 18).

As a researcher, I am captivated by these individuals' testimonies on their 'choice' of resettlement. Each durable resettlement for a refugee is meant to be a voluntary option (UNHCR n.d.). An honest consideration of these testimonies reveals that their choice is not that simple. The choice between resettlement and possible repatriation is possibly viewed as a verdict on their socio-cultural way of life and group identity. Opting for resettlement, therefore, was tantamount to turning one's back on an eventual return to Bhutan, or worse, betrayal (interviewee 1). The lingering resentment against the *taathaa-baathaa* (for their early departures from Bhutan as well as Nepal) was perhaps also involved, as the elites were the first to seize the opportunity of exit offered by resettlement.

Like the initial exodus from Bhutan, the refugees' exit from the camps reveals a cascading sequence. It has been observed that national identity groups often follow or mimic the actions of the overall community, if that action is taken by the majority (Laitin 1998). Such decision-making is especially pertinent in the case of protracted refugee groups, defined by their common refugee-ness (Eastmond 2007; Lacroix 2004). Therefore, many families opted for resettlement for a collective good, i.e. for the benefit of the family, especially the restless younger generation. Once the initial uncertainty around resettlement was addressed by the stories of families and relatives, the families felt the pressure to resettle intensify. With time, the decision came down to the stability of resettlement (albeit in foreign surroundings) and the uncertainty of either returning to Bhutan or staying in Nepal. As is clear, most families opted for the outcome with the most promise, i.e. resettlement.

## Chapter Conclusion

Although my initial investigation was rooted in resettlement, my research attempts to cover the overall dynamics of migration of Bhutanese refugees. Study of refugees, their identity and adjustment, is intimately linked to their overall experiences (Eastmond 1998, 2007; Lacroix 2004; Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Malkki 1994, 1995a, 1995b). Put differently, my study of Bhutanese refugee identities is better-served through a holistic understanding of their experiences. Choosing not to cast the investigate net wide runs the risk of studying refugees as archetypes (Ludwig 2016).

One method of investigating refugee experiences in resettlement is through their perspectives on group identities. Data from the interviews suggest that a diversity of identity frames are used by the community. It ranges from a primordial-type attachment to Bhutanese identity, to a similar Nepali frame, especially among the younger interviewees, and hybrid identity references (i.e. variations of Bhutanese-Nepali, or Nepali-speaking Bhutanese labels). This provides evidence of a diversity of perspectives within the community, and points to the necessity of examining experiences when studying identities.

The Bhutanese refugees in Akron, as articulated in this chapter, come from a variety of backgrounds and hold dissimilar positions on the reason for their flight, or the suitability of refugee resettlement, or their overall identities. The narratives point to experiences of communal similarities as well as personal differences in experiences. Part of the difference in experiences can be explained by difference in socio-economic background. The *taathaa-baathaa*, likely members of the political intelligentsia, were the first to be targeted by the Bhutanese government and subsequently driven out (Evans 2010a; Hutt 1994, 2003; Rizal 2004; Saul 2000). Moreover, these are likely to be the individuals who ventured out of their camp life in search of educational

opportunities, in contrast to those who were looking for seasonal labor work. Finally, *taathaa-baathaa* people were the first to consider the promises of refugee resettlement, their actions leading to a cascading effect of flight among the remaining refugees.

The next chapter will present the interviewees' narratives on resettlement, the most recent part of their migratory journey (further supplemented by my extensive field observations). Chapter V will be important in portraying the Bhutanese refugees' adjustment, a subject of many sociological works like Gold (1988, 1992), Nawyn (2006, 2010), and Portes and Rumbaut (2001, 2006). Life in resettlement is a completely different challenge, contributing to the dynamics of post-refugee identities significantly. This also translates into consequences for refugee identities, as the inequality of experiences within resettlement leads to different perspectives on identities.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CASE STUDY FINDINGS II:**

#### **RESETTLEMENT EXPERIENCE AND IDENTITIES**

A permanent form of migration like third-country resettlement carries far-reaching consequences for the refugees. The economic contribution of the refugees (Connor 2010; Potocky 1995; Potocky-Tripodi 1996, 2001, 2003; Rumbaut 1989) and the host society's impression of the immigrants (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015; Hopkins 2010) are relevant trajectories of inquiry in social sciences. From the perspective of resettled refugees, the most considerable impact of resettlement is arguably felt in their group identities, as captured in a variety of works (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Hein 1993, 1998; Malkki 1995a, 1995b, 1996; Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006). Rather than undercut the importance of economic and political perspectives, I have observed that refugee life meets at the intersection of individual and family life, economic integration, ethnic networks, and state-based expectations (and restrictions). Put differently, identity in resettlement is formed in response to all facets of daily life (Eastmond 1998). In examining resettlement, I have observed the community's economic and political organization (as is a common practice among social scientists studying immigrants) but more importantly, the impact of these factors on refugee identities.

In studying refugee narratives, an emphasis on the past is critical. Past identities and experiences lead refugees to make consequential decisions on their future and their identities

(Chapter IV, Figure 4).<sup>81</sup> As it is inextricably linked to the group's imagination of the future (Eastmond 2007), as well as its pragmatic adjustment to the present (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003; Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011). Social identity researchers inform us that past representations and memory define our political attitude and identity narratives: "...next to self-esteem and distinctiveness, people seek a sense of continuity and belonging, which subsequently guide identity processes" (Smeekes and Verkuyten 2015, 166). Hence, I presented the pre-resettlement narratives that consisted of refugee experiences in Bhutan and refugee camps in Nepal, through interview data and archival research in Chapter IV. The empirical offerings of this chapter are more expansive: I supplement the de-construction of interviewee narratives embedded in resettlement experiences with my field observations. The interviews provide an intimate glimpse into interviewee lives. On the other hand, my field observation provides a larger, richer social, political, and economic context, providing clues to the effect of experiences on social identities. The simultaneous presentation of field inferences and interview data connects the community's collective action as well as the interviewees personal perspectives. My ethnographic research points to a complex picture of refugee experiences, or as Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny (2011) described the resettlement experience, 'a mixed blessing.' Put succinctly, resettlement experience can be a liberating one or a severely restrictive one (Nawyn 2006, 2010), depending on the individual and their social position in resettlement.

Younger immigrants possess higher levels of language proficiency and education that can help them adapt and integrate into the host economy (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2004). This in-

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<sup>81</sup> In this chapter, I will analyze the second-half of Chapter IV, Figure 4, i.e. analyze the impact of resettlement-based experiences on Bhutanese refugees.

group disparity is well-captured through the prism of human capital (Connor 2010; Portes and Stepick 1985; Potocky 1995; Potocky-Tripodi 1996, 2001, 2003; Rumbaut 1989) as well as adaptation methods (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003). In relation to this dissertation, these are important yet insufficient inferences. Human capital is argued to impact refugees' identity management (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003), but in my view this link is spurious. Instead, economic contributions affect refugees' social agency in resettlement, which in turn impacts their consideration of identities. In the context of this Bhutanese community, I view this agency as the ability to contribute positively to individual and family affairs.<sup>82</sup> Social agency in resettlement, is a function of relative independence and a positive social status—two things that existed even in the harshness of refugee camps.<sup>83</sup> Economic integration, while necessary, hasn't always led to positive social agency for many refugees. Despite their stable work at the local factories, many refugees have reportedly found themselves dependent on younger members of the family or the community for healthcare, transportation, and other diurnal activities (Interviews 2, 3, 4, and 27). In contrast, I have come across individuals who might be unemployed, but possess a positive agency and an optimistic attitude through their social agency in the community.

Based on my inferences, resettlement resembles a part of the overall migratory journey; in this context, refugee identity is affected by events, while also impacting decisions. My interview subjects identified themselves through a variety of identity labels in resettlement (Chapter IV, Table 3). For the interviewees, their identification was a natural response borne out

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<sup>82</sup> Different interpretations of social capital come close to my articulation of agency: social capital can mean social connections, networks and norms of reciprocity among individuals (Putnam 2000 cited by Hawes and Rocha 2011). However, social capital is measured at a social level; my inference of agency here can be narrow as to simply encompass family.

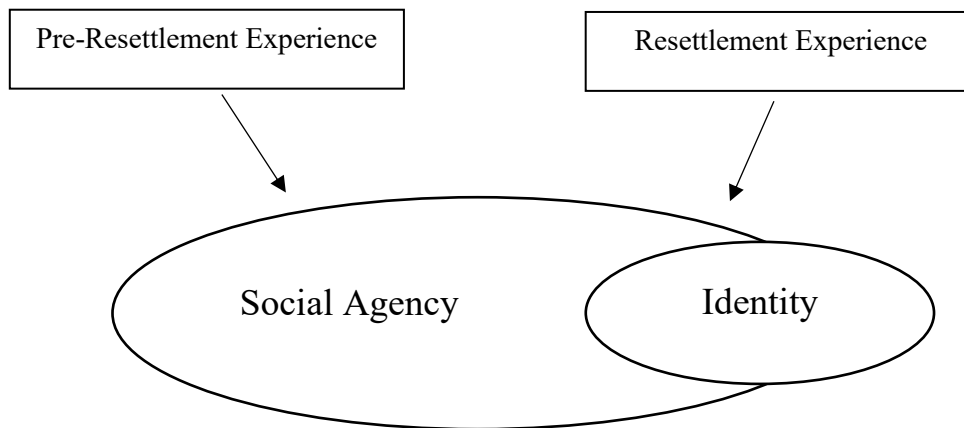
<sup>83</sup> My argument on social agency will likely be clearer in the next few sections of this chapter. I restrain myself from expounding on social agency in the interest of brevity and cohesion.

of their circumstances. The answer to unlocking their identity preferences lies in the disparity in their experiences. Through the interview process and my fieldwork, it is clear refugees judged their life in resettlement through a comparison of their current and past experiences. In this calculus, resettlement translates into empowered agency for some (reflecting positive social agency), while for others resettlement represents an acute loss of previous agency (negative social agency). Social identity-based perspectives inform us that we constantly aspire toward positive identity-based affiliations (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Renewed agency in resettlement leads to a positive valuation (and often, a revision) of their social identities. In the examination of experience-identity link, social agency plays a critical role. For instance, the adaptable generation, experiencing entrepreneurial success and academic opportunities is likely to adopt the emerging narrative of hybrid identities. Identity management in this case can be viewed as a struggle between cultural heritage and structural expectations, driven by the inequality of experiences.

Lack of economic potential and other adjustment challenges are considered *a priori* consequences of immigration. In the case of refugee groups, these difficulties are often exacerbated, if not created, by the host society's structures (Hein 1993; Naywn 2006). One of the foregone consequences of resettlement is the undercutting of an existing social structure and erasure of agency for some refugees. This loss of agency is likely to turn individuals inward into their core ethnic associations (Hancock 2014). Therefore, it would be overly simplistic to divide the Bhutanese community into the convenient camps of essentialism and constructivism based on age. Interviewees identifying with Bhutanese labels (Chapter IV, Table 3) generally experience little agency in resettlement; in some cases, the agency they possessed at refugee camps was abruptly removed in resettlement. In uncertain times and in the absence of control, people can



turn to their internal frames and worldviews, thus hardening their ethnocentric frames (Ross 2009, 145). Narratives on identity, therefore, are embedded within one’s social agency in resettlement. Figure 6 below, captures this relation in a graphic form:



*Figure 6: Experience-Agency-Identity Relation*

The Bhutanese community in North Hill isn’t interested in an ‘exit’ from its ethnic or national identities (Tajfel and Turner 1986). In contrast, resettlement provides the community the requisite space to re-create their familiar socio-political order, as is usually seen with immigrant groups in new host societies (Allen 2009; Hume and Hardwick 2005). The Bhutanese community has been active in celebrating its ethno-cultural worldviews—what Ross (2001. 157) calls “psychocultural interpretations.” As a function of this new space, some Bhutanese individuals are attracted to hybrid identities as it allows them to reconcile the Nepali and Bhutanese aspects of their identities. In fundamental terms, ethnicity is self-defined (Jaji 2015), and refugees often gravitate to the identity frames they’ve been denied in the past. For instance, Bosnian refugees preferred to define themselves as Bosniaks (or, Bosnian Muslims) compared to simply Bosnians in Sweden (Eastmond 1998). Somali and Ethiopian refugees preferred to identify separately from pan-African identities (Hume and Hardwick 2005). Similarly, some

Bhutanese refugees feel empowered to connect to their Nepali and Bhutanese identities in resettlement. Channeling Barth (1969), the past identity marker separating the Bhutanese and Nepali categories is effectively blurred here.

The formation of hybrid identities has been viewed as a conscious political decision (Laitin 1998). The clearest political statement in this regard is the community's self-representation as 'Bhutanese-Nepali' to the external community in its cultural programs (Field notes 08/31/2016). On the other hand, some interviewees have marked their Bhutanese-Nepali label as an expression of resistance (Interviews 2 and 5). In contrast, the paramount resolution for many older refugees was eventual return to their homeland (Eastmond 1998), an idealized yet unrealistic goal. Upon such realizations, refugees have been known to become more 'ethnic' in their self-identification (Byrne 2011; Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Malkki 1995a, 1995b) and adopt a 'passive' form of resettlement (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003). In resettlement, many young refugees have been elevated in their abilities, social status, and agency; in contrast, many older refugees have 'lost' the agency they once possessed in Bhutan and Nepali refugee camps. The economic and political agency of community leaders are readily visible in North Hill. Here, one must dig under this perception of a 'success story' narrative to find the common challenges to access and subsequent isolation faced by many refugees.

My examination of identity and agency of migrants is partially rooted in exposing the political and cultural filters that distort our vision. The label of 'refugee' generally guides us to picture these populations as helpless victims (Rajaram 2002), or as welfare abusers (Ludwig 2016). The Bhutanese refugee community in North Hill is similarly painted with a same broad brush, depicting them as a 'success story' or 'model immigrant group' (Field notes 11/3/2016). The downside of such perspectives is that we tend to ignore the diverse, rich narratives emerging

from the group. For instance, Bhutanese refugees' experiences at the hands of the Bhutanese government's repression varied, as did the subject of their blame for their eventual departure from Bhutan (Chapter IV). Similarly, while every Bhutanese refugee shared a sense of refugee-ness, their daily experiences diverged outside of the camp boundaries (Chapter IV). This is true of their experiences in resettlement as well. The gravity of the resettlement experience on refugees is straightforward. Most of the interviewees spent a majority of their interviews articulating the challenges they are facing in resettlement. References to 'suffering' in resettlement (125) outnumbered those of Bhutan (78) or refugee camps (52) (Chapter IV, Table 4). Furthermore, my time spent in North Hill exposed me to a variety of these challenges, some of which are individual and some communal.

Correlated elements of human capital—language proficiency, education, and age—are commonly cited as indicators of economic success in a host society, and as factors affecting refugee identities (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003, 339). Due to the US's emphasis on economic self-sufficiency (Gold 1988; Hein 1997; Nawyn 2006; Singer and Wilson 2006), early resettlement will perpetually be tied to human capital. Based on my findings, the human capital-identity link is spurious, i.e. it is the enhancement or erosion of social agency (often, a function of human capital) that provides a better clue to the management of identities in resettlement. I am hesitant to draw too many generalized conclusions from a single interpretative case study but one of the most profound effects of resettlement is the reversal of hierarchy and order in family relations that leads to an explicit loss of agency. Therefore, in the first section of this chapter, I will portray the lives of individuals who have lacked or have lost their social agency, contextualizing their isolation within the 'successful' case of resettlement in North Hill. Here, some important themes are the *enduring challenges of access, social order, and changing family*

*dynamic*. Next, I depict a contrasting picture of social agency developing among some community members, as well as a very different type of challenge they struggle with. Relevant themes here, are *economic opportunism*, *muted host society-community contact*, and *secondary migration*. “People’s identities are contextual and are culturally and structurally determined” (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003, 338). In the concluding section, I will discuss how the re-negotiation of identity tends to take place along the lines of native cultural heritage and the host society’s structural demands. My observations help provide a necessary context, crucial in an ethnographic investigation. With the help of my field notes, I illustrate the social behavior of the Bhutanese refugee community, and articulate its economic, social, and organizational agency. Between Chapters IV and V, my interviewees have provided revealing quotes about their lives. However, without my field observations, I would not be able to provide a communal context to their narratives.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Presentation of my field observations in a manageable manner has posed a significant challenge for me, partly given its volume. I have close to 100 pages of notes taken at a variety of situations and sites. Initially, I had planned to organize my field observations in neat categories of a) economic, and b) socio-political agency. While holistic in approach, this form of chapter organization would take a circuitous route to addressing my research question.

## **Lack of Social Agency in Resettlement**

Permanent migration to a new (and alien) society is inevitably paired with difficult challenges. One of the most evident challenges to refugee integration comes in the form of access to necessary resources and services. My initial entry into the Bhutanese community in North Hill was indirect, as a volunteer at the International Institute of Akron (IIA). My affiliation with IIA helped me establish professional contacts (which would prove beneficial throughout the duration of my fieldwork and beyond) and to gradually ingratiate myself within the Bhutanese community. This professional experience was a crash course in local institutions' short-term value and long-term limitations in resettlement.

The Bhutanese community in Akron has predominantly settled in North Hill in the vicinity of the IIA office.<sup>85</sup> The rental area includes neighboring Blaine Avenue, Schiller Avenue, Heiller Avenue, Cuyahoga Falls, West Tallmadge, Way Street, Jesse Avenue, Newton Street, Jean Avenue, Phoenix Avenue, and West Street. The proximity to IIA is especially helpful for families without private transportation. Figure 7 provides a glimpse of the concentration of (known) cases of Bhutanese families living in North Hill, close to the IIA office.<sup>86</sup> An IIA case manager remarked that even though Bhutanese refugees appeared to live relatively close to one another, this is not a true reflection of the distance between their homes (Field notes 12/16/2016). Most families live in rental houses, instead of in apartment complexes (as in the case of cities like New York). A majority of these homes are separated at least by a

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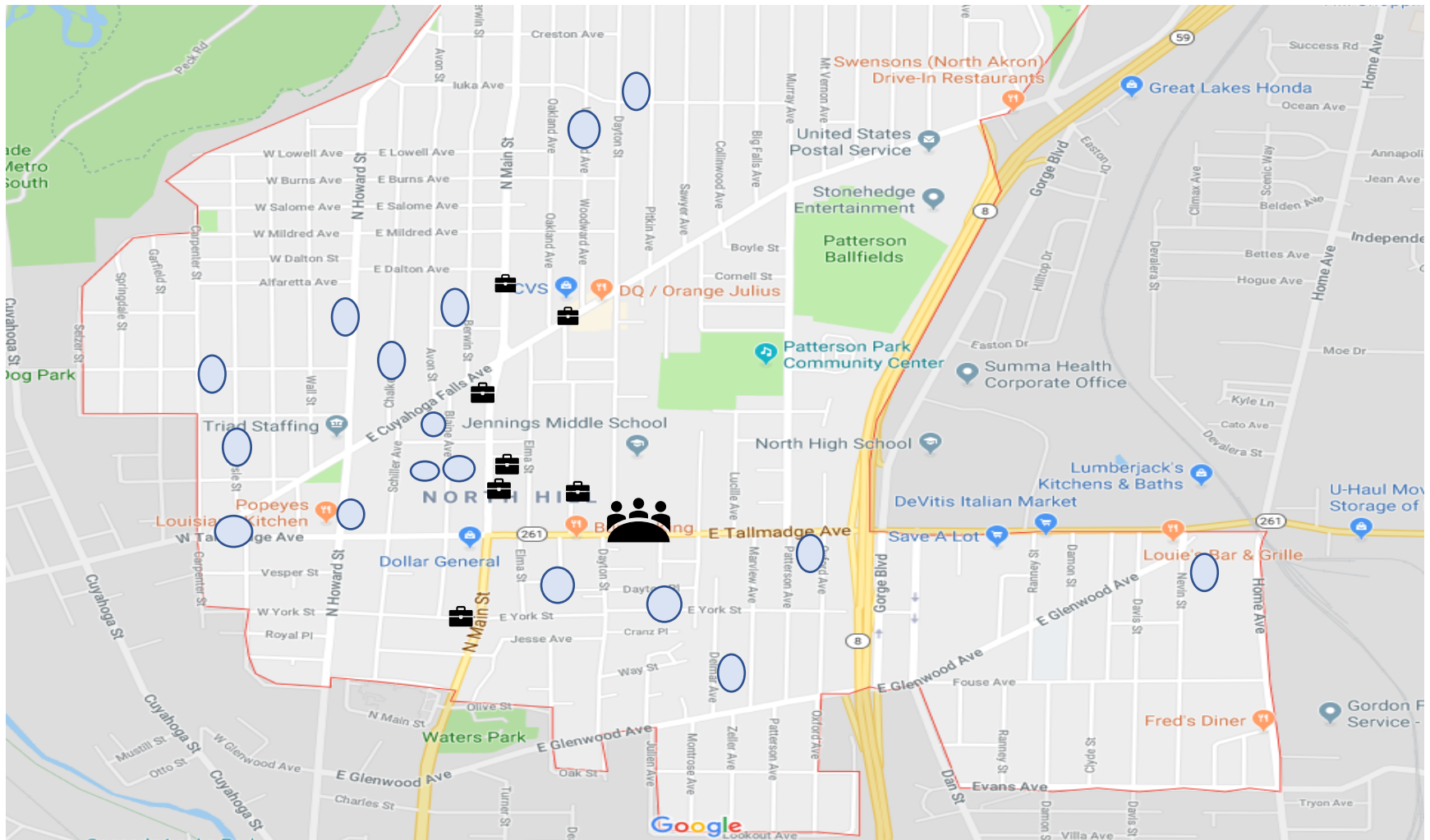
<sup>85</sup> The current IIA office has moved, i.e. it is no longer in the same location as depicted in Figure 2, but it remains in the North Hill neighborhood.

<sup>86</sup> A few points: Blue numbers in the map reflect Bhutanese cases (red – Burmese; Orange – other cases like Iraqi, Afghani, and Pakistani). Numbers denote categories with number of cases: Category 1: 1-5 cases; Category 2: 5-10 cases; Category 3: 10-50 cases




This image doesn't account for incoming secondary migrants and for the year 2015. I can attach similar data for previous years in the appendix section.

few blocks and are generally devoid of easily accessible footpaths; consequently, adversely affecting the casual socialization of the past. Navigating the local streets is especially troublesome for the elderly population. They struggle to make sense of English street names and crossing streets at appropriate intersections. On multiple occasions, I witnessed a group of Bhutanese refugees trying to cross the street in a rather dangerous fashion. This lack of social proximity is in sharp contrast to the close living quarters and the intimate social environment of the refugee camps:

*... I think people are depressed because in the camps they were so used to going out ... whether it was your cousin or some other relative, everyone was like a big family you could visit all the time. Here, you can't do that. You're living further apart. At the camps you could walk and meet. Here, you need a car to get to places. (Interview 2).*



Map Legend:

-  International Institute of Akron (previous location)
-  Bhutanese Refugee Businesses
-  Known Bhutanese Residence

*Figure 7: 2015 Refugee Residence and Businesses in North Hill (Source: Author's Derivation of IIA data)<sup>87</sup>*

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<sup>87</sup> For a sample of raw picture of annual North Hill residence provided by IIA, visit Appendix C.



The incoming refugee population in North Hill is clearly dominated by the Bhutanese population. Based on my conversations with some IIA employees, North Hill has consistently witnessed the movement of substantive numbers of Bhutanese refugees into Akron from other US states. Figure 7 shows that North Hill has been an important and popular destination for Bhutanese refugees since 2010. To provide further context, many Bhutanese refugee families, when applying for resettlement at Nepali camps, request to be resettled to Akron. According to one IIA analyst:

*The UNHCR is entrusting us with twice the amount of Bhutanese coming here. Twice the amount of Bhutanese Nepali refugees that we had taken in the previous years. This is also because they can trust us with the refugee populations. The word has gone out Akron really has its stuff together in terms of resettling refugees. They are getting more and more well-known in the last three years (Interview 3).<sup>88</sup>*

The Bhutanese community has constantly boasted the largest proportion of the local refugee population in North Hill, from approximately 45 percent (in 2010) to 78 percent (in 2015).<sup>89</sup> The visibility and the ‘success story’ narrative of Bhutanese refugees in North Hill, therefore, can be partly attributed to the significant number of Bhutanese refugees who have settled in North Hill.

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<sup>88</sup> Note the interchangeable use of ‘Bhutanese’ and ‘Bhutanese Nepali’ frames. I found this to be a common practice among my interviewees and the local NGO workers. Like I posited (Chapter IV, Figure 5) the theoretical distance between these frames are marginal.

<sup>89</sup> The years between 2010 and 2015 have seen even higher proportion of Bhutanese refugees, with 90 percent in 2012 and 85 percent in 2013.

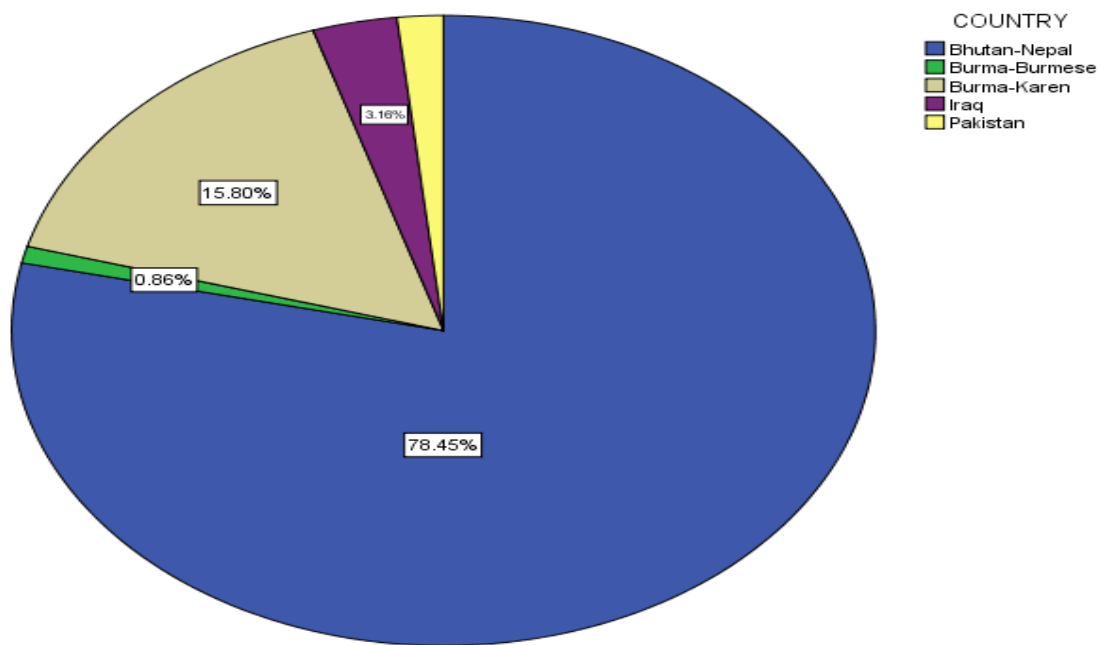
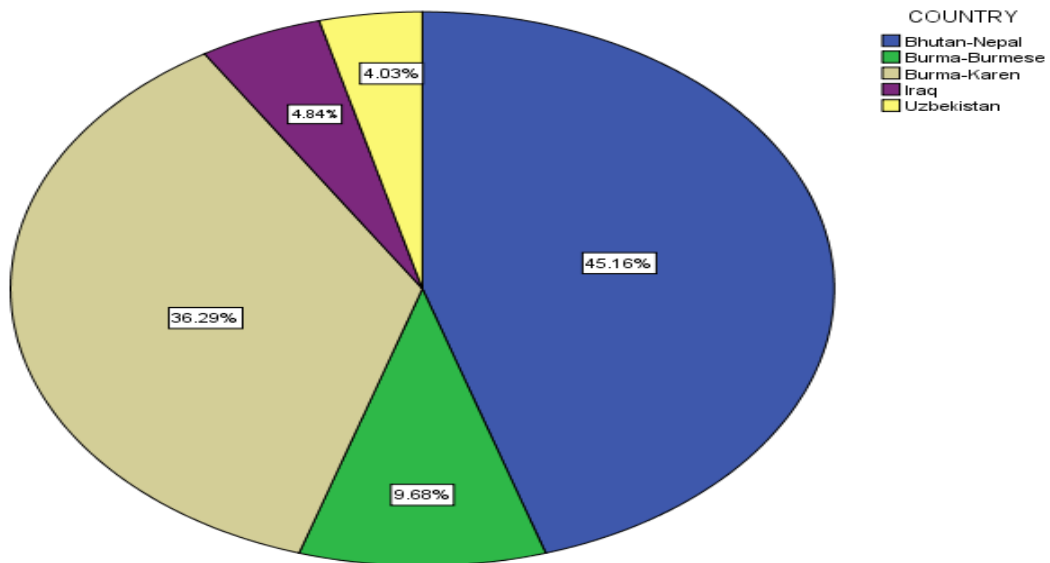


Figure 8: Total Refugee Population in North Hill in 2010 (top) and in 2015 (bottom)

(Source: IIA)

## **Challenges of Access and Isolation among the Older Generation**

During my tenure at IIA (my volunteer position changed to an internship, which later became a paid contractual position), I primarily worked with the New Initiatives team, whose goal was to create new community-based programs. This situation assisted me in establishing contacts with the community. Due to my status as a doctoral candidate researching the Bhutanese refugee community, and my Nepali background, I was regularly assigned research projects catering to the Bhutanese community. One of my first projects was to create a healthcare information packet for the local medical community. This packet was designed to assess the community's ease of access to healthcare, and to provide a shorthand of its attitudes and worldviews toward health and healthcare. This project was my initial introduction to the Bhutanese community, and served as an important lesson to their challenges of access in resettlement.

## **Lack of Access and Isolation in North Hill**

The initial inferences emerging from healthcare project served as a useful precursor to my subsequent understanding of the various interlinked challenges of resettlement. In my investigation, I spoke with several pertinent individuals: refugee patients, gatekeepers of the refugee community, and local experts on public healthcare. After surviving repression at the hands of the Bhutanese government and enduring protracted life in refugee camps, many Bhutanese refugees needed long-term physical and mental health services (Beiser 2006; Benson et al. 2011; Kingsbury et al. 2018; Rechtman 2000; Shrestha et al. 1998; Simich et al. 2005). This is also true in the case of Bhutanese refugees in North Hill:

*On top of that, the past job experience, working for little money, and not have satisfactory job experience; these gave physical and mental problems... A lot of the refugees here have no language skills; they're saddled with old age and mental health issues. Also, physical problems.*  
(Interview 5).

However, the services remain under-used or improperly utilized. This problem of access is intimately linked to the refugee experience and their agency.

Many refugees, especially newly-arrived individuals, marveled at the fact they could procure generic medication at local corner stores, in acute contrast to the meagre medical provisions available in the refugee camps (Field notes 01/29/2016). On the other hand, I detected a hesitation towards visiting hospitals, which can be partly attributed to the symbolic cultural stigma of hospitals. *Marne belaa hospital jaane* ('We go to hospitals when we are close to death') represented a common point of view. Such attitudes are especially common among the older generation, rooted firmly in their adverse experiences of the refugee camps. Health center personnel in the refugee camps were ostensibly restricted to a healthcare assistant. In the

absence of regular visits from doctors, such an assistant would prescribe and provide *cetamol* (a local equivalent for Advil) for most ailments. Only under grim circumstances—like a major surgery or a diagnosis of cancer— would refugees travel to a hospital in a neighboring city. This cultural association of hospitals with mortality, therefore, continues to exist within the community (Field note 3/4/2016).

In resettlement, healthcare is far more accessible to the refugee community but not accessed as necessary. In addition to physical ailments, many refugees suffer from mental and psychological problems. The post-displacement trauma among Bhutanese refugees is well-noted (Benson et al. 2011; Shrestha et al. 1998; Simich et al. 2005); moreover, Bhutanese refugees suffered from one of the highest suicide rates in refugee camps and in resettlement [Center for Disease Control (CDC) 2012; Kulman and Tsukii 2014]. An anecdote that I heard repeatedly, from the refugee community as well as the IIA staff, was of a recent suicide:

*An elderly Bhutanese individual boarded a local bus but couldn't identify the intended stop; consequently, he rode the bus the whole day. At the end of the day, the bus driver finished his shift and perhaps tried to help him but couldn't. They didn't speak each other's language. The next day the individual was found hanging; he had used his shoelaces to fashion a makeshift noose at the bus station.*<sup>90</sup> (Field note 2/3/2016).

First, this story highlights the direct and fatal consequences of lack of language skills within the community. Second, these stories of suicide elicited sympathy but not surprise from the community, reflecting their frequency as well as gravity. For me, these observations underscore

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<sup>90</sup> Hanging is somewhat of a common (even, preferred) form of suicide in many South Asian cultures.

the social isolation faced by many refugees in their resettled lives that is generally not covered by the local media.

The pervasiveness of social isolation and its impact on mental health can be evidenced in the following testimonies:

*Ek dum gaarho cha Amreeka maa [It is extremely difficult in the US]. Na mari jaanu, na garhi khaanu [neither can I die, nor can I survive]. That's how the situation is, enough to make you contemplate suicide. You don't find the type of work you'd like. Haina. [Right?] You have to work daily. If you aren't educated, your options are to work at hotel, housekeeping, meat factory ... you can't work in the freezing cold. (Interview 16).*

The challenges of interviewee 16 are like those faced by the elderly population, even though this person was not old. The individual in question suffers from developmental and psychological disorders which have prevented them from holding employment for an extended time. Based on the interview data, the interviewee has also been subjected to family conflict and possibly domestic violence.<sup>91</sup> I realized that interviewee 16 likely suffered from mental challenges only after the interview had begun. After volunteering for the interview, she started to speak in conversational loops; her speech was characterized by a lack of social filters and constant laughter. Although I was initially hesitant, I decided to use the interview. Interviewee 16 represents a different yet equally relevant challenge faced by Bhutanese refugees. Interviews like these reflected the mental health challenges faced by the community—especially a challenge

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<sup>91</sup> Following the interview, I reported the issue to pertinent IIA officers. Unfortunately, in Nepali and other Asian cultures, domestic abuse is casually accepted within families. However, I have also learned many refugee families are gradually learning such behavior is not acceptable in US society.

for the Bhutanese refugee population [Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2014]. They further highlighted the lack of voice and agency for these individuals.<sup>92</sup>

The following statements reveal the effects of stress of resettlement experienced either personally or observed as family members:

*At first, it was very difficult. We felt really depressed. So, now after a while we are adjusting and feeling a little shanti [peace of mind]. (Interview 17).*

*In terms of bad...well, we left our country and came here. At first, I didn't like it. I felt very lonely at first. I would want to cry all the time. I would want to return all the time. I would remember. I had crossed seven seas to a place that I didn't know. I felt like returning every day. That's how I felt for the first three months. No, not three months. I felt very uncomfortable for six months. (Interview 19).*

*Sometimes he [interviewee's father] would drink a lot in order to forget the [work-related] stress... He would complain about being pressured to toil [by the managers] and he couldn't even communicate about it [his frustrations]. He couldn't afford to quit because the family was in a vulnerable situation. He absolutely had to work, but on days he would return home very sad. (Interview 27).*

I have found that conversation on mental health is generally missing in the Bhutanese community. This is primarily due to the historical stigma attached to discussion of mental health issues, i.e. mental health challenges are often equated to madness. This is concerning as the social and psychological adjustments to migration are as important as they are challenging (Benson et al. 2011; Shrestha et al. 1998; Simich et al. 2005). On the other hand, awareness

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<sup>92</sup> Mental health carries a greater stigma in Bhutanese communities. Here, I want to mention that there have been local initiatives, driven by local leaders and IIA, in raising awareness of mental health challenges and accessing relevant resources.

efforts by local organizations and community leaders have reportedly helped, at least in reducing the recent suicide rates (Interview 7).

The most obvious casualty of resettlement is the communal intimacy of camp life. The ease of visitation and communal gathering in the camps have been difficult to replicate in urban Akron. The Bhutanese-Nepali community attempts to fill this social void through a variety of socio-cultural-religious events. Some of these are large-scale social events (with some political aspects); others are small-scale functions geared toward specific sub-sets in the form of castes and ethnicities (Field notes 11/3/2016). Yet, the social distance between families remains far apart within North Hill, especially for those without vehicles. This distance is especially problematic for the older generation of the refugees:

*I think people are depressed because in the camps they were so used to going out ... whether it was your cousin or some other relative, everyone was like a big family you could visit all the time. Here, you can't do that. You're living further apart. At the camps you could walk and meet. Here, you need a car to get to places. (Interview 2).*

*My father is 93 years old. My mother is also a little ill. She needs help breathing. So they stay at home. It is difficult for them. They also don't have a place to gather. The old folks are limited to their own homes. Even at the old homes, they will not do well because they don't understand the language. (Interview 11).*

These restrictions and subsequent isolation became especially clear to me during my volunteer work at IIA. The students of the English class that I observed were comprised of individuals who were unemployed and dependent; this often meant the elderly but there some middle-aged or even young people who were unemployed for various reasons. In addition to English-language lessons, the classroom doubled as a site for social congregation. Many of the



students, due to the restrictions in their language skills and lack of mobility, were reduced to taking these classes to meet their socialization needs (Field note 12/17/2016). In the view of an IIA officer, women were often likelier to learn the language better and faster:

*English classes have become the women's social space. So, for women and for older people the English classes serve as the primary sites of socialization. Because of that women tend to acquire English far more quickly. They maybe shier [sic] about their English but they definitely acquire it faster. And when they have to go to job waitressing or service industry, they are able to learn further. For men, it's a lot more difficult because they have to go to their job right off the bat. Between the women and men here for 10 years, I will be very surprised if the men didn't start out with anything other than manufacturing. (Interview 3).*

The lessons in these classes ranged from a general introduction to financial management skills, but the true value of these classes (for the attending students) was the much-needed socialization. Mirroring the observation of interviewee 3, I observed that the majority of the students in these classes were older women. They were less likely to find work and more likely to stay at home. For them, these classes provided a convenient reason to congregate, learn, and socialize. This was a site of communal learning, as well as light-hearted teasing and gossiping, and the occasional quarrel. Most students generally struggled with coursework, given their illiteracy, but were evidently at ease with the social environment of the classroom, which was in the IIA basement. In contrast to the communal closeness of their Bhutanese homes and even Nepali refugee camps, resettlement has extended the distance between their residences and social lives. These English classes at IIA served as a cultural oasis in the restrictive environment of resettlement.

The extant scholarship, especially in the field of public health, and my own observations point to a behavior that favors communal traditions, often at the expense of available access. Social support is a crucial determinant of refugee well-being (Simich et al. 2005, 872). A recent work on Bhutanese refugees in North Hill confirmed that family and communal connections to be a significant source of support as well as information among pregnant women (Kingsbury et al. 2018). This reliance, however, can have unexpectedly dire effects, like limiting the possibility of building outside connections with relevant healthcare professionals (1034). I observed an interesting version of this behavior. In 2016, refugees appeared to prefer visiting a Nepali doctor at a local Akron hospital over other doctors:

*According to [name redacted], she [the doctor] has been helpful in assisting the Bhutanese patients. She has a cultural knowledge of the situation. She knows the tendencies of the population, for instance, what constitutes 'bad' food, or bad habits. In other words, many patients probably have an easier time communicating their medical issues to her. (Field note 1/29/2016).*

In my interactions, I witnessed another example of this inward behavior in the form of *jhakris*. The insistence on the old way of life is captured through the practice of *jhakri*. A *jhakri* is a shamanic priest, and their use is especially prevalent within some castes. While the *Lothshampas* house the diversity of Nepali castes, the Tibeto-Burman castes are generally known to use *jhakris*.<sup>93</sup> Some of these families invite *jhakris* to their homes, to ward off evil spirits and 'heal' the afflicted individuals. I was surprised to hear that this practice had continued in resettlement, especially when access to American hospitals was available. Upon further

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<sup>93</sup> At the risk of significantly over-simplifying the complex fabric of the Nepali caste system, the *Lothshampa* castes can be camped between the 'Bahun-Chhetris' (representing the Brahman elites), and 'Tibeto-Burman' (representing the Mongoloid populations) castes, as shown by Hutt (2003).

examination, it appeared the *jhakris* fulfilled more of a cultural function for the families (Field note 3/4/2016). I view these practices as examples of psychocultural interpretations, or communal tradition to sustain the community's history and worldviews (Ross 2001, 157). Some of the individuals who used *jhakris*, did so in addition to their hospital visits, while a few used them as an alternative. One of the respondents mentioned that she didn't feel the same effect from the *jhakris* here as she did in the refugee camps. Although resettlement experiences in North Hill today are considered far more manageable compared to 2008 (Field note 12/16/2016; Interview 7) when Bhutanese refugees first started arriving, access to services like healthcare continues to be a constant challenge.

On a more practical note, regular visits to the hospital conflate two common challenges of refugee resettlement—language barriers and the lack of transportation (as evidenced in Table 5 below). Visits to a hospital inevitably required transportation and asking someone in the family or the community to drive them to the hospital. Due to the lack of a personal vehicle, and their restricted ability to use public transportation, many of the respondents were often dependent on their children or other relatives to take them to medical appointments. A young individual I interviewed for my dissertation reportedly chauffeured their relatives around the neighborhood, and they found it difficult to refuse these requests (Field notes 10/25/2017; Interview 27). This situation points to an uneasy juxtaposition of old cultural expectations and the new reality of resettled life.

Challenges	Sources	References
Language	18	35
Lack of transportation, mobility	16	31
Family dynamic	17	44
Health-based issues	12	23
Mental Health, Suicide	6	8

Table 5: A Picture of Resettlement Challenges (NVivo Data)<sup>94</sup>

For some refugees, it was a difficult and inconvenient task to schedule appointments despite the presence of medical translators at the local hospital (Field notes 2/3/2016). Many families further struggled with the details of navigating US hospitals. The following is based on my informal conversation with a youth of the Bhutanese community (whom I interviewed at a later date for my dissertation):

*Pertaining to the healthcare attitudes, [name redacted] reaffirmed the cultural hesitation in visiting hospitals. People generally don't go to hospital for regular check-ups. When is the best time to go? The population in general finds it taxing to figure out whether their Medicaid/Medicare covers their medical situation. They reportedly have trouble in identifying the 'correct' medical facility within the network. She informed me that there's also a tendency within the community to go to Emergency Room (ER) for every medical issue, instead of figuring out which hospital or hospital wing is appropriate... From her experience, she mentioned that waiting for medical services is not well-organized at Summa Hospital. It can evidently take up*

<sup>94</sup> This is not a complete list. I present other resettlement-based challenges in the next section to contrast the qualitative differences existing within the refugee community members. The complete list is presented in Appendix.

*between one and two hours to get to the appointment. She told me that she had recently organized an event called 'learning to change' focusing on the community-based behavior. It was attended by quite a few people. (Field Note 3/28/2016).*

The person here also revealed that the transportation challenge is gradually becoming more manageable with time, but the cultural intransigence remains a concern. This persistent challenge to access reflects the elderly population's dependence, and subsequently, a lack of agency in resettlement:

*...for older people it is very very hard. Because...especially if in the family nobody can speak English. Like going out and finding a job. Just being able to navigate. Like how do I get to work? How do I get to grocery store? All that requires a car and you have to be able to speak English. If you don't have anybody to help you out, then it is very very difficult. (Interview 2).*

The interconnectedness of access to healthcare with lack of language skills and mobility was articulated by an observant young individual. Their testimony is supplemented by Table 1 above and the following testimonies:

*When you don't have an interpreter, it's quite difficult [to take care of health issues]... [even if the interpreters] are in hospital. We can even get them on the phone. (Interview 15).*

*Not emergency, but appointment. Doctors during the appointment call me in. From the hospital here. But they don't give medicine that works immediately. I don't have a vehicle. It's very difficult to walk. The other day I even lost my temper. I told them that I don't have my vehicle and I can't walk to the hospital. (Interview 18).*

The situation illustrated by interviewee 15 reflects the acute difficulty faced by older refugees despite the recognition of access. For many, like interviewee 18, appointments are fraught with

inconvenient choices in relation to transportation. As I mentioned earlier, there is an intrinsic hesitation towards visiting hospitals unless the situation is serious or life-threatening.

In addition to the challenges listed in Table 5, seven of my interviewees independently identified language skills as a major challenge facing the refugee community; seven interviewees, on the other hand, identified the lack of transportation as a significant hindrance. The two are inter-related. Arguably, the lack of language skills is more significant as it can lead to the linguistic isolation of refugees in their host society (Nawyn et al. 2012, 255). There are a variety of perspectives on the pervasiveness of language-based challenges:

*One big thing is men, as soon as they get here they go straight to manufacturing where English is not really needed; you have to slug away in 12-hour shifts. Putting bolts in one thing or putting plastic in another... For men, it's a lot more difficult [to learn English] because they have to go to their job right off the bat. (Interview 3).*

*In time of critical case, when there is sickness, health hazard, or emergency situation they often don't have the courage to call 911 because of the language barrier... Sometimes they visit a difficult situation. They don't know how to communicate with the police. (Interview 5).*

*I don't understand the symbols. Even though I am learning English I hadn't learned Nepali either. So I find it difficult to make sense of the road symbols. So that's the difficulty. (Interview 12).*

These language-based challenges reported led many of my interviewees to feel helpless. These challenges have rendered them dependent on their family members and other relatives. This situation, as I was informed many times, was in sharp contrast to the intimate environment of the camps. Often, this feeling of dependence translated into guilt. For instance, interviewees 13 and 14 were a married couple, who both felt guilty about their helplessness. The husband used to

work until his health problems put a stop to his employability; as they couldn't work or even visit hospital on their own, they reported feeling like a burden to their families. To mitigate their situation, they help their employed children by managing chores at home:

*There's no car. Kuraa mildaina [there's a language barrier]. People here don't speak Nepali. We speak Nepali. Some educated people can speak English but we are often helpless. Bhaasa mildaina [there's a language barrier]. Going to hospital is difficult...we can manage to stay at home, cook food for those who go to work. (Interviews 13 and 14).*

Other testimonies on language-based challenges include:

*The biggest challenge here is the language. We can't even go roam around; we are old, and we don't understand the language. Therefore, it is quite difficult. That increases your tension and stress ... (Interview 15).*

*The problem with the language is like a noose around our necks. If we could talk to the American people here and communicate with them, we would be on the leveled playing field. We don't understand their language, and they don't understand ours. Therefore, it is very difficult. (Interview 17).*

*We don't even know where to go to get medication. You have to apply, and only then you can go to hospital. Jhyaau raicha [it's very inconvenient]. If we understood the language, then we could have easily gone and bought medicine. We don't understand the language. That's the big problem. (Interview 18).*

Based on the field observations and interview data, there is a direct link between a lack of language skills and the feeling of relative helplessness in the community. During many of the interviews, I got the impression that many didn't understand the nuances of the US healthcare system.

On a similar note, the Bhutanese population has also struggled acutely with their lack of transportation. Like many other US cities, Akron is not a convenient city for public transportation, which is further exacerbated by the refugees' lack of necessary language skills:

*It was very challenging...transportation became a very big hurdle. To go shopping, I would have to knock on somebody's door, and the wintertime was very hard. In Kathmandu, the environment was very different. The transportation was the number one problem. (Interview 5).*

*When I came here, there were ten homes occupied by our population. Nobody owned a car then. Transportation was a big problem. We didn't necessarily know the bus schedules... For groceries, we had to walk to the stores. Buses would leave without us, because we couldn't figure out bus schedules... Akron is a place where public bus system is not very good. You have to wait one hour or half hour for the bus. There aren't a lot of buses. Often, they don't reach the required destination. (Interview 7).*

*We came to Houston. We were new to the place. Houston was pretty big. It was difficult to travel to work at first. We didn't know how to drive. Plus you know, we drive on the left lane in Nepal. (Interview 11).*

*Bus service here is not like that of Nepal or India. No one tells you what destination we are arriving at. That's how we'd understand and get off. Here, you have to know yourself ahead of time. And have to ring the bell. We don't know where we end up. (Interview 15).*

In these interviews, young and the old alike had suffered from the lack of access to transportation. While the younger generation was able to adapt, i.e. learn to drive and own vehicles eventually, this wasn't the case for the older generation. Over the years, the importance of personal vehicles has been emphasized within the community, as is evident in the following statement by one IIA case manager (and community leader):



*Therefore, everyone needs to have a car in their homes here. We tell the incoming new families the same thing, that there will be transportation issues. You have to save money and buy vehicles. This is what we suggest. (Interview 7).*

During my fieldwork, I often felt the Bhutanese community was managing their everyday life in resettlement on a trial-and-error basis. Consequently, there was a lot of confusion as well as rumors. For instance, I once was informed of a rumor that a new policy would require refugees to pay \$800 to apply for a driver's license (Field note 7/12/2018). Even young, educated individuals were often susceptible to these rumors. In my view, these rumors persist partially because much of the population still experiences insecurity regarding their place in US society. That can be attributed to the limited contact between the native population of North Hill and the Bhutanese community. As the latter's presence is becoming more prominent, this has often led to rumblings of suspicion among the former.<sup>95</sup> Most of the contact between the two is largely mediated by IIA (and other similar local organizations), emphasizing the paucity of 'real' social connections in North Hill.

The relative ignorance in the refugee community is further apparent in their awe (mixed with a very rudimentary understanding of) at the US social welfare provision system. *Bhattaa*—the Nepali designation for welfare—mostly denoted Medicare. Having survived a refugee life punctuated by scarcity, many marveled at the idea of the government supplying additional income to refugee families. As is clear from the following testimonies, welfare symbolized a safety net to them:

*When I made my ID at the [refugee] camp, my age was reduced by two years. I agreed to it. I didn't know I was coming to the U.S. then. I thought having the number on the document doesn't*

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<sup>95</sup> I further elaborate more on the lack of contact and subsequent issues in the next section.

*actually reduce your age. Here in the U.S., my age moves me two years away from receiving welfare at the age of 65 ... Here, it's easier but to access Medicare you have to figure everything out. I don't know much. My son takes care of things. (Interview 12).*

*We knew about the bhattaa [welfare] even in camps. People in the U.S. would call us and inform us that after 65, people get bhattaa. You don't have to work. We heard these things. It's better to work. I heard some people work past 65 too. It's better to work. I have the desire to work but I haven't been able to work. One year has already passed [since I arrived here]. (Interview 18).*

*Medical welfare is provided. We have to make use of it smartly. If you just spend it right away, it's not going to be sufficient. (Interview 23).*

Refugees and immigrants are often unfairly portrayed as welfare abusers (Ludwig 2016, 5). As this case articulates, navigating the US system, from welfare disbursement to healthcare management, are far from straightforward. My interviewees have gradually come to understand the significance of welfare like Medicare in their financial reality, but the systemic nuances continue to escape them. There have been reported instances of refugees falling victim to welfare fraud, as they are extremely susceptible to exploitation, especially relating to their status in the US. Their lack of understanding of the welfare system further underscores the absence of control many refugees experience every day in resettlement.

The marginalizing impact of resettlement—from an ‘alien’ language and culture to the lack of mobility to the confusing *bhattaa* system—is evident in refugee family dynamics. Based on my interviews and field observations, family and communal norms are unquestionably changing. Nepali culture is based on a hierarchical, caste-based society, anchored in patriarchal expectations. The following is an observation presented by a community leader to me:

*They [the parents] also bemoan that they can't 'control' their children by beating them; they laugh, the children know to contact the authorities if they are being beaten. [There have been] [s]tories of 3-4 months sentence for some people [found guilty]. (Field note 05/02/2017).*

The hierarchy and discipline in families, as well as the role of the traditional elders has drastically diminished in resettlement. Generally, the Bhutanese community is interested in preserving its social and cultural heritage: a variety of ethnic (caste-based) organizations function within the community. During my fieldwork, I have been separately invited to join a Hindu organization (Field note 2/28/2017) and a Gurung organization (Field note 10/13/2018) within the Bhutanese community. Most of these organizations are invested in ethnic cultural celebrations, modeled after the Bhutanese Community Association of Akron (BCAA). The local experts I interviewed view BCAA and its tributary organizations as performing largely cultural and religious functions (Interviews 3, 4, 30).<sup>96</sup>

Despite these organizational efforts at keeping psychocultural interpretations alive, the everyday social system is largely upended (Ross 2001). First, as I have noted earlier, the communal socialization of camps is not replicated in resettlement. This is a special challenge for the older members who are largely restricted to language classes at IIA, or occasional religious-cultural gatherings. Second, family hierarchy has similarly been upended. The ethnic distinction of immigrant groups erodes with time (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). I have observed that children born and raised in Akron sound distinctly different from their older family members, even when they speak Nepali (Field note 07/28/2018). Their lack of economic potential as well as their

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<sup>96</sup> While it is true BCAA is largely known for its cultural functions, it is also involved in providing support services like language and citizenship classes. I will elaborate on its working, especially its political representation further in the next section.

It is relevant to mention that cultural expressions are important tools of politics and organization in South Asian cultures (Evans 2010b).

dependency on the younger generation for everyday tasks have led to feelings of helplessness and to an inversion of authority roles:

*The children take care of us. Our work apparently is to just sit and eat. Moving around is quite difficult. If they take us somewhere, we go. Otherwise, we just have to wait for them. (Interview 15).*

*After the children grow up, they stand up on their own feet [and become independent] here it seems. However, it is the Nepali custom that children watch over their families when they are old and sick. They do. I don't know about our future. (Interview 17).*

*In terms of easy or difficult...working is difficult at first, especially for those who haven't worked before. Children who grew up in our embrace, they must find it difficult. We [older folks] see it as simple...for people like us, who just sit and eat. (Interview 21).*

These interviewees weren't satisfied with their limitations or dependency but were restricted by the conditions of resettlement. In the struggle between preservation of their cultural norms and adapting to resettlement, the latter has mostly won.

Alongside family roles, gender expectations are also being challenged out of necessity. Within the community, women are compelled to participate in the local economy, from hospitality services to factories. I am not sure what the general feeling regarding women's economic contribution is, but I have noticed discomfort from some interviewees on this subject. However, they were resigned to it given their physical limitations and lack of economic potential. An IIA staff presented this change in the following way:

*This is becoming increasingly common, but this is not a norm yet...but I will say that they are definitely taking a lot more control of household. Because if the man doesn't speak English very well the primary point of contact is the women and children. So, we are definitely seeing in a*

*patriarchal society, where a man is head of the household...women are the ones who are actually controlling affairs...whether it's dealing with the welfare office or problem with applying for jobs. Even if the man has to speak to the higher ups his wife has to speak for him. (Interview 3).*

In describing this scenario, the interviewee felt that some men felt a loss of control over their households and interpreted their use of domestic violence as a method to regain that control.<sup>97</sup>

This interpretation coincides well with my impression of loss of agency experienced by some in resettlement.

The following is another intriguing interpretation of the changing family dynamic in North Hill:

*[Name redacted] informed me that older people in Akron struggle to discipline their children. This is especially the case for illiterate and uneducated parents. He opines that they have no incentive in pushing their children into (an American-style) independence. The older generation is more and more dependent on the younger generation, sometimes for simple daily actions. This creates a different type of family dynamic. (Field note 02/03/2016).*

Framed alternatively, many families fear that they are being forgotten or neglected in resettlement. Many of the interviewees recalled being breadwinners and family leaders in Bhutan as well as in the refugee camps. In resettlement, the restrictive combination of language, transportation, and health turned them into dependent members of the family. Moreover, their social space has been acutely curtailed in North Hill. As articulated in Chapter IV, many refugees harbored resistance towards moving to the US; for many of them, their trepidation has become a reality.

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<sup>97</sup> Domestic abuse—generally some form of physical force exerted on wife or children—is unfortunately accepted in South Asian cultures and is very unlikely to be reported to the law enforcement.

## Brief Identity-based Discussion

The experiences of the ‘forgotten’ group of refugees, highlighted in this section, puts a question mark over the appropriateness of resettlement as a long-term solution. The structure of resettlement—from dispersing refugee populations across the country (Barkdull et al. 2012; Hein 1993) to the strict expectations of economic self-sufficiency (Rumbaut 1989; Singer and Wilson 2008)—at least partly contributes to the isolation of refugees in resettlement. When asked about the flaws of resettlement, a senior IIA official expressed the following:

*Well, I think the [economic] requirements are rigorous...everybody talks about strength-based management and stuff but it's [an] assembly line system. There's no room for proper long-term relationship building and it's not empowerment focused. And I think the demands that they make and time they demand [of refugees] are not fair...the goal of resettlement is self-sufficiency within 90 days. But then they send...and this is what is really hard about this program and I hate saying this because I don't want to be the person playing God in refugee camps deciding who gets to go [or, resettle] but we are sent folks who are never going to be self-sufficient. So we struggle as an agency – why would you send this person here? I don't want them. Of course I don't want them in a refugee camp [either] where they can't get medical services. But if you bring them here, they can't do anything here. They're dependent and we've seen so many issues (Interview 30).*

Although I have intimately observed the positive impact of IIA and its hard-working staff on the refugee community, their impact is ultimately limited. Their services are best-suited for new refugees and aren't sustainable over extended periods of time. The system of resettlement, therefore, is far from perfect.

For many Bhutanese refugees, resettlement wasn't their preferred solution (Chapter IV). They viewed it suspiciously at the refugee camps (Evans 2010a). I came across individuals

whose family members had chosen to remain in the camps (Interviews 13, 28); others acquiesced to family pressure in choosing resettlement (Interviews 18, 19, 27). Based on the picture of isolation and dependence painted in this section, many refugees have found resettlement to be a constricting experience. In comparison to their experience in pre-departure Bhutan, and Nepali refugee camps, their social roles have further diminished in resettlement. These individuals find resettlement far from hospitable or welcoming. Facing a foreign environment, immigrants and refugees often adjust by becoming more 'ethnic' in their orientation (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Portes and Rumbaut 2006). From a social identity perspective, this translates to explicit or implicit rejection of the host society's culture, thereby remaining 'loyal' to their native roots. For instance, Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003, 339) observed Bosnian refugees from a rural background, and with low levels of language and employment skills to turned inward to their ethnic core. Similarly, Markovic and Manderson (2000, 321) argue some refugees hold on to their loss (despite opportunities offered in resettlement) as they define themselves through their ethnic origins. Parallel to these inferences, many Bhutanese refugees find themselves confronting loss of their agency in resettlement. It is natural for individuals in their situation to yearn for their past, as I have observed.

As is generally the case with immigrants in a new environment, the Bhutanese community has attempted to replicate its old social system. This is evident in the variety of cultural programs, the Nepali grocery stores and restaurants, and local music stores. However, the replication of the social system has struggled against the backdrop of resettlement. People live farther away from one another; they are busy with their economic lives; many individuals are dependent on other family members for simple tasks. Put differently, in the maze of welfare and healthcare challenges, and subsequent inability to address them, many refugees find very

little agency in their everyday lives. Their experiences lean toward the past; they're less likely to be future-oriented (Markovic and Manderson 2000, 323). In their struggle with dependence and marginalization, the future doesn't promise a positive group identity. Therefore, it is difficult to imagine why they would attempt to revise their group identity.

Consequential works on refugee identity are dispersed but generally emphasize the value of experience. Opportunities and challenges have differential impact on refugee lives and identities, whether in refugee camps (Byrne 2011; Jaji 2015; Malkki 1992, 1995a, 1995b) or in resettlement at host society (Colic-Peisker 2005, 2009; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003; Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Markovic and Manderson 2000). These case studies corroborate the constructivist argument; more importantly, they illuminate the contrasting experiences and subsequent identity preferences within refugee communities. In this Bhutanese case, refugees struggling with isolation and loss of agency stand in sharp contrast to the individuals who have benefited from resettlement. The latter group's identity has also been affected in resettlement as well, but in a different way. These are individuals that boast higher social agency, due to their higher human capital potential (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Portes and Rumbaut 2004; Potocky-Tripodi 2001, 2004; Rumbaut 1989) and social agency (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003; Markovic and Manderson 2000). In the next section, I will highlight how their group identity is positively affected by their social agency that has expanded in refugee resettlement.



## Social Agency of the Empowered Refugees

It should be clear from Chapter IV (as well as the reviewed scholarship) that a diversity of worldviews and identity preferences exists within the Bhutanese refugee community. While challenges are universal in refugee resettlement, some refugees experience serious isolation as articulated in the previous section. In acute contrast, resettlement has provided some refugees with space for economic mobility and social agency. Lack of social agency can often harden existing worldviews and group identities (Byrne 2011; Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Malkki 1995a, 1995b). On the other hand, newfound agency in resettlement can lead to a possible shift in social identities. Immigrant behavior in host societies can range from rejection to complete assimilation (or, somewhere in between). In resettlement, refugees with high level of social agency are more likely to opt for hybrid identity labels (Chapter IV, Table 3).

The Bhutanese settlement in North Hill is largely seen in a positive light. Immigrant and refugee groups in the US are often rendered successful prematurely (Bonacich 1987, 446). While the Bhutanese group remains largely detached from the local population, its presence is undisputed. Local media outlets—from *Akron Beacon Journal* to *WKSU*—periodically cover special interest stories on the Bhutanese community. These are generally positive stories, from the women’s health to the community’s economic contribution.<sup>98</sup> Also, the emerging Bhutanese-Nepali businesses in North Hill and their economic impact are difficult to ignore. The Bhutanese community is the largest supplier of labor for local factories. It is estimated that the immigrant influx has led to a \$207 million increase in local housing value of Akron between 2000 and

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<sup>98</sup> The following link lists WKSU’s stories on Bhutanese refugees:  
<https://www.wksu.org/term/bhutanese-refugees#stream/0>

2013.<sup>99</sup> *New American Economy* (2016, 8) estimates that 25 percent of refugees in Akron are homeowners. During my field work, I met a number of individuals who had purchased new homes, in the neighboring cities of North Hill:<sup>100</sup>

*According to [name redacted]’s rough estimation, around 25% of the Bhutanese residents in Akron are home-owners...The Bhutanese purchases are scattered, from Stow, to Munroe Falls, to Cuyahoga Falls, to Norton. It is possible that as families prosper and buy homes (pursuing the ‘American dream’) they will be positioned far away from one another, a far cry from their close residences in Bhutan and cramped refugee camps. Home ownership is another indication that the community is no longer languishing in extreme poverty. Or at least part of the community. (Field note 2/3/2016).*

Increasing homeownership is one of many distinct signs of the Bhutanese community’s progress. In this context, I have encountered contrasting impressions of refugees. Local US business owners who have noticed this shift in the economy are largely curious about their Bhutanese counterparts. They have mostly welcomed the refugee community-based injection of labor and capital in North Hill. On the other side, there are also instances of suspicious behavior expressed by some North Hill community members:

*During our conversations, we revisited this old subject of some African American leaders not being happy with the attention the refugees have been getting. The idea of ‘international community’ was a slap in their face ... This is something that has come up in conversations at IIA*

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<sup>99</sup> “...53 percent of Akron’s U.S.-born residents are home-owners, compared with 35 percent of foreign-born residents in the city. However ... 16.8 percent of the foreign-born own their houses without any debt, compared with 14.2 percent of the U.S.-born residents” (*New American Economy* 2016, 8).

<sup>100</sup> Purchase of homes is an informal but important marker of success, especially since refugee status equates lack of home (among other scarcities). In the case of Bhutanese refugees, there is a steady increase of home ownership, most of which are outside North Hill: mostly in Cuyahoga Falls, and in some cases, Norton and Kent. This home ownership is a reflection of two important factors: relative affordability of Ohio, and North Hill’s lack of attraction as a residential area due to its poverty and crime levels.

*many times. As the white population is leaving, the economic space in North Hill is being filled up by immigrant businesses. In the process, the African American population feels it is being bypassed.* (Field note 07/13/2018).

Similarly, the following is my observation of a confrontational scene at the presentation of the findings of a listening project, underlining the local suspicion as well as misinformation about the refugees:

*[They] complained about having refugee neighbors on both sides. She complained about how they [refugees] could have [purchased] more cars than her, or even have a driver's license without knowing the language. She believed that refugees brought all the wealth with them, and she doubted the vetting process of allowing refugees in.* (Field note 07/28/2018).

These observations are pertinent in confirming the general absence of contact between the Bhutanese refugee community and the local population. The self-sufficiency of resettlement seems to lead to an internally self-sufficient refugee group. Portes and Rumbaut (2006, 126) argued the inherent native prejudice of the US society feeds the ethnic consciousness (and crystallization) of immigrant societies.

Many individuals viewed refugee groups as 'nice and 'quiet' people, or 'hard workers.' Embedded underneath these generalizations lies their fear of authority figures. I remember many interviewees to be especially anxious before our conversation. Many elderly interviewees made me feel self-conscious by addressing me as 'sir' (Field note 10/13/2018). One community leader viewed this deference to authority as stemming from their past experiences:

*He suggested that students' hesitation will not be out of privacy or confidentiality concerns. He says that they will be skittish, or they lack confidence in speaking with individuals they see as authority ... for all the confidence expressed by Bhutanese-Nepali gatekeepers, new refugees*

*(especially older generations, and/or from conflict-affected areas) tend to be extremely shy and wary of any form of authority (Field note 10/13/2018).*

The social distance between refugee communities and host society, therefore, is quite large. This can be partly attributed to their refugee-ness. Also, immigrant and refugee communities are generally more interested in re-creating their old social order (Allen 2009; Markovic and Manderson 2000; Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006) rather than assimilating in a culturally disparate host society.

This section is an interlinked account of refugee agency in resettlement and concomitant challenges. The previous section centered on the challenges of isolation and dependence. Here, the challenges take on other forms. Some of these are characteristic issues of resettlement: refugees must be immediately employed; they don't necessarily find work appropriate for their training and qualifications. Interestingly, some refugees have adapted to their environment through social and economic organization. Many of these entrepreneurial efforts, however, are restricted by a lack of appropriate resources and know-how. The 'growth' of the community's agency is imperfect but tangible.

## Challenges Faced by the New Generation

When asked about the community’s experience in resettlement, the following are some of the prominent themes to emerge:

Challenges	Sources	References
Institutional Access	9	24
Economic Organization	19	53
Organizational References	14	36
BCAA	8	23
IIA	10	30
Secondary Migration	13	39

*Table 6: A Picture of Resettlement Challenges (Continued)*

Unlike the common complaints of Table 5, the themes reported in Table 6 here are quite diverse. Many of the challenges, especially stored in the ‘institutional access’ group, articulate a variety of growing pains for the younger generation and entrepreneurs in resettlement. Here, I observed a range of roadblocks to success, from higher education to local entrepreneurship. Although this group of refugees consisted of NGO workers, business owners, and college students, they were confronted with many challenges. On the other hand, themes of organizations, economic challenges, and secondary migration, all refer to the community’s organizational behavior in North Hill.

I start with the theme of economic challenges, a crucial piece in the overall picture of resettlement:

*As for [name redacted] himself, ... [h]e was one of the first Bhutanese refugees to arrive in Akron. He reflected that he was quite lost at first. His arrival coincided with the global recession of 2008. There were no jobs, he recalled, and the winters were depressing. By contrast, he says, it's a lot easier for refugees to settle in Akron today. More than the bitterness of past, he exudes pride in his relatively successful present. (Field note 12/14/2015)*

*So...when we came here in 2009 the economy was so bad. People were having a hard time finding jobs. When you come to the US you have to pay for all the airfare and all that back. It's not free. At first, they (IIA or the state) help you pay you rent and food for a month or so. But they don't give you food stamps for about a year. It was very hard. My dad couldn't find a job right away but slowly he could find a job. (Interview 2).*

*First year was quite difficult. It was a struggle. My father was the only one working. And all of it would be gone paying the bills here and there. So we had to sacrifice in almost everything. It was like Nepal. In Nepal, there was actual scarcity. Even if we wanted to eat something nice, we couldn't get it. There was that sacrifice. Even here, after one year, or a year and half, it was like that. It was just not enough. (Interview 27).*

These testimonies point to the economic struggle that predates the current stability of the community. I noticed that some of the younger refugees were well-informed of these initial difficulties vicariously, and were determined to pursue better opportunities, mostly through higher education. While the young interviewees largely understood their family's hardships, they exuded optimism for their own futures. They were emboldened, rather than weighed down by the sacrifices of their families. I have met similar young refugees with ambitious aspirations fueled by their family's sacrifices. The following is my field observation of an encounter with a young college student at the conclusion of a community dialogue in 2018:

*I also met [name redacted]. This was the first time I had met him. He is a student at the University of Akron, and seems curious and vocal. He is the youngest of 10 siblings and is the only one attending college. He is studying social work. He mentioned an interesting point – since he is interested in studies [higher education], his siblings don't expect him to work in the factories like they do. They'd rather he studied and 'made something out of himself'. (Field note 10/13/2018).*

Many of these young individuals, therefore, find themselves in relatively privileged positions thanks to their family's work in local factories. The local industry is comprised of glass, toy, and hand sanitizer manufactures; and a majority of the refugees work at Case Farms, simply known as 'chicken' or the 'chicken factory' in the Bhutanese community. Based on my interviews and my field observations, it was clear to me that the community was largely sustained by its work at Case Farms. Work there was strenuous, but it was the most convenient opportunity for incoming refugees:

*Once legal documentation is acquired, most refugees work in the local factories. Around 500 refugees work at Case Farms and at factories producing hand sanitizers. For the meat processing job [at Case Farms], working is quite [straightforward]; you only need transportation. (Field note 02/24/2016).*

Labor-intensive work at Case Farms was especially suitable for refugees with little to no education, or language skills. Even the educated refugees initially had to start with manual labor jobs, and they had their share of stories of challenges related to work:

*I worked at a warehouse and the pay wasn't good. As a result, it was a very hard time to meet the family needs. It was very challenging...transportation became a very big hurdle. To go shopping, I would have to knock on somebody's door, and the wintertime was very hard... On top*

*of that, the past job experience, working for little money, and not have satisfactory job experience; these gave physical and mental problems. (Interview 5).*

*At first, I struggled quite a bit in terms of work. The first work was at a company. I had to work the night shift. It was very difficult. It was a rubber company. We had to make parts. It was extremely difficult. We had to work at high temperatures to warm up metals. We are talking about temperatures of 380, 480 degrees, in order to 'cook' rubber for vehicle parts. (Interview 6).*

As I have explained elsewhere, the Bhutanese-Nepali population is largely employed in local manufacturing jobs. They're well-known for their hard-working and obedient demeanor, which makes them popular at these factories (Interview 3). Based on my field conversations, there's a strong link between these companies and the Bhutanese-Nepali community. However, this link (initially established by IIA) took years to form. As shown above, many refugees struggled in the early years of their resettlement, which started during the 2008 global recession.

Although appreciative of the economic stability provided by these factory jobs, many young refugees expressed acute disinterest in this line of work:

*In the beginning...perhaps it's because of my father's experience, I don't want to work in such companies. Or, I feel it would be better if I could avoid that. For instance, ... he would return home and feel ... he didn't understand English. He would complain about being pressured to toil [by the managers] and he couldn't even communicate about it. He couldn't afford to quit because the family was in a vulnerable situation. He absolutely had to work, but on days he would return home sad. Sometimes there would be discussion and argument at home. He would be angry at somebody but would express it to mummy. Sometimes he would drink a lot in order to forget the problems. (Interview 27).*



This interviewee associated work at the chicken factory with the emotional distress within the family. Unlike these ambitious individuals, some experts were concerned about the economic attraction of these dead-end jobs for the Bhutanese youth (Interviews 4, 30). Part of the problem here was the lack of necessary information and support.

This difficulty in charting a path to higher education captures the issue of institutional access well. The two college students I interviewed represented themselves as exceptions. Although in different ways, they received support and mentorship from their family and more importantly, relevant institutions and individuals:

*...I got a lot of help throughout the process. I had mentors who helped me understand the culture of the Americans. My parents were always very supportive...The problem is parents don't understand how the education system works here... I think among the young population, they do want to go to college and further their education. However, once they start working right after high school they see the income, and for a lot of them it's hard to break [that habit] and go to school. Also, for a lot of students the problem is that they do not know how to navigate the system. (Interview 2).*

Summarized succinctly, there is a combination of a paucity of necessary support at home and ignorance of necessary resources. Based on my recent conversations and observations, the access to education is slowly getting better. Students are starting to attend community colleges, and they are also benefitting from the knowledge of other students (like the interviewees here).

## **Economic Organization: Refugee Business in North Hill**

Despite the significance of factory jobs, it's the refugee business that has become the emblem of community progress. It is difficult to ignore the cluster of Bhutanese-Nepali businesses in North Hill (in addition to a local community garden and a music shop); grocery stores dominate the Bhutanese businesses. I worked as a consultant on IIA's economic development team for about four months at the end of 2016, spilling on to January of 2017. Funded by the local Knight Foundation, we were interested in the rising economic profile of refugee businesses, in comparison to older North Hill establishments. We recorded data in two phases – business surveys, followed by a focus group meeting with local business owners. The former was especially beneficial in sketching the initial picture of refugee businesses and establishing rapport with Bhutanese-Nepali business owners. Most of these establishments were co-owned by middle-aged men with varying degrees of education.

As a research team, we were able to collect data from 31 local businesses. Seventeen of these were owned by 'US-born individuals'; in this category, we also included corporate chains such as Circle K, Dollar General, and Dairy Queen. Fourteen 'immigrant-owned' businesses filled out the surveys, out of which nine (i.e. approximately 70 percent) were stores owned by Bhutanese-Nepali individuals.<sup>101</sup> This statistic emphasizes the numerical advantage Bhutanese-Nepali businesses enjoy within North Hill's immigrant markets. In the analysis of the survey data, some themes were readily evident. The data confirmed that most immigrant businesses were quite new and relied heavily on their immigrant clientele. By contrast, the surveyed US-

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<sup>101</sup> This does not include the two Bhutanese-Nepali restaurants operated outside of North Hill area; moreover, we failed to obtain data from about five Bhutanese-Nepali businesses. Three more Bhutanese businesses have opened after the conclusion of this project.

owned businesses offered a variety of services and most of them (90 percent) had been operational for more than five years.

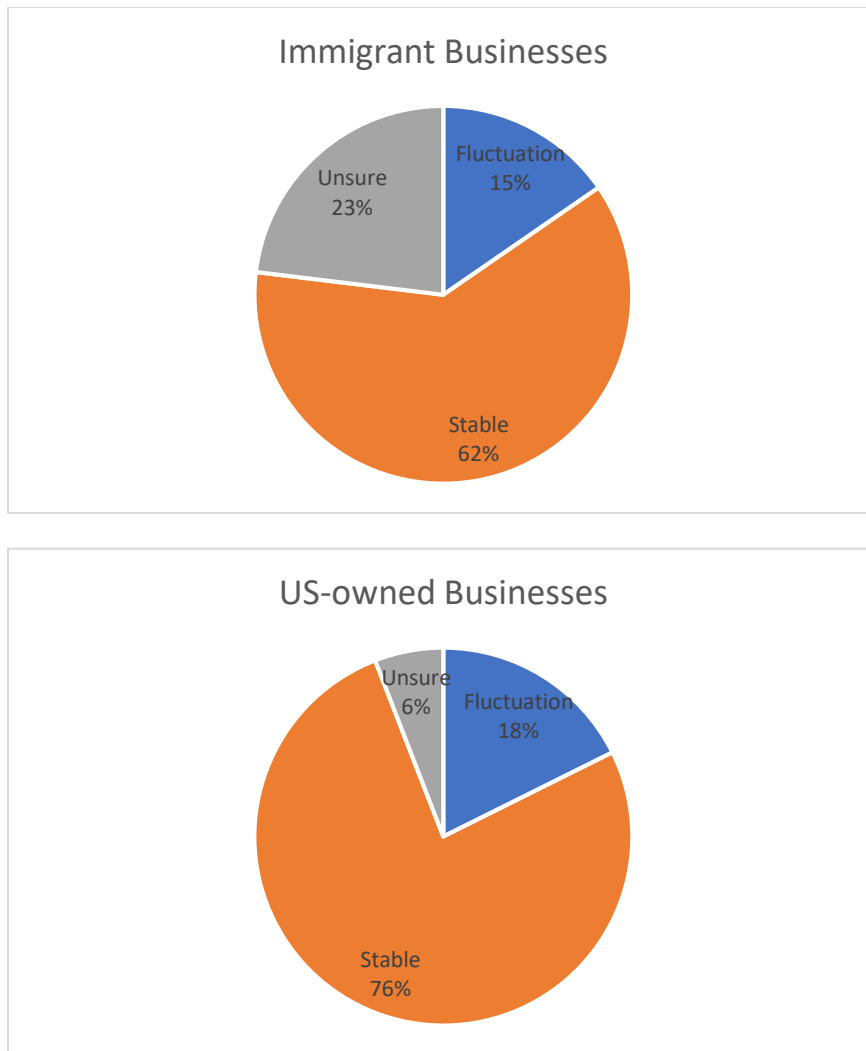
US-owned businesses – 17			
Type of services	Ownership	Duration	Immigrant customer base
Auto service – 3	Owned – 13	5 years and more – 15	None – 2
Laundry – 1	Leased – 3	3-5 years – 1	Unsure – 2
Restaurant – 4	No response – 1	1 year or less – 1	Between 5-20 % – 5
Grocery store – 4			50 % and higher – 7
Other:			No response – 1
Bank – 1			
Furniture – 1			
Printing – 1			
Glass – 1			
Childcare - 1			

*Table 7:: US-owned businesses in North Hill*

As is clear from Table 7, most of the US-owned businesses are well-established in North Hill. Most of these businesses are owned—close to 76 percent; this is especially the case with the corporate chains—and the rest were leased. Among these businesses, some locally-owned businesses have existed for more than five decades. Close to 88 percent of the US-owned businesses have existed for more than five years in North Hill. Their average number of total

employees is around 12 (the average number of full-time employees is around 5). These figures point toward a relative stability as well as a hint of paucity of entrepreneurship in the recent years, which stands in stark contrast to the immigrant markets that have expanded rapidly in the last five years. The US-owned businesses confirm the purchasing potential of the new immigrant customers. A little over 40 percent of the US-based owners considered their customer base to comprise of a significant level of immigrants, i.e. 50 percent or more.

Overall, the surveys reflected a stable local economic scene. 70 percent of all businesses reported a stable revenue trend for the past three years. 62 percent of immigrant businesses witnessed a stable revenue trend; 76 percent of the US-based owners claimed the same. Only four respondents reported some fluctuation in their revenue. Some of the anecdotal reasons provided for the reported fluctuation are reduction of the clientele, increasing competition, and new businesses. These inter-linked reasons stem from the shrinking population of North Hill as well as the influx of refugees and their businesses. The shrinking client base reportedly began well before the entry of refugee communities, forcing particularly the locally-owned businesses to adapt. For instance, the pizzeria owner has started deliveries to reach past North Hill; an auto shop manager confessed to considering moving the business out of North Hill. Establishing causal links for these claims, generally made by independent owners, was beyond the scope of our study but corporate chains seemed largely unaffected by the change in demographics.



*Figure 9: Comparison of Immigrant and US-owned Revenue Trend in North Hill*

It appears that the US-born and immigrant-owned businesses operate with contrasting business models and slightly different clienteles. As presented in Table 8, the majority of immigrant-owned businesses are relatively new. Only two stores had been operational for five years or longer – an African grocery store and a Bhutanese-Nepali grocery store. What is not reported in the tables here is that 76 percent of US-based owners expressed satisfaction with the location of their businesses in North Hill. 50 percent of the immigrant owners were reportedly satisfied. Based on my field inferences, finding an appropriate space within North Hill area was

an onerous task for many immigrant business owners, as well as the subsequent lease negotiations with the property owners. Almost all the immigrant-owned businesses—eleven out of thirteen—are run on leased property, often at what the business owners believe are ‘unfair’ or exorbitant rents (Field note 10/12/2016).

The Bhutanese refugees prioritize North Hill for business location because most of the refugee families live in the area, many of whom don’t have the means of transportation to travel far. As Gold (1988, 1992) observed, refugee entrepreneurship is sustained by a strong co-ethnic network. Most of these refugee-run businesses are almost entirely reliant on the refugee clientele. Eleven stores (out of the total thirteen) claimed that the local immigrant population makes up 50 percent or more of their clientele; similarly, eight of these businesses claimed this figure to be 90 percent or higher. Hence, refugee businesses are rooted in the relatively limited space of North Hill, despite complaints of inadequate client parking spaces or security concerns. Although there have been break-ins reported to the local police, the business owners remain committed to the North Hill location. As it is difficult for immigrant entrepreneurs to gain access to or succeed in the US market (Bonacich 1987), they anchor their business on their immigrant community’s needs (Gold 1992).

Immigrant-owned businesses – 13			
Type of services	Ownership	Duration	Immigrant customer base
Beauty – 1	Owned – 2	5 years and more – 2	Unsure - 1
Restaurant – 1	Leased – 11	3-5 years – 1	50 % and higher – 11
Grocery store – 7		1-3 years – 6	(90% and higher) – 8
Other: Garment – 3		1 year or less – 4	No response – 1

Table 8: Immigrant-owned Businesses in North Hill

The emerging immigrant markets provide a reason for optimism as well as caution. In the past, incoming refugee groups have successfully established ethnic enclaves with their own micro economies (Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Portes and Stepick 1985). However, there is a temptation to prematurely deem refugee communities a ‘success story’ (Bonacich 1987). As seen in Table 8, most of the immigrant businesses in North Hill have existed for a relatively short period of time. In my view, the immigrant businesses are still finding their feet. Refugee groups like the Bhutanese are unlikely to become an enclave considering their relatively small population. However, like the enclaves, local immigrant businesses are propped up by internal social capital, particularly in the case of Bhutanese stores. It was a common theme among Bhutanese-Nepali owners to co-own a business venture with brothers or close relatives. Based on my conversations, every Bhutanese-Nepali enterprise is a collective initiative. Some of the expected business risks are likely offset by refugee-based ethnic networks. A community leader confessed to visiting most grocery stores out of obligation. Moreover, it appears that these

businesses often benefit from free or cheap labor provided by family members and friends. External observers may be tempted to categorize this behavior as exploitation, but most refugees view this as a natural and reasonable development. In the opening of a new Nepali restaurant in Kent, I observed the owner of a restaurant in North Hill assisting the kitchen staff in the new establishment (Field note 10/09/2017).

Bhutanese-Nepali businesses – 9 (approximately 70 percent of the immigrant business owners)			
Type of services	Ownership	Duration	Immigrant customer base
Restaurant – 1	Owned – 0	5 years and more – 1	50 % and higher – 8
Grocery hybrid – 4	Leased – 9	3-5 years – 1	(90% and higher) – 6
Jeweler hybrid – 1		1-3 years – 3	No response – 1
Other: Garment – 3		1 year or less – 4	

*Table 9: Bhutanese-Owned businesses in North Hill*

In the context of Bhutanese-Nepali businesses, the grocery store was the most popular business model. In Table 9, I use the term ‘grocery hybrid’ because these stores were mostly designed to be one-stop-stores to meet all demands, while specializing in ‘native’ groceries. These stores carried South Asian grocery items; some offered a ‘street food’ corner as well as a section for cheap garments or clothing. A few of these stores even included a butcher area, offering pork, goat meat, and fish. The location of North Hill has benefitted these new



businesses with restaurants serving as the only exceptions. I have learned restaurants aren't limited to the refugee populations; they attract native members of the US population through their 'ethnic food' appeal. At least three restaurants have opened far from the immediate vicinity of North Hill.

## Growing Pains in Refugee Businesses

Naturally, business owners have had their share of challenges. Starting these businesses has largely taken place through “trial and error”, with difficulties ranging from failure to understand contractual obligations, to falling victim to corruption, exploitation and high rent and interest rates, to building code violations and break-ins. The focus group meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2016 was instrumental in understanding local economic difficulties. The focus group served a variety of purposes: it helped business owners reiterate their challenges; from a research point of view, it confirmed many of our theories, and it served as a venue for contact between native and immigrant business owners. The IIA team served as a bridge; it was interesting to note that business owners spoke to us, rather than to each other. In summary, the concerns presented by these two groups of business owners were quite different. The US-based owners spoke of challenges tied with the new influx of refugees. One business manager confessed:

*We don't understand the make-up of the [refugee] population. We witness many car wrecks with the new vehicle owners, so there is an increase in dealing with the new immigrants ... instead of working with us regularly, they generally do whatever the insurance company asks them to do. We are used to working with owners who understand and take pride in their cars. Those family roots are gone [from North Hill]. (Field notes 12/7/2016).*

This business owner proposed training and working with the Bhutanese-Nepali youth to gain access to the new North Hill population. IIA representatives promised to follow-up with him to facilitate this.

The US-based business owners viewed the immigrant presence in North Hill positively. The language barrier was brought up several times, but they seemed concerned about the safety of some of the refugees. Here, Bhutanese-Nepali refugees were painted as a mild-mannered

group. They were satisfied that the new immigrant businesses were occupying once-empty spaces. In addition to their economic contribution, this has reportedly helped in restricting local space for disreputable people: as one individual said, “there is less riff raff now.” This was a sentiment shared by other US-based business owners during the data collection phase.

While the US-based business owners were interested in holding on to the status quo, the Bhutanese-Nepali owners’ principal agenda was dealing with the growing pains of starting and managing a business. One Bhutanese-Nepali business owner described his business experience as a trail-and-error process. This was a confirmation of my initial inference that there was a distinct lacuna of business know-how within the refugee community. The business owner spoke of his personal struggles in leasing the appropriate space, or addressing unforeseen permits for meat-cutting machinery, or appropriate electricity codes. In building a ‘chatpatey corner’, to offer Nepali street food, inside his grocery store, it took a Bhutanese business owner a year and half to procure the correct permits. As the owner of the oldest Bhutanese-Nepali business, he informed us that his business was slowly growing but he was running out of store space and parking lot to expand.<sup>102</sup> While everyone concurred on local security concerns, it seemed to be a bigger concern for Bhutanese-Nepali business owners.

The following testimonies supplement the difficulties associated with entrepreneurship in North Hill:

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<sup>102</sup> In the summer of 2018, this individual had invested and started a new business in Columbus, Ohio – another well-known destination of Bhutanese refugees. This economic decision perhaps alludes to the saturating refugee market in North Hill.

*So in 2011, we started the [name redacted] to help the community in Akron. I work with [or co-own the business] three partners... A few years ago there was a break-in after hours at this store. I consider it not be out of the ordinary (Interview 1).*

*We tried to start a gas business in Canton, Ohio. We had even come to an initial agreement. But we didn't have the required cash. We applied for a loan. However, the gas company wouldn't sell the place if we were using loan money to get started. They told us that start the business if you have cash, but don't use loan money to get started. They also told us that we don't have the experience for that type of business... So we couldn't collect cash and we left that initiative. (Interview 6).*

*...if I wanted to start a business there would be refugee loans – not a great amount but about \$15,000-20,000 for low interest, perhaps about 7 per cent. Apparently business loans are usually charged 15 percent interest. So when I heard that I was interested. In 2015, I scoped out a location in Cuyahoga Falls Avenue. At that time, I couldn't find a vacant lot and my business loan was also not approved. (Interview 9).*

*I basically had nothing when I moved here. So I started working here. I would take no salary [or profits from the sale]; I took no day off throughout the year. I work continuously. I also got my sons to come and help out at the shop after work. That's how I filled up the entire store. After a long time, and many rotations, I have managed to fill up the whole store. (Interview 10).*

These statements highlight the difficulties associated with starting a business in resettlement.

The owners' lack of adequate business information is often exacerbated by their exploitation by local contractors, often being duped into signing inappropriate contracts and losing money:

*One of the things that has been very challenging for the entrepreneurs of the community has been the dishonesty of the American businesses and business people. Selling property that wasn't theirs; selling buildings that were falling apart, that never should have been allowed to go into*

*the market; stringent requirements in the contracts; it has been horrible... We would get calls for help from people but wouldn't have the expertise. Many times, I would run interference working with the police department, with health departments, things like that. It didn't really solve the generic problem in lack of knowledge and experience. I guess it's just going to have to come over time. (Interview 4).*

As I had learned during my initial phase of field research, many business owners also struggled with lack of requisite skills for business. The *Lothshampa* don't boast a well-known history of business management, as past refugee groups like Vietnamese, Chinese and Koreans did (Gold 1998; Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006):

*They don't keep receipts. I don't know how many times I told them... there's no concept. There are no spreadsheet skills. Now, I don't know if all Goldhap folks were farmers but I haven't met any who's had businesses in Bhutan. (Interview 4).*

The business owners (of mostly grocery stores) I interviewed enjoyed varying levels of success. The older businesses have reached a position of economic stability while the relatively new stores are starting from the scratch.

Interestingly, I have witnessed evidence of cooperation as well as internal competition among the business owners. In social sciences, refugee entrepreneurship is viewed to grow out of 'middleman' concerns: refugee entrepreneurs lack access to mainstream market but they are able to harness the refugee economic scene (Bonacich 1987). Refugee businesses tend to function outside of the mainstream market, and over time they tend to compete with one another for the refugee clientele Gold (1992). Business owners of the older grocery stores expressed their cooperation in starting up businesses. A business owner of a relatively new store expressed his determination to succeed on his own (Field note 10/12/2016).

Culture-based theories emphasize the entrepreneurial lineage of some refugee groups, like the Chinese and the Jewish population (Gold 1988). On the other hand, ‘disadvantage theories’ highlight the economic disadvantages faced by refugees – the lack of language and labor skills – that motivate them into a reactive form of entrepreneurship (Gold 1988, 416-418). Having started their life at the bottom, entrepreneurship allows them to “move into self-employment through the support of preexisting ethnic networks” (Portes and Stepick 1985, 494). Source theories do not apply here: no Bhutanese-Nepali business owner possessed significant business experience in Bhutan or in Nepal. On the other hand, disadvantage theories helped explain some business owners’ motivation. A minority of business owners were able to work full-time at their stores; most of the new owners, on the other hand, divided their time between being at the store and at the factory putting in their regular hours. The following are the testimonies of Bhutanese business owners in North Hill:

*When people started resettling here, I tried to help them out, especially in regards to finding familiar food for them. Later on it became an issue. We had to go very far to get these things. So in 2011, we started the [name redacted] to help the community in Akron. I work [and co-own the business] with three partners. (Interview 1).*

*Me and my brother used to consult about opening a business. We wanted to do something; open a business. We figured working in the company was difficult. We couldn’t work there for 65 years [of age]. It seems it’s only while you’re young and strong, you can work at the company. It’s also risky work. Sometimes you get your hand burned. I still sometimes get my hands burned. It also gives you back problem. Only recently I had back sprain. We have to use heavy equipment after all. So I had to go to hospital through the company. My back still flares up sometimes. So we wanted to start something than just slaving away. We wondered if it [starting*

*a business] would be easier than slaving away at the company. Perhaps our living style would be easier [happier] (Interview 6).*

*At one point, most of my savings was gone. I asked my sailaa brother, bring what money you can; I have around \$20,000 to 30,000, and let's start a small store. That's how I brought it up and we tabled a discussion. Another brother of mine, said that he didn't have money then. At that point, my youngest brother hadn't arrived at all. [on asked about brothers] yes, we are four brothers. Then, I acquired a small space of about 1,000 square feet with the rent of \$900. It was a small, grocery business. (Interview 10).*

*We saved some money – about \$10,000-\$15,000. We started the business in the November of 2015. It's been about a year. To start a business, you have to undertake a bit of risk. It was difficult at first. The merchandise we needed for business comes from Nepal. Different items arrived at different times. Now I am learning on the job; before, I didn't know. We mistakenly ordered all merchandize leading to being held back [presumably at customs]. Some of the stuff is still stuck. We import the stuff from Nepal. My in-laws stay in Kathmandu. So they help us out. (Interview 11).*

*Well, opening a restaurant is difficult obviously...But I saw that people here liked Indian food. So I got more confident... But I wanted to put a Nepali name. It was our language and our culture. ...So we thought of keeping the Nepali name, and we went from there... At first I had started to open a restaurant – I lost between 8 to 10 thousand [dollars]. They spoke about partitioning, tax, zoning, and so on. These old guys seemed to be crooked. These were retired folks trying to con people. (Interview 28).<sup>103</sup>*

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<sup>103</sup> Interviewee 28's observation of corruption is an important one, which only became clearer to me much later. Entrepreneurs like him have been guilty of naivete and a lack of contractual know-how, falling prey to predatory ventures. One of my expert interviewees had personally investigated these situations and provided me evidence of the level of exploitation. This line of inquiry is slightly off-track, but this lack of business acumen remains a significant challenge to some upcoming entrepreneurs.

While I have discussed a variety of challenges, it is equally important to not overlook the desire and will of the Bhutanese business owners. The reasons behind starting a business meets at the intersection of opportunism, a desire for a better future, and agency. The risk of starting a business is often distributed among multiple individuals, generally family members, or close relatives. Family members also fill in to oversee daily business operations, presumably for free or at a very low rate of pay.

The attraction of entrepreneurship is apparent, especially following the success of the first few grocery stores businesses. It is well-established that refugee-centric businesses provide an alternative mode of economic mobility (Gold 1988, 1992; Portes and Stepick 1985). For interviewee 6, it's an alternative to their labor-intensive work. Competing and excelling within the mainstream economy can be difficult for refugees. As reflected by the experiences of aspiring refugee students, it is often difficult to find necessary assistance and resources. While it may seem risky to open different versions of the same grocery store, this could appear to be the least risky option to a refugee entrepreneur. Grocery stores are popular due to their cultural trappings as well as their acceptance of food stamps. Most refugees employ their food stamps (or Electronic Benefit Transfer cards) in the purchase of groceries (Field note 09/26/2016).

Immigrant communities across the US are known to invest in ethnic grocery stores (Portes and Rumbaut 2006), as they can cater specifically to their immigrant population, and perhaps help to resist cultural assimilation into the American society. Similarly, Bhutanese businesses are anchored in cultural and national identity. Some businesses in North Hill proudly advertise themselves in English and Nepali. To step into a Nepali grocery store is tantamount to stepping into a cultural oasis. Each shelf and every corner of the store exudes Nepali-ness, in sight as well as in smell. Conversations taking place between cashiers and customers—ranging



from the outstanding credit to the best local daycare options—highlight a cultural closeness that is difficult to witness outside of the refugee context. To the surprise of many (especially US citizens), one popular and successful Bhutanese business owner, and community leader, opted to start his business instead of pursuing an academic career; he chose a Bhutanese-Nepali reality over the pursuit of the ‘American dream.’<sup>104</sup>

In my view, there is a strong link between local Bhutanese-Nepali agency and the ‘new’ North Hill. Immigrant business ownership and entrepreneurship are emblems of a thriving immigrant population, as seen in a variety of immigrant enclaves in the US: Chinese in New York, Koreans in Los Angeles, Vietnamese and Russian Jews in northern California, and Cubans in Miami (Gold 1992; Portes and Rumbaut 2006). It is fair to say the Bhutanese-Nepali population exhibits all the necessary signs. North Hill has witnessed a steady rise of an immigrant-based market in the last five to seven years. Here, the Bhutanese-Nepali businesses easily outnumber other immigrant-owned enterprises. Based on my observations, Bhutanese entrepreneurs will continue to move forward, irrespective of their challenges:

*...if you want to blame, no matter where you are you won't succeed. [L]aziness and poverty are always neighbors. (Interview 9).*

*As a Nepali, you have to be brave. You have to work hard and one day hopefully you can earn money. That's how you're meant to do it. That's how everyone is doing it. They find ways to stay afloat and survive. We as people work hard, but we want to make it. (Interview 28).*

The aforesaid ambition is common among the local entrepreneurs. Many of these entrepreneurs are invested in their ethnic businesses not because of their cultural expertise like the Chinese,

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<sup>104</sup> This individual has a doctorate in natural sciences. Moreover, I have also heard health challenges might have been pertinent in his decision (as discussed in Chapter IV).

Japanese, and Jewish populations of the past (Gold 1992, 70). Instead, these ventures offer the most pragmatic route to economic success.

## Secondary Migration: An Expression of Agency and Attachment

Despite their growing pains, many Bhutanese families are showing signs of economic progress. Many of my interviewees (and others I spoke to informally) have moved out of North Hill and bought homes around North Hill as it is not an affluent or a particularly safe neighborhood. Yet, the business and social aspects of Bhutanese-Nepali community remain centered in North Hill. With its combination of communal presence, the availability of jobs, and a growing entrepreneurial scene, North Hill continues to attract secondary migrants from other states. Secondary migration in North Hill represents the community's economic as well as cultural pull for Bhutanese refugees. I consider the phenomenon of secondary migration as an explicit demonstration of refugee agency in resettlement. Secondary migration is a deliberate decision that is facilitated by information and awareness regarding the status of the community (Mott 2010).

IIA officials estimated there was one secondary migrant for each primary migrant (Interview 30). While there is no official statistics available on secondary migrants, people I spoke with were well-aware of the phenomenon:

*Mostly, it's in-migration that is taking place in Akron. [Name redacted] estimated there are around 10,000 Bhutanese in Akron area. Interestingly, they told me that most visible enterprises, i.e. business in North Hill, are started by secondary migrants coming in to Akron from other states. (Field note 12/14/2015).*

*When discussing the clear entrepreneurial ventures of Bhutanese businessmen, Mahananda agreed that most of them are secondary migrants. (Field note 02/03/2016).*

I also observed independently that there's a strong correlation between ambitious, successful refugees and secondary migrations. Many of my interviewees—from business owners to NGO

workers—were secondary migrants who came to North Hill from other states like Maine and Texas.

The reason for their migration was reportedly rooted in economic opportunity and cultural proximity:

*Some people come here for family reunification. Some people move here for the secondary reunification. I have also heard that some people with entrepreneurial frame of mind come here for cheaper housing prices. (Interview 1)*

*Coming to Akron, I wasn't employed for a while. I had some relatives in the neighboring states here. I felt Dallas, Texas was a big state where I had no relatives. That's why ... in order to have more interaction and get together, and to hunt for a job I came to Akron, Ohio. (Interview 5).*

*I came to Texas first. I stayed in Houston for about six months. Everyone was talking about Ohio. The Bhutanese community were all speaking of Ohio. Following that bandwagon, I came here too. (Interview 11).*

*There are people who come here. I occasionally hear about families coming into Akron from other states. It's been about a week or ten days that a family from our village who came here. It's a Subba family that we met yesterday. I showed them my house and informed them that if there was any trouble my son – who is settled here and can even communicate with the hospital staff – can help them. We exchanged phone numbers. (Interview 12).*

*We have our relatives here. There's a strong Nepali community. That's why we came here. At jethaa's [oldest son] place [in New Hampshire] there aren't a lot of Nepali families. (Interview 18).*

The subject of secondary migration is an interesting one. My interviewees emphasized the cultural proximity of life in Akron rather than the economic aspects. Based on my

understanding, North Hill is a small town that offers an attractive combination of cultural and economic potential that also boasts of an established ethnic network.<sup>105</sup> These networks play an important role in resettlement choice (Kingsbury et al. 2018, 1034).

Over time, secondary migration has led to a noticeable rise in the Bhutanese population in North Hill. The close-knit community is slowly expanding and one is more likely to come across unknown faces in the community now (Field note 08/03/2018). While everyone is aware of secondary migration, they only have a few pieces of the whole picture. It is difficult to estimate secondary migration numbers due to lack of proper data collection. However, secondary migration can pose problems for the receiving organizations as well as for the incoming refugees. When secondary migrants relocate to a new place, “many secondary migrants are no longer eligible for many public benefits” of that state (Barkdull et al. 2012, 113). Case managers often became aware of these new migrants following a complaint or a problem, according to an IIA expert:

*I would love for someone to study the secondary migration because the problem, unfortunately, when we get the negative calls, they are dealing with the secondary migrants...I don't know if they're coming here in desperate need for a larger community... And they're the ones who tend to live in squalor-like conditions, and having more problems. I don't know if they're coming because they think they will receive more support from the Bhutanese ... community because there's more of them here. But I worry about that sometimes. (Interview 30).*

While IIA has been able to assist secondary migrants in the past (including some of my interviewees), they face a challenge in supporting refugees from outside of their system. At this

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<sup>105</sup> In the next chapter, I will test the national patterns of secondary migration statistically. Inferences from this chapter will guide me in my hypotheses.

point, my interpretation is that Bhutanese secondary refugees are attracted to the North Hill community primarily for its cultural connections, though the economic pull is also important for ambitious entrepreneurs. Secondary migration can be at least partially explained through the lens of cultural proximity, underscoring the need for familiarity and identity.

Secondary migration of refugees is not novel (Desbarats 1986; Rumbaut 1989), if understudied. As articulated in Chapter VI, secondary migration decisions are solely made by refugees, free from host society intervention (Ott 2011), which emphasizes the agency of refugees in resettlement. There are both economic and social considerations to the secondary migration decisions [Bloem and Loveridge 2017; Ott 2011; Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) 2012, 2013, 2014]. The quantitative examination of secondary migration in Chapter VI overlaps with my field observations of secondary migration in North Hill. While cognizant of restrictions on my available data, I found states with attractive economic and welfare-specific offerings and affordable living conditions are likelier to attract refugees from other states. Also, large pockets of ethnic populations are also relevant predictors of secondary migration. Cities like Akron attract Bhutanese refugees with its mix of affordable living costs and ethnic oasis of its community. This is especially reflected in the narratives of local entrepreneurs of North Hill.

## Institutions, Agency, and Claiming of Identity

This chapter has been a story of two contrasting parts. Each part reveals unique experiences of Bhutanese refugees in North Hill. There is a group of refugees—the elderly, the illiterate and the disabled—that has experienced the marginalizing effect of refugee resettlement. They are often dependent on others for completing simple tasks and searching for their old agency to be lost in Akron. In sharp contrast, the other group of Bhutanese refugees—generally comprised of young students and middle-aged entrepreneurs—is evidently faring well in resettlement. For these individuals, resettlement is full of imperfect but sufficient promise.

Table 10 summarizes the divergent experiences presented in Chapters IV and V.

	Group 1	Group 2
Memory of Bhutan	Yes	Yes, No
(If yes) Background	Rural	Urban
Refugee Experience	Labor-based work	Educational opportunities
Social Agency in Resettlement	Dependence/Negative	Independence/Positive
Identity Response (SIT)	‘Loyalty’ (Ethnic turn)	Hybrid Identity

*Table 10: Experience and Identity*

Based on my research, Bhutanese refugees can be grouped into two rough categories. I will admit this categorization is far from perfect and takes theoretical liberties. The generalization here is based on my observations and the theoretical frameworks of past scholars like Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003). As I have argued before, past experiences are pertinent in decoding questions of identity in resettlement. Refugees who remembered their life in Bhutan,

especially their rural, farm life are more likely to hold on to an ethnic form of identity, i.e. the Bhutanese label. These individuals, given their age and illiteracy, are more likely to experience resettlement negatively, especially evident in their isolation and dependence.

I have observed that social space in resettlement allows refugees to re-capture their culture and practices that define their identities, i.e. cultural content (Barth 1969). This is also true for refugee identity, from reasserting a religious-national identity (Eastmond 1998) to recreating their old class system (Markovic and Manderson 2000). I have observed that Bhutanese refugees are similarly interested in re-creating their old sense of culture, social system, and identity. The only issue is that these can mean different things to individuals. For the Bhutanese refugees in group 1, this meant the primordial, ethnic form of Bhutanese identity; for refugees in group 2, this was likely to be a combination of Bhutanese and Nepali identities. Group 2, as is evident from Table 4, enjoys greater independence and social agency. The Nepalization of their Bhutanese identity (or, hybridization) is an expression of native ties as well as social experiences. Portes and Rumbaut (2001, 155) observed immigrant identification range along the axes of American and native identities, affected by family dynamics and social interaction. As opposed to an isolated existence of Group 1, members of Group 2 are likely to have to balance home life and ‘American’ life. It’s a balancing act:

*I think it’s going to be difficult to manage both [American and Bhutanese-Nepali culture] because my parents have certain expectations from me. Like learning about new things. From my perspective, I want to take good things from my culture and good things from the American culture. And try to balance that together. But yes it will be difficult to always hold that middle ground. Trying to balance both sides. So how do I go about doing it? I think I just have to go forward and figure it out [laughs] as I go through the process. (Interview 2).*



The critical difference here is that the refugees of Group 2 are also attempting to balance their Bhutanese and Nepali identities in resettlement instead of just reconciling their American and immigrant identities. A new life in North Hill has allowed for the possibility of conjunction of Nepali and Bhutanese roots (as I previously explained in Chapter IV, Figure 4). This fascinating complexity of Bhutanese-Nepali monikers is shared by many of my interviewees (from Group 2). They understand the complexity as well as the gravity undergirding the question of identity:

*[I identify as] Bhutanese-Nepali I guess. It is Nepalese...Probably Bhutanese-Nepali... It is a complicated issue. There's not a simple answer. Probably identify as Bhutanese-Nepali and Nepali-Bhutanese. (Interview 2).*

The distance between Bhutanese-Nepali and Nepali labels is marginal (Chapter IV, Table 1), and I have observed many individuals using these labels interchangeably.

The insistence on hyphenated labels can be interpreted in many ways. The Bhutanese part of their identity is central, whether through experience or historical narrative. Some refugees, especially those with a history of resistance in Bhutan, view their attachment to Bhutanese identity as an expression of resistance as well as of loyalty:

*We like to be called Bhutanese first. Then, the ethnic sub-sets are available. Whether it is Hindus, or Kirats, Christians, or Buddhists. We often view ourselves as a form of resistance to the Bhutanese government. I see us as Nepali-speaking Bhutanese population. (Interview 1).*

*Perhaps, the kids who born in Nepal might simply say that they are Nepalese. But I remember Bhutan. If I don't identify with Bhutan, I feel like I am not being fair to myself. I am Bhutanese-Nepali, and now even an American. (Interview 7).*

On the other hand, there is an increasing acceptance of the cultural and linguistic contribution of the Nepali identity:

*Considering our long stay in Bhutan, I identify myself as a Bhutanese-Nepali. Bhutanese because I had Bhutanese citizenship earlier but culturally, linguistically and other regards we have great similarity [or commonness] with the Nepali populations. I always like to say [I am] Bhutanese-Nepali. (Interview 5).*

*I identify myself as Bhutanese-Nepali. I have become a US citizen but I consider myself Bhutanese-Nepali. (Interview 6).*

*I say I am Bhutani-Nepali. This is because our forefathers went from Nepal to Bhutan. We lived in Bhutan but we don't know how to speak their language. We always spoke Nepali. (Interview 8).*

Some of the testimonies above raise pertinent questions of language, territory, and belonging, in relation to identity. Some of the answers further reveal their connection to another identity label, i.e. American. Ethnicity and ethnic identities, however, are often self-defined. In resettlement, group identity seems to manifest in the Bhutanese-Nepali category, at least for many individuals.

The following testimonies further reveal the muddy nature of identities and belonging:

*I [thinking hard] ... some of them call themselves Bhutanese-American. Some call themselves Nepalese-American. What I want to say is I am Bhutanese-Nepali-American. However, I have some complaints, dai [colloquially, brother]. From what I have researched, they say our forefathers originated in Paanchthar [in Nepal]. Later on, we returned there. In our original land, we existed as refugees. For instance, a person when he's born at a place, he has the right to be a citizen after some time. I was born in Nepal. My history and roots were Nepali. Right? I was born in Nepal but I had no identity there. (Interview 27).*

*We are moving forward. Bhutanese-Nepali I think the answer will be the same [i.e. a confusing area]. What can they say? Born in Bhutan, including one's fathers and grandfathers, but everything we do is Nepali. This is not something we planned, but this is how it turned out. We unexpectedly became refugees. Thikai cha. Somehow, we managed to come to America.*

(Interview 28).

Often, these responses were half-framed as questions. In using their hybrid identity labels, many individuals still appeared to be determining their identities.

Hyphenated identities have been used in the past as a political tool to guard against assimilation (Laitin 1998). For example, Russian-speaking-Estonian labels were used by the Russian minority. "When categories of identity change, the old labels are no longer relevant" (198). In the case of Bhutanese resettlement, their new identity is perhaps replacing the bureaucratic and powerless identity of refugees. From a Social Identity Theory (SIT) framework, individuals seek positive identities; this pursuit can lead to an 'exit' (Tajfel and Turner 1986). It can be argued that the act of resettlement allows for that exit from the refugee category. As I have explained some refugees prefer to stay 'loyal' to their Bhutanese history, especially given their limited agency in resettlement (Group 1). Others, given their enhanced agency in resettlement, have opted for a middle path, charting a course between Bhutanese and Nepali labels.

## **Collective Identity Management in Bhutanese-Nepali Community**

Change in group identity is often observed in a cascading manner (Laitin 1998). In other words, adoption of an identity label, like the Bhutanese-Nepali, is a function of acceptance by a significant portion of the population. An individual is likely to adopt the revised identity frame, when they observe others doing the same. From a social identity perspective, this can be viewed as a form of boundary manipulation (Barth 1969). The preferred label of post-refugee identity has shifted from a concrete ethnic category of 'Bhutanese' to a more fluid 'Bhutanese-Nepali' label. Theoretical perspectives of Barth and Jenkins are especially useful here as the content hasn't changed. Although the preferred identity labels (i.e. nominal aspects of identity) have changed, the virtual aspects (i.e. the cultural content of the group) remains the same (Jenkins 1994). There is a strong (institutional and informal willingness) within the community to keep their cultural traditions alive. It is no surprise that the gatekeepers of the North Hill community are confident users of the hybrid labels, and others seem to be following suit. Elucidation of Bhutanese Community of Akron Association (BCAA) and its work is pertinent here. Based on my analysis, BCAA helps the community maintain its virtual facets of its identity, while also attempting to manage its nominal aspects.

BCAA fits the role of a Mutual Assistance Agency (MAA), dedicated to the welfare of the resettled Bhutanese community (Nawyn 2006). As the main political organization of the Bhutanese refugee community in Akron, the organization works toward making the transition from camps to Akron easier. BCAA is primarily known for hosting community-based events: its annual cultural festival, elder picnics, sports-related events, and citizenship classes (Field note 9/28/2016). In addition to serving as the cultural and political representation of the community, BCAA works towards finding solutions to persistent problems of the community:

*We identify [the problems] to tackle in the community. And the way the Nepali community works is that we already know each other well and know everything that's going on. What is going on, where it's happening. We know everything. That's why we are aware of these things. Sometimes people even come to us [with their problems]. (Interview 7).*

Based on my field conversations and interviews, BCAA has been active in mobilizing appropriate solutions to emergent problems. This includes emergency fundraising to delay eviction to raising awareness on mental health (Field note 10/21/2016).

Based on my analysis, BCAA provides a formal structure to the communal living and problem-solving of Bhutanese life in refugee camps. The community is especially sensitive to helping each other, and BCAA seems to make that process a little easier:

*Within the community, if someone passes away, the whole community works together and raises money for funeral. I still see that. But maybe in the camp they were so close all the time where they would jump and come to help all the time. Here, you have to call. But people do come to help. Help with funeral and family matters. (Interview 2).*

*When we came here in 2008, there were many challenges. We realized that individually we couldn't do anything [or change anything]. Being organized – for example, eviction; one person got an eviction notice; what will he do? He doesn't have enough money to pay; so what do we need for cases like these – so we have to get organized. (Interview 7).*

Some of my interviewees had served or were serving as founding members, consultants or officers of BCAA.<sup>106</sup> Although affiliation with BCAA comes with some degree of authority,

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<sup>106</sup> BCAA officers are elected on a regular basis. The overlap between my interviewees and BCAA-related individuals wasn't planned, but it underlines these individuals' leadership roles in the community.

these individuals' leadership was informal, and they remained in intimate communication with the rest of the community.

The rise of BCAA profile coincides with the community's increasing independence from local institutions like IIA. As refugees become more confident and self-reliant with time, (Rumbaut 1989; Shaw and Poulin 2015), I imagine their dependence on local organizations like IIA subsequently recedes. Much of IIA's resettlement-centered work is largely directed to newcomers, assisting them in their initial placement and training. The Bhutanese-Nepali network in North Hill is evidently establishing its own networks; this includes internal recruitment for employment (Field note 07/24/2018), or informal engagement with BCAA (Interviews 1, 7). It is likely that many secondary migrants coming to Akron approach BCAA as well as IIA looking for help. Organizations like IIA are restricted in assisting these secondary migrants (Bloem and Loveridge 2017; Interview 30; Simich et al. 2005).

Hence, it is interesting albeit not surprising to note that BCAA is starting to step into IIA's toes. The relationship between BCAA and IIA has evidently deteriorated over time, as expressed by an IIA Director:

*It's always been a difficult relationship I would say. I heard rumors that they're [BCAA] not fans of IIA. Because there have been [competition for] funding opportunities for whatever reason...I can't define what all of those issues are...So it's difficult. And we understand. We've gone to them. They say "we are busy; we are volunteers." But I think the general consensus is that they're that way with everyone. I think they have higher expectations of us [in providing them assistance] than we are able to provide. But I think there's definitely a rift there. (Interview 30).*

Based on my observations, there is no active conflict between BCAA and IIA. Instead, collaboration between the two organizations has become challenging over time as their roles

have shifted. IIA was helpful in BCAA's initial years; however, IIA's organizational mandate has remained the same, even though BCAA's role has grown with time. While BCAA may view itself as the more appropriate representative of the Bhutanese community, it lacks the professional structure and funding of IIA. As articulated in the excerpt above, the BCAA officers are volunteers who have to balance BCAA duties with their personal and professional lives. According to one of my expert interviewees, leadership at BCAA can be challenging and time-constraining. Every successive BCAA leadership has reportedly struggled:

*They [BCAA leadership] were constantly talking about the things what they should be doing for the community, falling woefully short due to time. My current impression is that they've just kind of given up. They don't have the energy or the interest or the drive it takes to become a community citizen. (Interview 4).*

The expert interviewee's complaint is largely based on the civic ambition of BCAA leadership that has waned over the years. According to this interviewee, BCAA should be more involved in civic matters of North Hill, ranging from education to intellectual fields. They view BCAA's current role has been predominantly occupied with helping community perform religious celebrations.

Currently, BCAA seems to have adopted a 'continue what we do well' mindset:

*BCAA has offered citizenship and language classes over the years, pretty consistently. Those have been areas where they could provide self-help. The instructors came from within the community. More educated people would teach the others. And the annual festival. (Interview 4).*

Toward the end of my fieldwork, I came across several complaints of BCAA from Bhutanese-Nepali community members, ranging from a lack of support for local arts (Interview 27) to the

recent failure to host its annual cultural event (Field note 07/12/2018). The general consensus on BCAA is that its organizational ambition is waning with each passing year. Overall, BCAA is a Janus-faced emblem of the Bhutanese-Nepali community: it represents the confident rise of Bhutanese-Nepali community but is also limited in its scope under the rigors of resettlement.

Irrespective of its current functions, BCAA continues to play a significant role within and for the community. Like IIA, it is an institutional medium between the Bhutanese-Nepali (and arguable the larger refugee population) and the rest of North Hill. For instance, in its annual celebration, BCAA would invite other immigrant groups—Hmong, Karen, and Mexican communities—as well as Knight Foundation representative and mayor of Akron (Field note 9/28/2016). In the context of the Bhutanese-Nepali community, BCAA has set a precedent of ethnic-religious organization and mobilization. Taking a cue from BCAA and through its guidance, caste-based (Gurung, Kiraat, and Tamang societies among others) and religious (Hindu and Buddhist) groups now organize cultural functions and celebration of festivals:

*Presently, we [BCAA] have an office ... Other religious groups or sub-committees, like peace zone sporting clubs, other cultural groups under BCAA, they use the office. (Interview 7).*

This religious and ethnic mobilization, to the discomfort of Interviewee 4, is evident within the community. I have heard that some members in the community are actively raising funds to build a Hindu community for the population (Field note 10/13/2018). On separate occasions, I have been invited to join Hindu and Gurung organizations of the community. Based on my analysis, what some experts (like Interviewee 4) view as ‘religious’ is better understood through a cultural prism. Bhutanese-Nepali community members are trying to re-create their cultural heritage (which is undergirded by religious practices). Cultural expression has often served as political rhetoric for Bhutanese refugees (Evans 2010b). The Bhutanese-Nepali community



therefore, displays a dynamic cultural agency. The Bhutanese-Nepali community has brought with itself its own form of social organization—the caste-based system. This system resembles the Nepali caste system, where the caste represents an individual’s ethnic identifier. Casteism is a hierarchical Hindu system that divided families based on their historical profession and subsequent social status, as roughly articulated in Figure 10.

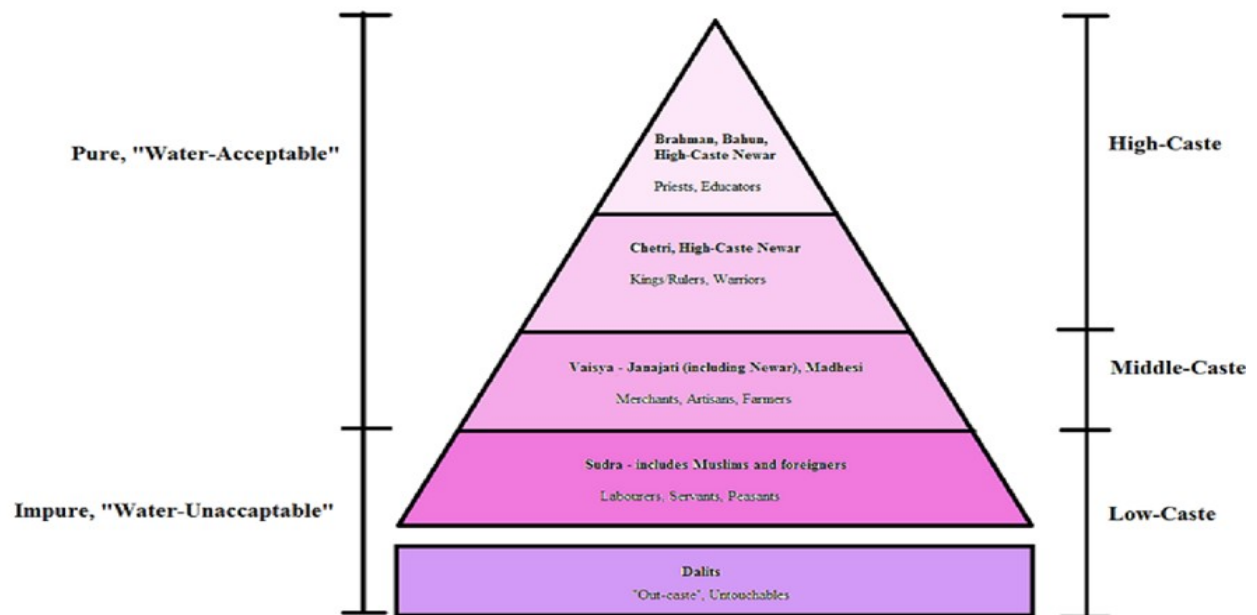


Figure 10: Nepali Caste Hierarchy (Source: Diana Simpson)

Embedded within the larger Bhutanese-Nepali identity, are these caste-based narratives. Like BCAA, these castes have their own sub-organizations dedicated to cultural and religious celebration. While most want to preserve this way of life, some have reportedly shunned or transformed their castes:

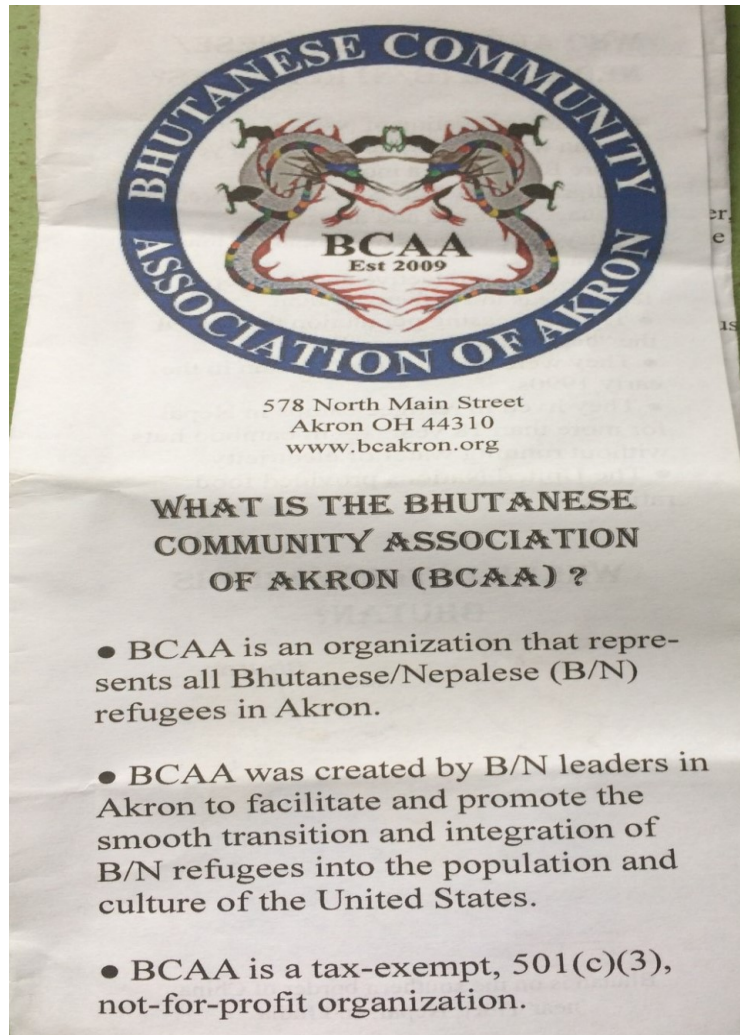
*He [the business partner] actually changed his last name so he wouldn't be identified by his last name as Brahman. That seems to be the trend among the younger and more affluent Brahmins in the community that they don't want to be associated with the past. (Interview 3).*

*Before my last name was 'Biswa' but when I got the citizenship, I changed my last name. In August. 'Biswa' was common, so I wanted to change the name. (Interview 9).*

*In my view, the caste-ism wasn't in our religious edicts. It was added afterwards. We have adopted that in our mentality. Many things are missing in our history. Are you Hindu? I think there are similarities in our religions. But I think there's confusion in our history and source of these religions. (Interview 11).*

Here, the case of interviewee 9 is particularly interesting because it is an exception. Irrespective of their identity labels (i.e. nominal identity), most Bhutanese-Nepali prefer to sustain their culture (i.e. virtual identity). When fitted into a social identity perspective, the Bhutanese-Nepali population continues to find positive affiliation with the content of their identity. Continuation of their ethnic identity also affords them a sense of continuation of identities even in resettlement (Jetten and Hutchison 2011; Sani et al. 2008). The outlier in this case are people who have been repressed by the caste system. Interviewee 9 originally represented the *Dalit* caste, placed bottom in the caste-based Hindu hierarchy as reflected in Figure 4. *Dalits* are so marginalized that they're considered 'untouchable' by the members of the higher castes. In the face of such marginalization, the family of Interviewee 9 converted to Christianity in Nepal. In resettlement, they changed their surname (an indicator of their ethnic identity) to start afresh; they have been invested in their religious faith and were actively involved in the Akron's church scene. From my vantage point, resettlement provided them space to continue their cultural and religious way of life; it just happened to be divergent from the rest of the Bhutanese-Nepali way of life. Sub-Bhutanese ethnic groups, therefore, tend to find solace within their respective groups (Field note 10/12/2016).

In addition to the management of virtual facets of identity, I came across BCAA's attempts at managing the community's nominal identity as well, i.e. BCAA defines the community as Bhutanese-Nepali. I first came across this at BCAA's annual celebration in August of 2016. This was a cultural event showcasing music, dances, and food from various Bhutanese castes. BCAA further invited immigrant communities—from Hmong to Mexican groups—to celebrate with them. Alongside, Bhutanese refugees, representatives of local NGOs and politicians were in the audience. During this event, BCAA handed out brochures articulating the origins of their refugee experience and described themselves as 'Bhutanese/Nepali', visible in Figure 11:



*Figure 11: BCAA Brochure*<sup>107</sup>

I found this to be interesting for a number of reasons. BCAA's status and influence within the community is evident. Therefore, its use of the hybrid category could have a formalizing effect for the community as well as outsiders, especially where internal dissension over its identity exists. I don't know if BCAA used this category deliberately or if it was happenstance.

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<sup>107</sup> A more revealing picture of the brochure containing the self-description of BCAA is provided in the Appendix D.

Personally, I lean toward the former explanation. At least one BCAA-affiliated interviewee wasn't happy with this development:

*I don't like that. You are no longer Bhutanese. You have to be loyal to this country [the USA]. Why should you talk about someone else? That's how I feel. You are already disconnected with that government. You don't have a relation now. You have to respect that. If you had an [official] attachment with Bhutan it would make sense. I don't think you have any right to talk about that. You're American [citizen] now. You have given up that loyalty [to Bhutan] now.*  
(Interview 7).

It is possible that BCAA viewed the use of Bhutanese-Nepali labels as an act of defiance against the Bhutanese government. Many members of the Bhutanese-Nepali community remain angry at the Bhutanese government. Part of the Bhutanese-Nepali population has been active in creating and distributing music and documentaries cataloguing their displacement and suffering (Field note 10/12/2016). I also came across a few blog entries critical of Bhutanese government on the BCAA website.<sup>108</sup> The following is a representative excerpt:

The palace [Bhutanese government] and its defenders should soon realize the present political state of South Asia and step forward to compromise with opposition political factors keeping aside the bargaining, concentrating to solve the subsequent stalemate of refugee issue. Thimphu shouldn't be mourning or dancing in a joy while refugees in Nepal are choosing to go abroad for resettlement because that only was their last left option for now.

Entries like these are critical of the political society of Bhutan citing historical grievances; these entries often justify resettlement as the only feasible option refugees could have chosen.

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<sup>108</sup> BCAA has revamped its website and it's now harder to access BCAA's old website and these blog entries.

Therefore, there's still animosity left in the refugee camp that often bubbles up to the surface. At least in the past, BCAA helped amplify these voices of dissent.

As I have observed during my field research, there is a disagreement on self-representation within the community. However, there seems to be an increasing and informal acceptance of Bhutanese-Nepali hybrid categorization. There may be disagreement on the identity labels and how they might represent the community, the community itself appears to be united in celebrating and sustaining its culture in various forms.

## Chapter Conclusion

*“[Resettlement is] ... as if the whole refugee camp was transported to Akron. There are good things here. Also, bad things.”* (Field note 02/03/2016).

This quote is emblematic of the Bhutanese-Nepali resettlement in Akron. In this chapter, I have articulated resettlement translates into unequal experience for the refugees. Many of the elderly or ailing community members have found resettlement to be exacting, challenging their social role and agency in their family and community life. They’re often dependent on the younger generation for everyday tasks, underlining their diurnal vulnerability in resettlement. In contrast, the younger generation is better-suited to a life in resettlement. Language skills, education, and cultural versatility makes life in resettlement promising for them. Yet, access to proper institutions and information remains a challenge for them.

This divergence of experiences—in the past and the present—lends some explanatory power to the emergence of the Bhutanese-Nepali hybrid labels. On deeper investigation, the difference in identity preferences (i.e. nominal identity) appears to mask the unanimous desire to sustain their cultural way of life (i.e. virtual identity). The story of Bhutanese-Nepali community in Akron is interlinked with their history and refugee experience. While the impact of resettlement on their lives is substantial, it hasn’t entirely detached them from their way of life, and they continue to work hard on sustaining that indelible connection.

## CHAPTER VI

### STATISTICAL FINDINGS:

#### SECONDARY MIGRATION OF REFUGEES IN THE US

There are three durable solutions to the global refugee crisis: repatriation, reintegration, and resettlement [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2018]. Among these solutions, refugee resettlement is often seen as the ‘last resort’ (Ott 2011, 4). Refugees generally prefer the option of a safe return home (voluntary repatriation), and in some cases, absorption into the host society (reintegration) (Adelman 2001; Chimni 1998; Van Hear 2011, 2014). The choice of resettlement—when countries offer it to refugees—is realistically understood as the last of the durable solutions. “Resettlement is more expensive [for host states] ... and requires greater cultural adjustment on the part of the refugees” (Jenkins and Schmeidl 1995, 71). A minority of (generally affluent) countries offer resettlement to refugees.<sup>109</sup> About one percent of the global refugee population is resettled.<sup>110</sup> In offering resettlement to refugees fearing their safety and protracted stay in camps (Singer and Wilson 2006), resettlement is situated on a humanitarian pedestal (Betts and Loescher 2011). From a critical point of view, states entertain foreign policy and economic considerations in offering resettlement to refugee groups (Chimni 1998; Hein 1993). While grounded in humanitarianism, resettlement is more of a trade-off. For refugees, resettlement brings stressful expectations—the economic self-sufficiency rule (Gold 1988; Hein 1993; Rumbaut 1989; Singer and Wilson 2006)—while also

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<sup>109</sup> The number of countries offering resettlement has grown from 14 in 2005 to 37 in 2016. Traditional host countries like the US, however, generally absorb majority of the ‘burden’ of incoming refugee populations. For more information:

<https://www.unhcr.org/information-on-unhcr-resettlement.html>

<sup>110</sup> The current estimate is less than one percent, considering the drastic reduction of resettled refugees recently. Number of refugees resettled dropped by 50 percent between 2016 and 2017. For more information: <https://www.unhcr.org/resettlement-in-the-united-states.html>



providing self-affirming experience of becoming legal citizens (Rumbaut 1994). However, for refugees, resettlement is not always a conclusive phase of migration; for many, this could simply be part of their overall migration (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011). Secondary migration is “the voluntary movement of migrants or refugees within their receiving country away from the community which they originally resided” (UNHCR 2011). Here, my research question is: why do resettled refugees opt to undertake secondary migration in resettlement?

In line with recent (yet disparate) case studies on refugees, my work is invested in gauging the effect of resettlement on the refugee community. In this context, secondary migration is an interesting phenomenon of refugee agency. Theoretically, secondary migration is important because it “challenges the basic framework of resettlement as a ‘stationary solution’” (Ott 2011, 1). Even after their relocation to the US, refugee groups have been observed to re-migrate from one US state to another (Barkdull et al. 2012; Bloem and Loveridge 2017; Desbarats 1985, 1986; Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Ott 2011).

Although the overall picture of resettlement is largely synonymous with permanence and stability, this picture is often far from reality. As evident from my field observations (mostly presented in Chapter V), resettlement presents a myriad of challenges to incoming refugees, especially for individuals with low levels of human capital and social adaptability. Economic opportunity and social agency (or, social role) of refugees are inter-connected, and difficulty in fulfilling either one can possibly lead to dissatisfaction with life in resettlement. In inquiring about immigrant assimilation and integration, immigrant scholarship is mostly invested in measuring the impact of immigrants on the host society (Borjas 1989, 1999). According to data in the 2012 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, 11,143 refugees participated in secondary migration in the 2010 fiscal year ; similarly, 5.7 percent of refugees reportedly moved

away from their initial resettlement location in the 2011 fiscal year (GAO 2012, 21). Secondary immigration of refugees is not necessarily new. In the past, the US witnessed secondary migration of the Indochinese population in the west (Desbarats 1985), and of Cubans in the Miami area (Portes and Mozo 1985) despite government efforts to dissuade secondary migration. Although the US prefers to disperse incoming refugee populations across US states (Barkdull et al. 2012; Ott 2011; Singer and Wilson 2006), secondary migration continues to take place among refugee groups. This chapter presents my attempt to create a broad picture of refugee behavior as a response to the structure and demands of resettlement in the US. As I have articulated in Chapters IV and V, resettlement comes with stressful pressures to survive. Based on my analysis, secondary migration is a response to the structure of resettlement, making use of unequal opportunities and resources present within the US.

In answering the research question, available data and case studies point to the usual economic and network-based considerations: economic opportunity, quality of host societies' reception and their institutional services, and ethno-cultural proximity (Bloem and Loveridge 2017; Fix et al. 2017; Kingsbury et al. 2018; Nawyn 2006, 2010; Ott 2011). Applicability of these drivers is likely to vary from one host site and refugee case to another, as resettlement in the US is decentralized and is largely driven by state and local institutions (Barkdull et al. 2012; Fix et al. 2017; Ott 2011). Although secondary migration has been observed and discussed in many policy-based research documents, to my knowledge there hasn't been a substantive investigation into the subject. In this chapter, I attempt to find some answers, borrowing inferences from my field research. I have developed my dissertation to amplify refugee identities and agency in resettlement. With my interview and observational data serving as research markers, I examine secondary migration as an expression of refugee agency. From a

rational perspective, this chapter should serve to identify and elaborate on the specific needs that refugees find salient, and perhaps make the theoretical split between refugees and immigrants a bit more explicit.

North Hill, my field site, serves as a unique oasis of economic opportunities—from the availability of labor-based jobs at local factories to entrepreneurial ventures to affordable housing—and a flourishing ethnic and social network of refugees, which is dominated by the Bhutanese population.<sup>111</sup> North Hill reportedly houses a smaller Bhutanese community in comparison to Columbus and Philadelphia; these locations combine as the top three Bhutanese refugee settlement sites that attract secondary migration. The aforesaid confluence of factors has noticeably attracted Bhutanese refugees to North Hill from other states, including many of my interviewees who came from states as far away as Texas and New Hampshire. Secondary migration of Bhutanese refugees into Akron is widely acknowledged but the reasons behind it aren't precisely understood. Secondary migration, especially in a relatively small neighborhood like North Hill, reportedly has significant implications on welfare disbursement, local economics, quality of life, and overall adaptational experiences (Interview 30). In other words, secondary migration can lead to positive change as well as negative circumstances (Bardull et al. 2012; Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011). Although the pattern of secondary migration has been identified, especially since the Indochinese exodus to western states in the 1980's (Desbarats 1985, 1986), secondary migration “is widely neglected by the academic community” (Ott 2011, 8). In fairness, lack of reliable data on secondary migration makes statistical analyses difficult. “The PRM [Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration] does not track secondary migration because it is ‘not part of their mandate’” (35). Furthermore, the Office of Refugee

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<sup>111</sup> Other visible refugee groups include Karen, Congolese, and Iraqi communities.

Resettlement (ORR) attempts to report secondary migration but there's a lag between its reporting and development of new secondary migration trends (*Human Rights Institute* 2009, 35-36).

My overall research is a socio-political interpretation of refugee life, and the examination of secondary migration offers a holistic look into their post-resettlement agency. This is especially relevant considering the stereotypical perception of refugees as helpless victims or welfare abusers (Ludwig 2016, 6). Compared to other immigrant groups, refugees are especially sensitive to the host state's rules and expectations (Hein 1993); as I alluded to in the first paragraph, resettlement is the last resort for many refugees. In resettlement, US sets the federal, state, and local parameters for refugee life at least initially (Ott 2011, 4-5). The initial placement of incoming refugee population takes place in consultation with the nine US voluntary agencies (volags).<sup>112</sup> Then, the refugee population is dispersed throughout the US.<sup>113</sup> This nation-wide distribution is perhaps an attempt to discourage the formation of past ethnic enclaves, like the ones formed by Chinese and Koreans in California and Cubans in Miami (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006). This decentralized distribution of refugees assumes refugees would opt for a 'sedentary settlement' (Ott 2011, 5). In other words, US institutions expect refugee families to stay and grow at their initial site of resettlement.

Secondary migration arguably represents the pull of ethnic networks that appear to be far superior to the aforesaid state expectations. "Secondary migration challenges the basic

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<sup>112</sup> There are nine VOLAGs: Church World Service (CWS), Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC), Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), International Rescue Committee (IRC), US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and World Relief Corporation (WR). USCRI is responsible for refugee resettlement in Akron.

<sup>113</sup> Wyoming is the only US state that does not participate in the resettlement program. On the other hand, Washington DC receives refugees, albeit a small number.

framework of resettlement as a ‘sedentary’ solution...This counters the conceptualization of refugees as passive, helpless actors who would be content in any community” (Ott 2011, 5). In following this line of research, I view secondary migration as an imperfect negotiation between the host state’s structure and the agency of refugees. In addition to capturing this agency, secondary migration raises the question over refugee integration as well as US actions on refugee resettlement. Refugees aren’t allowed to choose their destination for resettlement (UNHCR 2018). While the US expectation of self-sufficiency (i.e. immediate employment and welfare independence) is universally applied to every refugee family, the requisite local support and training services vary from one state to another, leading to the inequality of refugee experiences (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011).

Third-country refugee resettlement is actively undercut by the current US administration through exhaustive pre-arrival vetting (Robbins and Jordan 2018) and subsequent reduction of resettlement-based agencies and manpower (Rosenberg 2018).<sup>114</sup> Such nativist attitude toward immigration, while distressing, is far from novel (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006; Zolberg 2006). The current political context, therefore, makes the scholarly inquiry of resettlement especially salient and consequential. This chapter, in investigating secondary migration, continues my overall examination of refugee opportunity and agency in resettlement. Moreover, it magnifies the imperfect nature of structure of resettlement. Given the lack of precise data and relative scarcity of scholarship on the subject, the theoretical and empirical implications of my project are more exploratory than deterministic. However, I view my research as an initial step toward a future of rigorous investigation of both refugee agency and resettlement.

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<sup>114</sup> Toward the conclusion of my fieldwork, I witnessed the negative transformational impact of the US government’s policies against resettlement. In addition to making resettlement less likely for refugees abroad, these restrictive policies led to inevitable layoffs and institutional overhaul among the local agencies.

## **Pertinent Scholarship and Hypotheses**

My investigation meets at the interdisciplinary intersection of US immigration and refugee adaptation-based scholarship. Immigration research pertinent to this work is largely invested in how immigration and immigrants affect the host society (Borjas 1989, 1999; Hanson 2005; Hawes and McCrea 2017; Hero and Preuhs 2007; Potocky and McDonald 1995; Potocky-Tripodi 2001, 2003; Singer and Wilson 2006). Many of these investigations are affiliated with the economic productivity of immigrants or their connection with state welfare. On the other hand, the latter is largely composed of disparate case studies featuring various immigrant or refugee groups and their adaptation in the host society (Allen 2009; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003; Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Gold 1988, 1992; Hardwick and Hume 2006; Hein 1993; Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Malkki 1992, 1995a, 1995b; Markovic and Manderson 2000; Nawyn 2006, 2010; Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006; Portes and Stepick 1985; Rumbaut 1989, 1994, 1997). On its own, each scholarship boasts its advantages and limitations: the immigration scholarship is theoretically united and generalizable but often lacks the context that is richly available within the case studies. Therefore, I borrow from both schools of thought in pursuing my research question.

## **The Economic Context of Refugee Resettlement**

Refugees, as forced migrants, lay on the periphery of the theoretical space of immigrants, i.e. refugees are often lumped into the broader category of immigrants in the US (Rumbaut 1997). Here, a theoretical distinction between refugees and immigrants is warranted.

Immigration in the US has historically been a political instrument of inclusion and exclusion (Zolberg 2006), and these motivations are salient in the context of refugee resettlement as well.

According to Singer and Wilson (2006):

The Department of Homeland Security determines who is eligible to be admitted to the United States. The Department of State manages the overseas processing, transportation, and the funds for initial reception and placement. The State Department's Reception and Placement Program—through contracts with voluntary agencies—provides immediate services to refugees during their first month (18).

As stated earlier, resettled refugees fall into three cases, Priority One (P1), refugees in imminent danger; Priority Two (P2), refugees of special humanitarian concern; and Priority Three (P3), close family members of resettled refugees (Singer and Wilson 2006, 4). Humanitarianism is an important facet of resettlement, but there are other political deliberations to resettlement, such as domestic policy and fiscal responsibility (Hein 1993, 48), as well as international security and migration fears (Betts 2010, 2011, 50; Thielemann 2012, 27). With the passage of the 1980 Refugee Act, the legal basis of refugee admissions became standardized. This Act eliminated the geographical (Europe and the Middle East) and ideological (anti-Communist) grounds for granting refugee status. Actual practice of refugee admission, however, arguably remains linked to political motivations. In 1993, the overwhelming majority of US resettlement spots for refugees from abroad still went to people from the former Soviet bloc and Indochina, relatively

few of whom would meet the international standard for a claim of international protection (Newland 1995). Recently, Bhutanese, Burmese, and Iraqi groups have become the largest refugee populations (ORR 2012-2016). The Bhutanese and the Burmese are rumored to be brought in (after a protracted stay at refugee camps) due to their docile, non-complaining nature, i.e. they're "nice and quiet" (Field notes 11/3/2016). The influx of Iraqi refugees is likely connected to the US intervention of intervention and its political aftermath in that country.

Understanding the political place of refugees is related to absorbing the difference between refugees and immigrants. There are important distinctions between refugees and (economic) migrants. "Immigrants constitute an economic form of migration, refugees a political form" (Hein 1993, 44). Unlike the case of European states, refugees can only arrive in the US following an extensive application and vetting process.<sup>115</sup> At least initially, refugees enter resettlement as migrants requiring protection and legal identities. Unlike other immigrants, a host society like the US provides resettled refugees with privileges and protections associated with citizenship. This includes a fast-track work permit, permanent residency, naturalized citizenship (in most cases), and resettlement-specific welfare over time (Hein 1993; Field note 04/25/2017).<sup>116</sup> The identity-migration nexus is a complex subject, but Rumbaut (1994, 757) notes that obtaining permanent residency and citizenship (symbols of legal-national identity) has a positive effect on immigrants. If the bureaucratic identity of refugee comes with negative connotations and a sense of helplessness (Zetter 1991), life in resettlement re-introduces myriad

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<sup>115</sup> The similarity between European states and the US would be Central American immigrants arriving at US borders and applying for political asylum. Often, immigrants in the US (on a student or business visa) can apply for political asylum, citing fear of persecution in their country.

<sup>116</sup> According to my interview data, it is easier or faster to obtain residency or citizenship in some states than others. For instance, the process is faster in Ohio compared to states like New York. This inference is based on interviews as well as my own experience.



privileges of citizen life. It is pertinent to note these provisions and privileges are generally not afforded to economic migrants, at least not initially.

This intimate relationship between refugees and the host state also has some less than ideal consequences for refugees. Jeremy Hein (1993) provides perhaps the most authoritative work on the state-refugee link. According to him, “[T]he state’s unique relationship with refugees is a subset of its larger function of reproducing the social order” (54). Here, refugees are distinct from immigrants because the state is responsible for their social organization and welfare. This means the US government considers demographic conditions of the receiving locality, the availability of jobs, and the welfare available in each state for the refugee populations. It is fair to claim that the US expects the economic assimilation of refugees at these initial placement sites (Ott 2011). Put differently, there is some level of strategic consideration from the US in sending refugee families to certain areas or states.

In resettling refugees, the US model is based on the volume of refugees and an emphasis on economic adaptation (Lanphier 1983, 4). US resettlement policy actively pushes refugees toward paying their economic ‘dues.’ From the moment refugees board the plane for resettlement, they are formally in debt to International Organization of Migration (IOM) for the cost of their plane tickets (Bloem and Loveridge 2017, 26). Similarly, the economic expectation of the US is “for refugees to achieve economic self-sufficiency as soon as possible” (Nawyn 2006, 1520). This translates into refugees having to start paying their rent within six months. Refugee families get cash assistance for the first eight months, a provision that has been shortened from the original period of 36 months (Ott 2011, 5).<sup>117</sup> This expectation of self-

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<sup>117</sup> As refugees move forward to applying for permanent residence and citizenship, they can become eligible for other forms of welfare.

sufficiency is the driving force of resettlement as far as the US is concerned; it's a priority for the government with no exceptions. The resettlement of Bhutanese refugees in the US began in 2008, at the peak of global financial crisis:

*So...when we came here in 2009 the economy was so bad. People were having a hard time finding jobs. When you come to the US you have to pay for all the airfare and all that back. It's not free. At first, they (IIA or the state) help you pay you rent and food for a month or so. But they don't give you food stamps for about a year. It was very hard. My dad couldn't find a job right away but slowly he could find a job. (Interview 2).*

*First year was quite difficult. It was a struggle. My father was the only one working. And all of it would be gone paying the bills here and there. So we had to sacrifice in almost everything. It was like Nepal. In Nepal, there was actual scarcity. Even if we wanted to eat something nice, we couldn't get it. There was that sacrifice. Even here, after one year, or a year and half, it was like that. It was just not enough. (Interview 27).*

These narratives serve to highlight the immediate economic pressure faced by refugees, as well as to reveal the imperfect yet real picture of resettlement experiences. In sum, “[t]he U.S. resettlement program emphasizes getting refugees in jobs as fast as possible” (Kapps et al. 2015, 6). In North Hill, an important reason for the success of its refugee communities has been the labor vacuum they have been able to fill. In deciding the initial placement for refugees, the US considers among various factors, including the availability of local employment for the refugees (GAO 2012), presumably nudging refugees toward self-sufficiency. It is well-known that immigrants, and especially refugees, start at the bottom of the economic ladder (Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Portes and Stepick 1985). “When immigrants arrive in the host country, they lack many of the skills that are valuable in host country (e.g., language, knowledge about the

location of jobs, etc.)” (Borjas 1989, 472). When comparing 2009-2011 income, refugee median income was \$42,000, i.e. \$3,000 below immigrant median income and \$8,000 below US-born income (Kapps et al. 2015, 21). Refugee groups, on average, live in poorer neighborhoods where they’re initially placed (Connor 2010, 383-84). However, in comparison to immigrants, refugees are more likely to receive food stamps, cash welfare, and public health insurance (Kapps et al. 2015, 25).<sup>118</sup>

This initial economic handicap faced by refugees is a function of the structure of resettlement. Although refugees’ economic performance improves with time (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Rumbaut 1989), it generally takes five to six years for the refugee economic situation to reach parity with their US-born counterparts (Shaw and Poulin 2015, 1100). From a refugee perspective, the initial economic pressure steers them into manual labor jobs. Third-country resettlement is predominantly rooted in developed societies, but most refugees are forced to ply their capital in labor centric, often underqualified jobs (Gold 1988, 1992). A low percent of refugees are employed in the skilled job sector (Connor 2010). This can be attributed to the refugees’ lack of requisite language skills or US-centered training (Nawyn et al. 2012), and consequently their inability to access or compete in the mainstream US economy (Gold 1988, 1992).

Therefore, a notable consequence of the economic expectation of resettlement is the capital-labor mismatch. The availability of local blue-collar jobs is crucial for refugees, as is the case in Akron, but it can be difficult for educated and qualified refugees to gain economic traction and mobility in ‘mainstream’ society. In the urgency of attaining economic self-

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<sup>118</sup> This statement, while accurate, requires some context. Provision of welfare for refugees is part of the initial resettlement process, and many refugees as I have found, require a range of medical facilities given their traumatic past and age.

sufficiency (and survival), many refugees are forced to compromise on their professional aspirations. The more refugees become aware of the US structure and opportunities, the more they are prepared to adapt to their economic reality. Facing economic dead-ends, immigrants often turn inward to their community to move forward. An economic enclave is the quintessential illustration of immigrants circumventing the US economy for their economic mobility (Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Portes and Stepick 1985). Enclaves refer to ethnic networks that establish a micro-economy primarily run by and for the immigrant community:

Enclaves are formed by clusters of immigrant-owned enterprises which tend to hire recent arrivals from the same nationality. Although similar in outward appearance to other small firms, they possess certain characteristics which open significant mobility opportunities for immigrant workers (Portes and Stepick 1985, 499).

Refugee populations in Akron, especially the Bhutanese community, exhibit similar signs. The Bhutanese community is far from becoming an enclave like the Chinese or Cuban cases, but it is like an ethnic oasis, providing economic and cultural offerings unique to the neighborhood of North Hill.

In an enclave economy, necessary prerequisites for employment are tied to one's ethnic network and identity; Gold (1992) succinctly captures ethnic enclave as a symbolic relationship between ethnic business and ethnic community (169). Once the migrant population reaches a critical threshold, "the expansion of networks reduces the costs and risks of movement, which causes the probability of migration to rise, which causes additional movement, which further expands the networks, and so on" (Massey et al. 1993, 448-449). Ethnic entrepreneurship is often supplemented by income from other jobs and supported by family or community-based capital investment (Field note 10/12/2016). It is quite common to see these businesses utilize

(some would argue, exploit) cheap or free labor from their family members (Gold 1992). Economic enclaves therefore, are an alternative path to economic success, especially when one lacks adequate human capital (Gold 1988, 1992; Portes and Rumbaut 2006). However, in the case of Akron, most of these entrepreneurs represent the upper crust of their ethnic networks. In assessing refugee resettlement, illustrations of entrepreneurship are viewed as distinctive traits of refugee imagination and success (Singer and Wilson 2006). Common examples of ethnic businesses include ethnic enterprises like grocery stores and restaurants.<sup>119</sup> As refugees find themselves struggling in the US economy, they're likely to start a business catering to their ethnic population (Gold 1992). Here, "refugees do a stint of worst jobs available, but move into self-employment through the support of preexisting ethnic networks" (Portes and Stepick 1985, 494). Some refugee groups like Jews, and some subsets of Vietnamese and Chinese populations boasted cultural and historical knowledge of business; on the other hand, newer refugee groups (like the Bhutanese) who have had no prior business experience open businesses in large numbers in the hope of upward mobility (Gold 1992, 172). In the case of Bhutanese businesses opening in North Hill, I observed the motivation behind these businesses to be part cultural and part economic. Scholarship shows that although refugees participate in the economic sphere, they tend to resist cultural assimilation (Barkdull et al. 2012; Adamson 2012). Many new business owners replicate the same ethnic business model, competing with one another in the process (Field note 9/28/2016). The most successful business model was that of the grocery store, and this was partly because refugee families used Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT), or food stamps to purchase their food items.

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<sup>119</sup> The Bhutanese entrepreneurial scene in North Hill included 9 business ventures (in 2016), with 4 grocery stores and 1 restaurant (Chapter 5). Immigrant businesses prefer to stay within or close to immigrant populations, the only exception being the restaurant business.

The economic behavior of refugees in resettlement, therefore, is best viewed as a form of adaptation to state structures and expectations. While the US, through its rules and institutions, sets the economic expectation, refugees tend to work within the system and perhaps around it. Diffusion of refugees in resettlement is designed to inhibit their economic ties, as well as the formation of enclaves (Hein 1993, 54). Whether it is the formation of ethnic enclaves or undertaking of secondary migration, successful refugee resettlement is a complex story of struggle and ingenuity. Immigrant scholars like Borjas (1989, 1999) claim that net long-term effect of immigration is (only) marginally positive for the US economy. In the assessment of refugee impact in the US, I find focusing on the local level is likely to lead to a more accurate picture.

As I noted in Chapter V, the influx of Bhutanese refugees has led to a positive effect for the local economy in Akron. In addition to the opening of new businesses and rising home ownership (as well as rental value), the refugee advent has overseen an increase of \$207 million in the local housing market (*New American Economy* 2016). It is imprudent to assume all refugee communities will inevitably work toward the establishment of enclaves. Refugee communities vary from one group to another. In contrast to entrepreneurial success stories, many groups largely see entrepreneurship as a placeholder until a more lucrative professional opportunity is available (Gold 1992; Rumbaut 1989); similarly, other refugee populations (compared to the Bhutanese) are far less active in Akron's entrepreneurial scene. Due to the structural expectations of resettlement as well as the ambition of the refugees, human capital will remain an important factor in their decision-making, like undertaking secondary migration to a new location.

I argue that the refugee decision to undertake secondary migration is a function of resettlement. Refugees and immigrants are often viewed as a monolithic entity (Hein 1993) and are afforded little nuanced consideration for their behavior. In the context of resettlement, refugees are faced with a wide variety of state-based opportunity structure and services (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Nawyn 2006, 2010), but the expectation for the refugees to attain economic self-sufficiency remains constant (Rumbaut 1989; Singer and Wilson 2006). Secondary migration, therefore, is a natural response to the economic pressures of the structure of refugee resettlement in the US.

*H1(a): States with better economic opportunities will attract higher levels of secondary migration.*

My empirical analysis will also examine measures of self-sufficiency in undertaking secondary migration. For refugees, attraction of various economic factors is a given; embedded within the context, studying the effect of self-sufficiency (i.e. income, independence from welfare) will help provide a more nuanced picture of refugee behavior.

It is easy enough to expect better economic opportunities, or higher wages to attract refugees but this is only part of the picture. When it comes to refugee resettlement, consideration of welfare is intimately related to the overall economic well-being of the refugees. “It is the welfare state that keeps the migrants aboard in hard times” (Freeman 1986, 57). Put differently, the refugee communities can’t survive, let alone acquire economic self-sufficiency (in less than a year) without considerable state assistance. Resettlement entry is based on family units (Hein 1993), and many refugees require additional medical and psychological care (Kinsbury et al. 2018), which is impossible without welfare provisions. Contrary to the inaccurate generalization of refugees as welfare abusers (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Ludwig 2016), recently

arrived refugee populations are often at a loss in understanding the complex machinations of welfare (Field note 04/11/2017). On the other hand, every individual in the refugee community learns quickly enough that their economic survival in resettlement is tied to welfare, from Medicare to food stamps. Fifty percent of refugees in their first 24 months receive welfare, and those with further disadvantages tend to become more dependent on welfare (Potocky 1996).

Part of the ‘deal’ of the 1980 Refugee Act is that the US will provide welfare checks to refugees while they work on gaining economic self-reliance (preferably within nine months).<sup>120</sup> Hence, this initial welfare support is crucial for the incoming refugees; whether the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash benefits are sufficient is a different question. Immigrants benefit from the state-disbursed TANF offerings but the amounts vary from state to state (Hero and Preuhs 2007). Although refugees can qualify for TANF cash benefits, they initially depend mostly on three types of refugee-specific welfare disbursement: social services, Cash and Medical Assistance (CMA), and Targeted Assistance. CMA is generally awarded to US states for the duration of eight months. On the other hand, social services are “formula grants awarded to states and non-profit organizations ... for a broad range of services for refugees, such as language training and employment services” (ORR n.d.; ORR 2012, ii). Targeted assistance also comprises of formula grants awarded to states for counties with large number of refugee populations, but these are mostly geared toward specific programs like securing employment for refugees. Targeted assistance, unlike the other two, are provided to states based on their needs. In 2012, all states (and Washington DC) received some level of social services funds. In the same year, Alabama, Alaska, Kentucky, Nevada, and Tennessee

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<sup>120</sup> Ordinarily this check is worth \$1100 for around nine months.



didn't receive CMA. Similarly, 20 states didn't receive Targeted Assistance for refugees in 2012.<sup>121</sup>

When it comes to the treatment of refugees, services vary greatly from one state to another (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Ott 2011). This is reflected in the differential disbursement of refugee aid. The gap in the welfare disbursement can be explained by (the lack of) state initiatives. These funds are generally reimbursed to states by the federal government, i.e. the states have to provide the initial funds. Therefore, many states are likely to opt out of them. States discretion and subsequent differences on migrant matters is not new. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in 1996 applied various restrictions on the migrant eligibility for welfare, but “states were allowed to provide their own funds to address immigrants’ welfare needs” (Hero and Preuhs 2007, 498).

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<sup>121</sup> These states are: Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Connecticut, Washington DC, Hawaii, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont and West Virginia. Moreover, Wyoming is the only state that has opted out of the refugee resettlement program.

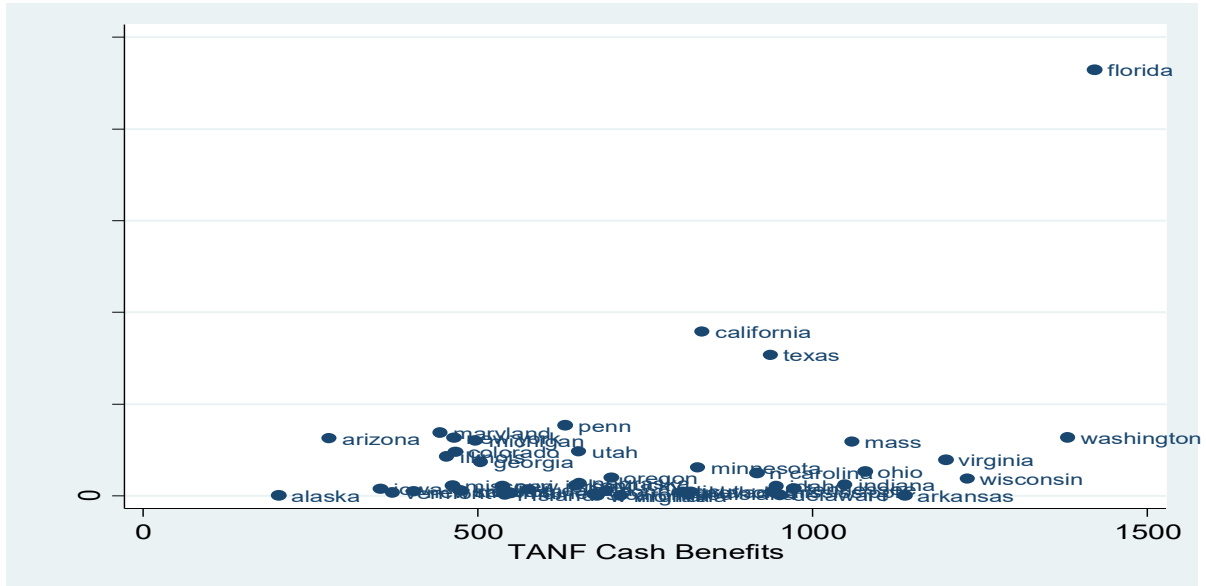


Figure 12: Scatter Plot of TANF benefits and Total Refugee-related Welfare (2012)

As is evident in Figure 12, the relationship between TANF cash benefits and total refugee-related aid is largely stable with some outliers like California, Texas, and Florida. Increasing amounts of TANF doesn't necessarily translate into higher levels of refugee welfare. This relationship is sustained in the initial calculation of correlation between TANF benefits and the overall refugee-related welfare. The correlation is in a positive direction, but it is not remarkably high. Irrespective of the type of refugee aid, the correlation hovers around 0.36, further articulating the independence between TANF cash benefits and refugee-related aid. Refugee-related welfare has been a constant source of assistance for refugees over the years. All forms of refugee-related welfare have generally been on an upward trajectory over the years, suggesting a rise in refugee population numbers as well as their rising needs. The post-2012 relative dip mirrors the drop in the number of refugees admitted. Based on Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) data, that year the admitted refugee population dropped from 73,293 to 56,384. Based on Table 2, targeted assistance and social services are

largely constant. On the other hand, only CMA seems to show any type of fluctuation over the years.

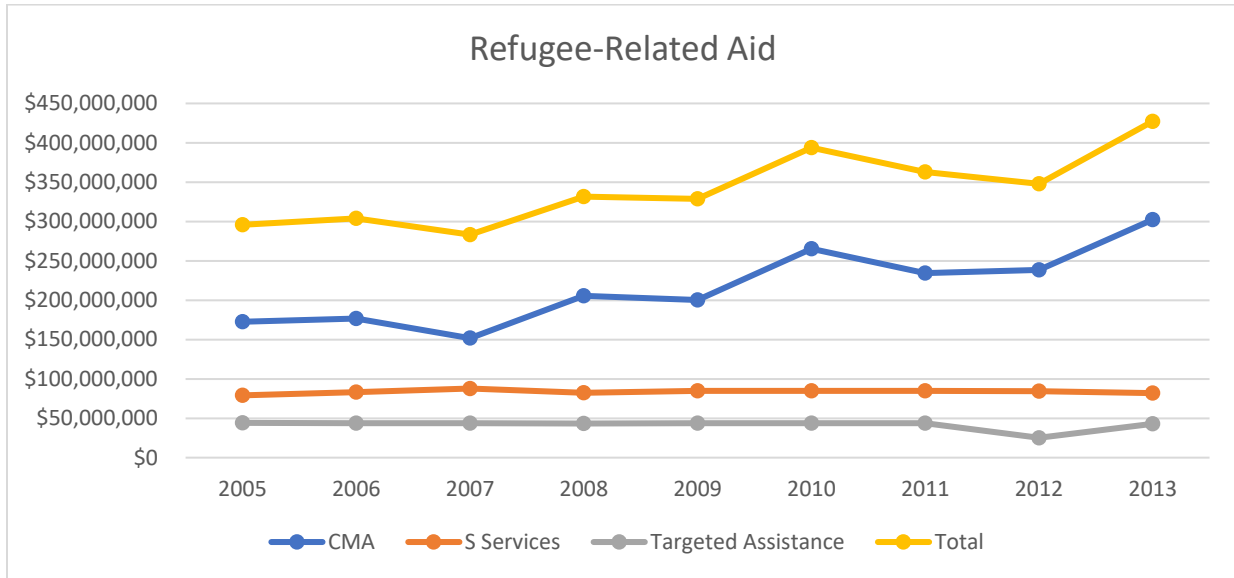


Figure 13: Refugee-related Welfare Over the Years

Although welfare is closely associated with immigrants and refugees (positively as well as negatively), this relationship is understudied. My field inferences point to an imperfect understanding of welfare, but its significance for refugees can't be overstated. Political factors play an important role in US welfare (Johnson 2001; Hawes and McCrea 2017; Hero and Preuhs 2007). Hero and Preuhs (2007) find a state's liberal orientation leads to more inclusive welfare policy (500). Refugees' decision to undertake secondary migration might not necessarily be reliant on national political narratives but the state-based availability of welfare is likely to be of great importance.

*H1(b): States with higher provisions for welfare will witness higher rate of secondary migration.*

## **Ethnic Networks and Identity in Secondary Migration**

The economic decision-making of refugees in resettlement is tied not only to their human capital but also to existing ethnic networks. To deconstruct secondary migration, it is important to study the constituent parts salient to understanding refugee life. The overall economic picture of refugees is based on a variety of case studies and some scattered statistical analyses. These works help in establishing a baseline picture of the economic profile of refugees.

In its simplest form, migration is a function of transfer of labor: people from low wage-high capital places will travel in search of high wage-low capital areas (Massey et al. 1993, 433). In understanding migration, neoclassical microeconomics views it through the prism of rational cost-benefit analysis (434). Over time, it was understood that migration decisions aren't made by individuals alone, i.e. family and community factors intimately inform these migratory decisions. This is especially true for refugee populations. Network theory expresses high explanatory value:

Migrant networks are sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and nonmigrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin ... Network connections constitute a form of social capital that people can draw upon to gain access to foreign employment (Massey et al. 1993, 448).

Migration is more likely if there is already a network in place (Massey 1987 cited in Portes and Böröcz 1989). In essence, these established networks create a self-perpetuating migration, which is true in the case of international as well as post-resettlement secondary migration.

When it comes to resettlement and secondary migration, some reasonable assumptions can be made. First, refugee settlement takes place in waves, in which the first migratory wave is

likely to be composed of the population's elites (Rumbaut 1989, 106). In the case of Bhutanese refugees, it was the educated, English-speaking individuals, who currently serve as the gatekeepers—business owners, educators, and NGO workers. Second, these early settlers are mostly likely going to be affected negatively, at least initially. However, with the passage of time they will be able to develop positive ties with the host community as well as their ethnic ties. This is a phenomenon that is evident in the case of Bhutanese refugees in Akron. The refugee sites that witness these ethnic networks form successfully (parallel with the necessary economic potential) are likely to attract secondary migration from other states. I attempt to include these factors in my hypotheses.

There have been some relevant statistical works on refugee income and earnings. As mentioned earlier, human capital serves an important positive function in refugees' economic integration. In resettlement, age, proficiency, time spent in the US, and education are crucial markers of economic progress (Borjas 1989; Nawyn et al. 2012; Potocky and McDonald 1995; Potocky-Tripodi 2003; Rumbaut 1989). In her study on refugee economic status of East European, Southeast Asian, and Cuban refugees, Potocky-Tripodi (2001) found education, gender, and household composition to be statistically significant predictors. As mentioned previously, family and community dynamics are often more important in refugee socioeconomic status than human capital factors (Rumbaut 1989). Potocky-Tripodi's (2001, 34) analysis is also interesting for casting doubt on social capital's relevance on overall immigrant adaptation. Operationalized as networks, ethnic composition and formal assistance, she found social capital has minimal impact on refugee employment, public assistance, and earnings. She raises a relevant question if social capital for immigrants should be represented by their community or the family (35). The general concept of social capital was built on community norms and

reciprocity (Putnam 2000); based on my field observations, it can be measured in reference to family composition as well as community relations. In resettlement, refugee families are often settled far from each other (in contrast to their camp environment), which makes their family connections even more salient. Furthermore, refugee groups can be segmented within along diverse lines of division. For example, the Vietnamese refugees were naturally sub-divided along Chinese-Vietnamese, early expatriates, and the boat refugees (Gold 1992); similarly, Bhutanese refugees practice an ethno-religious caste system with disparate cultural practices. In sum, fitting social capital on refugees necessitates contextualization.

In studying the secondary migration of Indochinese refugees, Desbarats (1985) observed that presence of existing refugee communities and the milder climate of the western US were important considerations alongside access to public assistance and income. According to Singer and Wilson (2006), newer refugee populations have been documented to prefer settlement in semi-urban areas. This is in stark contrast to the metropolitan gateway cities that were preferred by refugee populations in the past (Singer et al. 2008). Based on its interest in decentralization, the US government is likely settling refugees away from traditionally immigrant-friendly areas. In Singer and Wilson's (2006) view, size of the city, diversity of its population, labor market, and access to healthcare and education are favorable factors for refugee integration (19). In their research on volags, GAO (2012) found preferred certain conditions in funding their local affiliates. Volags generally considered factors like employment opportunity, affordable housing, existence of ethnic and linguistic groups, public transportation, healthcare resources and state budget for public assistance to be crucial in their decision-making (12). It is worth mentioning that the GAO report found that there was a noticeable gap in communication between volags and local institutions (17). This inference is analogous to Nawyn's (2006) findings as well as my

field observations, where local NGOs on the ground were far more aware of the realities of resettlement.

An act of migration is generally undertaken in search of a better future, especially through economic opportunities (Massey et al. 1993). Refugees, given their common refugee experience, tend to follow one another in migration. Like most immigrants, refugees prefer to undertake a journey that allows them to invest toward their future. This investment can come in the form of economic mobility; in the case of refugees, it comes in the form of improved welfare for future generations. It is well-known that immigrants and particularly refugees, are future-oriented (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006). As shown in chapters IV and V, many Bhutanese refugees have resettled to the US for the sake of their children:

*I had said that I wouldn't come here. I used to fight at home with my family [regarding this matter] ... But everyone convinced me to come here. They said it was good here. That's why I came. (Interview 16).*

*So when I considered ... [the benefits of resettlement], I felt compelled to come. I didn't think my children would appreciate it. So I came in the hope that it would be better for them here. (Interview 22).*

There is a significant role of culture and identity on refugee decision-making in the camps (Byrne 2013; Jaji 2015). This, however, shouldn't obscure economic considerations in their decision-making. In determining their destinations, refugees consider not only their safety but also future wages and costs (Moore and Shellman 2007, 831).

When viewed from a neoclassical perspective, secondary migration appears to be a natural course of action: refugees moving from one location to another in search of economic opportunities (Massey et al. 1993). Given the structure of resettlement, human capital will be

central to refugee decisions (Borjas 1989, 1999; Potocky-Tripodi 2001, 2003). In the case of refugee movement—especially with a strong emphasis on family and community—the attraction of ethnic networks can be just as important. Resettlement after all requires refugees to re-start their lives in a culturally alien society, a process that is not straightforward or risk-free. Simply framed, refugee families prefer to be around a culturally familiar setting. Refugee groups, especially from protracted conflict settings, generally possess little influence in the political decisions pertaining to their own lives (Zetter 1991). Freedom of movement in the form of secondary migration is therefore, a welcome change for many refugees.

In resettlement, destination states expect refugees to put down economic roots at the site of their initial placement: “[t]he notion of local integration into a community in which the refugees arrive is ... the primary design of resettlement services” (Ott 2011, 5). Secondary migration of refugees therefore, stands in contrast with state’s attempt to manage social organization of refugees and their identities (Hein 1993, 51). Secondary migration is a planned action, where “refugees create their own solutions” (Ott 2011, 25). Secondary migration, therefore, is an act of agency based on a close understanding of economic (and psycho-social) needs of the family, and the support system provided by the destination society. By analyzing secondary migration as a form of refugee agency, I seek to explore the agency of refugees within the structure of resettlement.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Here, I view agency as individual freedom of choice. Refugees in my view have agency in resettlement even though it is influenced by various forms of structures – refugee community, and state expectations.

For a discussion on structure-agency in migration check:  
Bakewell, Oliver. 2010. “Some Reflections on Structure and Agency in Migration Theory.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36(10): 1689-1708.



While ethnic networks can attract secondary migration, they can also isolate refugee communities from the host community, leading to suspicion and tension (Interview 30). There is a racialized component to understanding identity in the US context, often observable in policies related to welfare. The white majority in the US appears to be quite sensitive to the presence of racial minorities (Belluck 2002; Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006). This sensitivity manifests itself both in increased hostility to minorities as they increase in number, and in negative attitudes toward "racialized" public policy outputs, such as welfare (Johnson 2001, 41). The Racial Classification Model (RCM), developed by Soss, Fording, and Schram (2011) states that welfare policies are racially patterned. US states with high black and Latino populations have negative impact on benefit levels (Hawes and McCrea 2017). Liberally-inclined states, therefore, will likely attract and boast a higher level of 'foreign born population.' On the other hand, this is likely to reduce individual welfare payments (Hero and Preuhs 2007). For an identity scholar like me, this is an intriguing inference. There are demographic consequences to the nature of reception of host society (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). The implication is that group identity is made salient by US structural policies.

For refugees and immigrants, identity becomes an unavoidable part of life in the US. This manifests itself in the relationship between immigrants and the US-born population, and often within immigrant communities themselves. Through their findings, Allen and Ishizawa (2015) inadvertently confirm the difference between 'good' and 'bad' immigrants. In their study on comparative homeownership between Asian and Latino migrants, they find states' 'unfriendly' political policies affected the latter's homeownership but not that of the former. Latino immigrants are more likely to be associated with the label of unauthorized immigration, a fact that was reportedly prevalent even in the perception within the Bhutanese refugee

community in Akron (Interview 29). Portes and Rumbaut (2006) argue that early immigrant settlers to the US will partly hold on to their native cultures in response to the nativist attitude prevalent in US society. They found some Asian and Latino immigrant experiences to be more positive compared to that of dark-skinned immigrant populations like Haitians in Miami. In other words, looking ‘white’ makes of immigrant life far easier. This phenomenon has similarly been observed in other resettlement settings, like the case of Bosnian Muslim refugees in Australia (Colic-Peisker 2005).

Resettling in this identity-obsessed environment, therefore, is not straightforward. New refugees tend to keep to themselves (Allen 2009), for a variety of reasons. This includes self-consciousness regarding their language skills, and a deference to authority following their refugee experiences (Field note 02/03/2016). In this setting, I have observed the host society’s attitude toward their refugee neighbors, classmates, and co-workers can range from curiosity to suspicion to outright rage (Interview 30; Field note 07/28/2018). Therefore, it isn’t surprising to see many refugees to turn inward to their community for familiarity and solace. In migration, factors pertinent to family and society are increasingly viewed as influential in the migration literature (Massey et al. 1993). A subset of migration scholarship has studied the positive impact of ethnic networks on their mental and psychological wellbeing (Benson et al. 2011). In the development of their socioeconomic status, family and community dynamics are often more important than human capital factors (Rumbaut 1989). The presence of ethnic and family networks, therefore, is arguably more important (even crucial), in comparison to economic considerations, in the decision to undertake secondary migration.

Refugees arguably attempt to wrest control of their lives through secondary migration and network-creation: “networks migrate, categories stay put, and networks create new

categories” (Tilly 1980, 84). Various scholarship shows that although refugees participate in the economic sphere, they tend to resist cultural assimilation (Barkdull et al 2012; Adamson 2012). In Chapter V, I elaborated on how Bhutanese refugees have attempted to re-create the social order that existed in their camps, through personal actions to economic (ethnic businesses) and political initiatives (in the form of cultural celebrations). Perhaps, economic success is a means to sustain their cultural community in resettlement. Moreover, sustainable ethnic networks are often crucial for economic progress for refugees (Allen 2009; Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006).

As I have observed in my fieldwork, concentrated ethnic networks often provide economic benefits to secondary refugees. Many local factory jobs in Akron are filled through the existing informational network of Bhutanese workers (Field note 02/24/2016). These Bhutanese workers are well-liked and perceived to be quiet and hard workers in Akron. Incoming Bhutanese refugees can go through their ethnic networks rather than depend on local institutions that once facilitated this refugee-employer communication. In describing this ethnic association of refugees in Portland, Maine, Allen (2009) described it as ‘co-ethnic social capital.’ Erstwhile described as social capital in the US political science scholarship, these networks represent social connections and norms of reciprocity (Putnam 2000 quoted in Hawes and Rocha 2011). Hence, the existence of ethnic networks is likely a significant attraction for secondary migration.

*Hypothesis 2: States with concentrated refugee populations and networks will witness higher levels of secondary migration.*

Although refugees bring different forms of benefits to communities, they also bring severe institutional challenges for service providers, like access to education and health care (GAO 2012, 17; Interview 30). During my fieldwork, I came across secondary migrants who had

arrived in Akron in search of better economic opportunities as well as a closer proximity to the Bhutanese population (Field note 03/28/2016, 04/13/2016, 04/25/2017). The biggest challenge with secondary migration is that institutions are not expecting these migrants and are ill-equipped to provide them the necessary services:

*I would love for someone to study the secondary migration because the problem, unfortunately, when we get the negative calls, they are dealing with the secondary migrants...I don't know if they're coming here in desperate need for a larger community... And they're the ones who tend to live in squalor like conditions, and having more problems. I don't know if they're coming because they think they will receive more support from the Bhutanese ... community because there's more of them here. But I worry about that sometimes.* (Interview 30).

After learning of these secondary migrants, organizations (US- as well as ethnic) would work with the secondary migrants. I have learned these local institutions are crucial in absorbing some of the initial shock felt by the secondary migrants, mirroring the institutional observations of Nawyn (2006, 2010).

There are three types of institutional structures in the US that assist refugees – voluntary agencies (volags), mutual assistance associations (MAA), and support agencies. Volags are federal agencies that specialize in refugee resettlement and are responsible for all refugee resettlements in the US (Nawyn 2010, 153).<sup>123</sup> While refugees are protected by the host state, they are also vulnerable to state policies (Hein 1993, 54; Nawyn 2006, 1511). Volags “are the non-profit organizations that the U.S. government funds to assist refugees during the

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<sup>123</sup> There are nine VOLAGs: Church World Service (CWS), Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC), Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), International Rescue Committee (IRC), US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and World Relief Corporation (WR). USCRI is responsible for refugee resettlement in Akron.

resettlement process” (Allen 2009, 338). At the national level, volags are responsible for managing and assisting incoming refugees. On the other hand, MAA’s are “ethnic organizations serving a particular immigrant group” (154). MAA’s are established and operated by the refugee community without direct support from the state; albeit they qualify for welfare support as NGO’s (Hein 2001). In North Hill, the Bhutanese Community Association of Akron (BCAA) serves as the MAA for the local Bhutanese population. I interpret this organizing capacity of the Bhutanese as a further evidence of the strength of its ethnic networks. even though volags are the formal representatives of state support and welfare for the refugees, services provided by MAAs and support agencies are more intimate and culturally relevant for the refugees (Nawyn 2010, 158).

In the discussion of refugee-based institutions, it is unwise to leave out the role of support agencies. Support agencies are locally-based institutions facilitating the resettlement of refugees by providing necessary training as well as disbursing state-mandated welfare. Although the nomenclature points toward a supplementary role, the support agencies arguably play a crucial role in adjustment of refugee populations. Support agencies exist at the micro level, executing the macro policies put in place by the volags. However, they often do more than that. Although not articulated by the volags, support agencies have been found to provide cultural and social sites for the local refugee populations (Nawyn 2010). It is difficult to generalize support agencies across the US, but my inferences support the social-cultural functions, as described by Nawyn.

Despite the reportedly differential services offered by different states (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011), local institutions continue to play a critical role for overall refugee welfare. Local NGOs are heavily invested in the welfare of refugees, especially during the initial

stages of resettlement. In contrast to the inflexible volags, local agencies boast an intimate understanding of the local refugee communities, and a largely flexible approach (Nawyn 2006, 2010). These institutions play a mediating role between the refugee communities and the state; this role is further facilitated by the hiring refugees as ‘bridge builders’ or cultural brokers (Shaw 2014, 284).<sup>124</sup>

The presence of institutions in the lives of refugees predates resettlement. During their liminal stage in refugee camps, a host of institutions aid refugees in their survival and welfare. During the initial stages of resettlement, that void is filled by local agencies. These agencies, in addition to establishing economic contacts and providing training, help refugees with language and cultural education. I have observed such a local agency to provide necessary institutional as well as psycho-social support to the refugees. Therefore, my observations and Nawyn’s (2006, 2010) empirical contributions regarding the role of institutions merit a closer inspection in the examination of secondary migration.

While the role of institutions is an important one for refugee communities, it is difficult to capture its effect on secondary migration adequately. Due to decentralization of resettlement, services provided to refugees tend to vacillate a great deal among states (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Nawyn 2006). There is also an empirical issue: measurements of institutional efforts tend to be limited to national-level institutions or volags (GAO 2012), even though local institutions and MAA’s play a more intimate and culturally sensitive role in refugee integration (Nawyn 2006, 2010). The structure of resettlement and its limitations in funds often force local

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<sup>124</sup> During my fieldwork, I started through work at International Institute of Akron (IIA). IIA maintained a close relation with refugee communities, especially through the hiring of refugee individuals, i.e. bridge builders (Shaw 2014). I was involved here (first as volunteer, then intern, and then consultant) thanks to my cultural broker profile, i.e. my Nepali background.

institutions to compete rather than collaborate with one other (GAO 2012). Refugee economic situations improved within 5 or 6 years of arrival (Shaw and Poulin 2015, 1100). In time, refugees and their representative MAAs even end up competing with the local refugee-serving institutions. Given these structural limitations and paucity of disaggregate data, it is difficult to pinpoint the impact of refugee-based institutions appropriately. However, it is important to remember that secondary migration generally takes place in the first year or two (ORR 2012, 2012, 2014). Early resettlement is especially a vulnerable time for refugee populations; they share close relations with institutions at refugee camps (Evans 2010a, 2010b; Jaji 2015) and this institutional vacuum is filled by the host society organizations. Therefore, the presence of refugee institutions is likely to attract secondary migration.

*Hypothesis 3: Higher presence of federal level refugee-based institutions and services in the state is unlikely to attract secondary migration.<sup>125</sup>*

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<sup>125</sup> Hypothesis 3 can appear counter-intuitive. It is important to understand at the local level, institutions are close to refugee communities but this is not the case when it comes to high-level organizations like volags (Nawyn 2006, 2010).

## Research Design and Data

My unit of analysis is state-year. I perform a pooled cross-section-time-series analysis. Longitudinal analysis is generally beneficial in social scientific examination. The time frame, however, is limited. The dependent variable is incoming refugees from their initial site of reception, i.e. the number of secondary migrants entering a US state between 2012 and 2014.<sup>126</sup> For my models, I work with 150 observations (50 observations per state for each of the three years).<sup>127</sup> Based on my field observations and interview data, reasons for secondary migration are diverse and far from straightforward. I came across ambitious and educated individuals, looking for not only the opportunity for mobility but also the familiarity of their community, like it used to be in the refugee camps. But there were also refugees who were simply lured by the existing ethnic networks. Away from gateway states, different refugee groups have found homes in the Midwest states: Indiana hosts the most Burmese refugees, Missouri the most Bosnians, and Ohio the most Bhutanese (Kerwin 2018, 211). It is not uncommon to find refugees and migrants follow a migratory pattern of their peers and neighbors (Chapter IV). It is therefore, difficult to capture individual motivations for the secondary migration, especially in the lack of disaggregate data. Employing my field inferences as a platform, I use the statistical tools to develop a general picture of secondary migration.

Based on the statistical reports provided by ORR, entrance and exit of refugees is common in US states (Key Indicators for Refugee Placement 2012, 2012, 2014). These reports provide incoming, outgoing, and net migration figures for refugees for each state (following the initial resettlement). Net migration is captured by subtracting the outgoing refugees from the

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<sup>126</sup> The dependent variable is presented in terms of fiscal year.

<sup>127</sup> In my dataset, Wyoming is replaced by Washington DC; Wyoming does not participate in resettlement, but DC does.

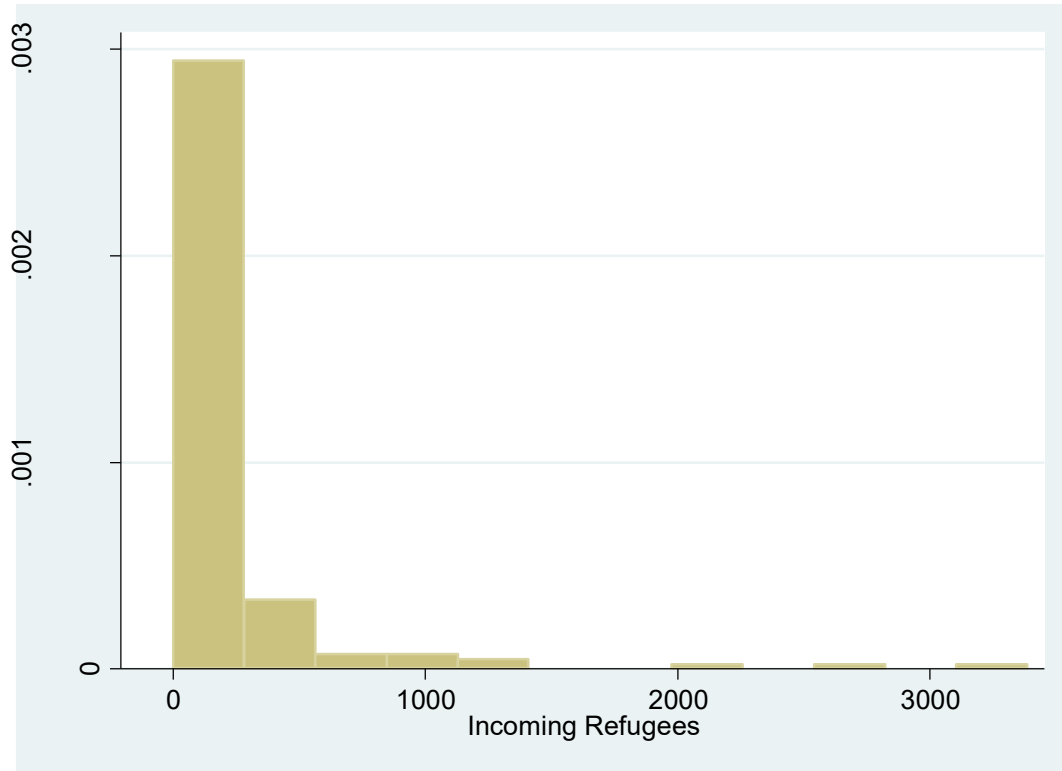


incoming refugees for the year. Positive net migration equates to a higher rate of in-migration of refugees than out-migration. Net migration estimates are likely to provide the difference between ‘push’ and ‘pull’ characteristics, weighted heavier for gateway states like New York, California, Illinois, and Texas (ORR 2012, 2013, 2014). Recent scholarship suggests refugee populations are increasingly moving to non-gateway locations, especially prioritizing small cities [*Refugee Resettlement in Small Cities (RRSC)* n.d.; Singer and Wilson 2006]. I admit that the state-level data used in this analysis is perhaps not the ideal unit for analysis. However, given the limitation of available data and lack of research in this area, I see this research as a well-merited first step. As I am interested in capturing the possible reasons for a state’s attractiveness for refugees to re-migrate after resettlement, I opt for the log-transformed incoming refugee migration in each state as my dependent variable. In examining the reasons for secondary migration, I estimate the following model:

*Secondary Migration*

$$= \alpha + \beta_1 (Economic\ Pull) + \beta_2 (Welfare) + \beta_3 (Ethnic\ Networks) + \beta_4 (Institutions) + Controls + \varepsilon$$

Empirically, states’ in-migration ranges from zero to 3,387 (with a standard deviation of 433.18). As migration patterns within the US are far from uniform, i.e. some states are generally perceived to be ‘better’ host society, this trend is reflected in the skewed distribution of the dependent variable, as seen in the histogram below:



*Figure 14: Distribution of Incoming Refugees to the US*

To address the skewness in the dependent variable, I log-transformed the variable; as part of this transformation, I also added a constant value (i.e. 1) to address the missing value issue. This step was merited as the log-transformed variable discounted the ‘zero’ observations reducing the overall observations by 16 (which is fairly consequential in a reduced model like this).<sup>128</sup>

Here, it is relevant to discuss the imperfect and imprecise nature of the data. As I mentioned above, there is a distinct lack of data capturing the secondary migration of refugees. Refugee numbers are recorded as they enter the United States and also at their initial reception at states. Once settled, refugees however, are not required to report their migratory decisions. This is partly because they’re expected to establish roots there and not move to a different state.

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<sup>128</sup> For the dependent variable, I imputed two missing observations for Montana (2013 and 2014) with ‘0’ (2012 value).

Therefore, precise numbers of refugee flow within resettlement is difficult to capture. Net migration of refugees is based on ORR fiscal year reports with limited time frame, i.e. it is only available for three years. These reports were created for relevant stakeholders and are instrumental in drafting a general picture of secondary migration patterns of the refugees. To the best of my knowledge, this is the only available data on secondary migration of refugees in the US.<sup>129</sup> Although available data on secondary migration is limited, it is sufficient for an initial exploration.

In my examination, the economic hypothesis is the most straightforward avenue of research. I employ a number of predictors to test my first hypothesis: *Refugee Average Wage* and *Housing Costs*. Each state's *Refugee Average Wage* figure is recorded by the US Department of Health and Human Services. The average wage of refugee workers, generally speaking, should be attractive to refugees considering secondary migration in the US.<sup>130</sup> However, average wages earned by refugees not only reflect earning potential but also the host society's standard of living. In other words, this represents an economic trade-off. As a potential empirical counterweight, I offer *Housing Costs*, which is the measure of median monthly housing costs in each state for the relevant time frame. Affordability of housing is generally cited as an important factor by the secondary migrants I interviewed in North Hill. It is sensible to expect that affordable rent would be crucial for incoming refugees, at the very least during the first few months of their transition. I expect a negative relationship between the dependent variable and *Housing Costs*, i.e. lower housing costs is likely to attract higher levels of secondary migrants.

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<sup>129</sup> After 2014, I couldn't find any more reports or data on secondary migration.

<sup>130</sup> I imputed the missing observations of Montana (2012, 2013) with the *Refugee Average Wage* recorded for Montana (2014).

Measures	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max	Source
<i>Dependent Variable</i>					
Incoming Refugee Population (logged)	4.05	2.07	0	8.13	Key Indicators for Refugee Stakeholders, ORR 2012-2014
<i>Economic Indicators</i>					
Refugee Average Wage	9.44	0.86	7.31	14	US Department of Health and Human Services
Median Monthly Housing Cost	801.93	173.4	552	1293	US Census Bureau
<i>Self-Sufficiency Indicators</i>					
Entered Employment (%)	55.39	18.5	0	100	Key Indicators for Refugee Stakeholders, ORR 2012-2014
Cash Assistance Terminations (%)	53.56	30.54	0	100	Key Indicators for Refugee Stakeholders, ORR 2012-2014
Cash Assistance Reduction (%)	17.74	21.86	0	100	Key Indicators for Refugee Stakeholders, ORR 2012-2014
Entered Health Benefits (%)	60.36	24.73	0	100	Key Indicators for Refugee Stakeholders, ORR 2012-2014
<i>Welfare Indicators</i>					
Total ORR funds (t-1)	11800000	21100000	85000	141000000	Key Indicators for Refugee Stakeholders, ORR 2012-2014
TANF benefit levels for family of 3	429.04	161.76	170	928	Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
<i>Ethnic Networks</i>					
Total Refugee Population (logged)	6.12	2.07	0	8.91	Refugee Processing Center – PRM
Bhutanese population (logged)	215.88	329.09	0	2166	Refugee Processing Center – PRM

Burmese population (logged)	299.28	399.11	0	2290	Refugee Processing Center – PRM
Iraqi population (logged)	340.71	650.42	0	3691	Refugee Processing Center - PRM
<i>Institutions</i>					
Caseload (logged)	6.47	1.6	0.69	10.22	Key Indicators for Refugee Stakeholders, ORR 2012-2014
Number of Reception Sites	6.63	6.54	0	33	Author's interpretation based on ORR volag maps
<i>Demographic Controls</i>					
State Unemployment Rate (%)	6.24	1.68	2.6	11.2	US Bureau of Labor
Total Foreign-Born Population	9.1	6.07	1.4	27.1	American Community Survey
Educational Attainment, High School	29.92	3.12	20.8	39.2	American Community Survey
State minimum wage	7.66	0.75	5.15	9.5	US Department of Labor

*Table 11: Summary Statistics Table*

As a supplement to my economic hypothesis, I include variables that represent the status of economic self-sufficiency in the state. Resettlement requires refugees to participate in becoming self-sufficient through economic integration and ending their dependency on state welfare (Gold 1988; Hein 1993; Nawyn 2006, 2010). Measures of self-sufficiency theoretically can be more revealing in examining secondary migration patterns and be salient for future policies in relation to resettlement. *Employment Entry*, *Cash Assistance Terminations*, *Cash Assistance Reductions*, and *Health Benefits* are the representative variables here. In determining how many work-eligible individuals entered the work force, terminated cash assistance, reduced overall assistance, and required health benefits respectively reflects the overall picture of the refugee (in)dependence in the state. Each of these predictors is measured as a percent of employment caseload of the state for the year. Higher measures of self-sufficiency of the state will attract more secondary migrants, as these signal the plausibility of starting a manageable life. These measures were derived from ORR reports on “Key Indicators for Refugee Stakeholders” between 2012 and 2014.

As for my welfare-related variables, I introduce two predictors that measure refugee-related welfare as well as overall welfare. *Total ORR funding* is the aggregate amount reimbursed to states by ORR for their refugee-based expenses. As I discussed earlier, the funds for each state can fluctuate across states. Given the discretion enjoyed by states on refugee matters, some states don’t participate in programs like matching grants. Referring back to Figure 2, many states don’t receive Social Services and Targeted Assistance. Hence, I find the total ORR funds to be the best possible measure.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, I use *TANF* (for a family of three) as a parallel measure of welfare in the consideration of secondary migration. State-provided cash

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<sup>131</sup> Since ORR reimburses the state funds, I lagged the predictor by one year.

benefits in the form of TANF “provides the most direct, comparable measure of state welfare generosity” (Hawes and McCrea 2017, 351). In the case of resettled refugees, welfare plays a significant role for their initial survival and journey to self-sufficiency. The possibility of higher benefits is likely to lead to higher number of secondary migrants. It is therefore, likely that refugees consider welfare disbursements when deciding to undertake secondary migration.

To measure the possible impact of ethnic networks, I use proxies in the form of total refugee population, Bhutanese, Burmese, and Iraqi populations present in each state, i.e. *Refugee Population*, *Bhutanese Refugees*, *Burmese Refugees*, and *Iraqi Refugees* respectively. According to PRM data, the aforementioned groups represent three of the largest refugee populations in recent times. Inclusion of these populations can help me determine if secondary migration to a state might be largely driven by the ethnic networks of these populations. Some gateway states like New York and Texas witness consistently large numbers of secondary migrants from these populations. On the other hand, different refugee groups prefer one state over the other: in Ohio Bhutanese refugees over the three years studied (between 1306, 1189, and 1248) clearly outnumber their Burmese (209, 215, and 182) and Iraqi (216, 424, and 488) counterparts; Iraqi refugees (2479, 3416, and 2751) predictably gravitate to Michigan in larger numbers than Bhutanese (317, 164, and 184) or Burmese populations (539, 489, and 409). Given the variation of the refugee groups across US states, and the lack of information on the composition of secondary migrants, it is difficult to ascertain the degree of the impact. However, I expect the resulting relationship between these predictors and the dependent variable to be largely in the positive direction. I have also included a variable capturing total refugee population of the state-year. *Total Refugee Population* refers to the total size of refugee

population for the state-year.<sup>132</sup> It is argued that the past experience of ‘refugee-ness’ connects refugees in camps and elsewhere (Eastmond 1998; Fuglerud 1997; Lacroix 2004). It is therefore, reasonable to expect refugees to consider destinations with large refugee populations, as opposed to simply immigrant or foreign-born populations. While specific and disaggregate ethnic networks are likely to be more influential in secondary migration, information on overall refugee population might be similarly pertinent. Secondary migration can be path-dependent, i.e. once the refugee networks (or enclaves) have been established, secondary migration of refugees is likely to continue naturally (Massey et al. 1993).

To capture the impact of institutions on secondary migration, I include *Number of Reception Sites* in the model. The US resettlement system is largely based on a system of institutions, from volags to local support agencies and MAAs (Hein 1993; Nawyn 2006, 2010). My ethnographic findings uphold these theoretical assertions, especially in favor of local support agencies. It was difficult to gather necessary data on local-level institutions to include in this study; ideally, a state-wide list of local support institutions (affiliated to volags) and MAAs would have added nuance to my analysis. As local institutions vary in their roles, capacity, and services they provide (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011), and often compete with one another (GAO 2012), there is no systematic way to reference them. Instead, I have arranged a list of volag-based resettlement and placement sites for each state-year. I derived the tally rather crudely from PRM maps of volags. The distribution of volags across the US is not uniform mirroring the unequal placement of refugees. As I have mentioned earlier, I am not sure if there’s a definitive conclusion to be drawn, but I expect larger numbers of these reception sites

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<sup>132</sup> I imputed missing observations for Delaware (2012, 2014) with ‘6’ (2013 value); similarly, I imputed the missing values for Montana (2013, 2014) with ‘1’ (2012 value).



per state-year to correlate positively with incoming refugee populations. I have also included *Caseload* (logged) which refers to the number of refugees being assisted by pertinent institutions. Local case managers are assigned a quota of cases to assist in economic participation and overall integration. In my view, *Caseload* serves as a proxy for the economic potential of refugees as well as local institutional presence. This is an indication of higher relevance of local institutions in comparison to the presence of higher-level volags.

For my demographic controls, I include a mix of refugee-specific variables and traditional variables from the scholarship. *State Unemployment Rate* expresses the economic and labor-based health of the state. Similarly, *State Minimum Wage* provides the designated minimum wage levels of states across given time.<sup>133</sup> Although demographic variables like *Foreign Born Population* has been observed to be insignificant in the determination of refugee economic performance (Potocky-Tripodi 2001), this may be a relevant factor for secondary migration. On the other hand, I opted to exclude measures of black and Latino population, often common facets in immigration-based analysis. I also include the *High School Attainment* level of each state-year. While immediate economic and social concerns are forefront in secondary migration, education level might be a salient feature as refugees are known to be future generation-oriented (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006). While refugees are often unaware of the specifics of navigating the educational system, they're largely invested in providing their children the necessary access to high school and college education (Field note 02/21/2017).

In working with cross-section-time-series data, spatial and temporal considerations are highly salient (Beck and Katz 1995, 2001). I am working with a continuous dependent variable

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<sup>133</sup> On an empirical note, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee don't have a formal minimum wage. I imputed the subsequent missing observations with \$7.25, a figure determined by Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

with balanced state-year data, which allows me to employ panel-corrected standard errors (PCSE). While I am working with a continuous dependent variable, the data is in the cross-section-time-series (CSTS) format. Using ordinary least squares (OLS) in CSTS models can be problematic as the OLS assumption is that “all the error processes have the same variance (homoscedasticity) and that all of the error processes are independent of each other” (Beck and Katz 1995, 636). OLS standard errors reding can be understated; “when PCSEs are not necessary, they perform as well as the OLS standard errors, and when OLS standard errors perform poorly, PCSEs still perform well” (641). PCSE is useful for particularly for CSTS analysis in political science.

In my analysis, I have opted against using a fixed-effects estimator for my analysis event though it is a common instrument employed to ‘cure’ autocorrelation. Fixed effect-based estimation allows researchers to detect variation across N over time, in turn, reducing the possibility of omitted variable bias. On the other hand, in cases without much variation within states (or other entities), fixed effects can bias the overall interpretation. However, my research objective here is not the examination or detection of variation within states. In my analytical models, I am working with a low number of states with limited variation across time. Overall migration patterns (secondary or otherwise) in the US is more interesting when compared between the US states. In terms of diagnostics, the PCSE model didn’t detect autocorrelation, i.e. inclusion of a lagged dependent variable didn’t affect the overall inferences. Similarly, I didn’t encounter a severe case of heteroskedasticity or multicollinearity between the predictors.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Test for heteroskedasticity returned a low chi-square (0.00) and high p-value (0.99) suggesting that the error variance is not unduly affected by heteroskedasticity.

None of the predictors expressed a high enough variance inflation factor (i.e. 10) to cause alarm.

## Empirical Analysis

First, let's discuss the baseline mode (without the refugee populations or any specific ethnic networks). The relevance of economic hypothesis is evident, albeit it presents a relatively mixed picture. As suspected, *Refugee Average Wage* appears to be less predictive of secondary migration in comparison to the *Median Housing Costs*. The latter expresses a negative relation with the dependent variable, i.e. refugees are less likely to be attracted to states if the local living cost is expensive. Affordable living cost is understandably a fundamental consideration for refugees to manage their new life in resettlement. This empirical support for Hypothesis 1 correlates with my field observations, where affordable cost of living is fundamentally significant.

Embedded within the economy hypothesis was the investigation of economic self-sufficiency. Based on the evidence of Table 12, information on refugees' successful employment in the state is the most appropriate criteria for refugee decision-making when it comes to secondary migration. *Employment Entry*'s predictive power is probably a reflection of the economic pressures exerted by the structural expectations of resettlement. Refugees are under pressure to secure economic stability as quickly as possible, as highlighted separately by scholars like Hein (1993), Portes and Rumbaut (2001, 2006), and Nawyn (2006, 2010). By comparison, predictors like *Cash Assistance Terminations*, *Cash Assistance Reductions*, and *Health Benefits* are evidently less salient (the latter two even express a negative relationship with the dependent variable). Put differently, secondary migrants care about being employed, but are less interested in their independence from local institutions.

These three measures of self-sufficiency, while important, represent a state-based perspective on refugee dependence. In my view, refugees are less invested in their dependence

to the state in comparison to improving their economic potential. On the other hand, I didn't expect the negative direction of *Cash Assistance Reductions*, and *Health Benefits*. The reduction of cash assistance and higher level of participation in health benefits, perhaps, can be perceived as an overall dependence on the local institutions. It is possible that potential secondary migrants view *Cash Assistance Reduction* as states' decreasing disbursement of welfare. Based on my analysis, gradual economic independence is not necessarily prioritized by secondary migrants (in contrast to the state expectation of welfare independence).

VARIABLES	(1) Baseline Model	(2) Refugee Population	(3) Ethnic Networks
Refugee Average Wage	0.062 (0.043)	0.074* (0.039)	0.020 (0.030)
Median Monthly Housing Cost	-0.005*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)
Entered Employment (%)	0.013*** (0.003)	0.010*** (0.003)	0.008*** (0.003)
Cash Assistance Terminations (%)	0.004 (0.003)	0.003 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)
Cash Assistance Reductions (%)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.002)
Entered Health Benefits (%)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.000 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.003)
Total ORR funding (t-1)	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000** (0.000)
TANF for family of 3	0.003*** (0.000)	0.002*** (0.000)	0.002*** (0.000)
Caseload (logged)	1.135*** (0.077)	0.823*** (0.119)	0.805*** (0.109)
No. of Reception Sites	-0.028***	-0.028***	-0.024***

	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.006)
State Unemployment Rate (%)	-0.130**	-0.123*	-0.140**
	(0.064)	(0.066)	(0.061)
Foreign-Born Population	0.055***	0.043**	0.025
	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.020)
Educational Attainment, high school	0.096***	0.091***	0.074***
	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.009)
State Minimum Wage	-0.179	-0.147	-0.077
	(0.109)	(0.107)	(0.117)
Refugee population (logged)		0.256***	0.255**
		(0.057)	(0.103)
Bhutanese Refugee Population (logged)			-0.105***
			(0.039)
Burmese Refugee Population (logged)			0.250***
			(0.027)
Iraqi Refugee Population (logged)			-0.110
			(0.080)
Constant	-2.671***	-2.703***	-2.397***
	(0.831)	(0.821)	(0.775)
Observations	149	149	149
R-squared	0.750	0.758	0.777
Number of states	50	50	50

Table 12: Panel-Corrected Standard Errors Models of Secondary Migration

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

*Table 132: PCSE Models of Secondary Migration*

My main model finds empirical support for the welfare hypothesis as well. Overall, both the TANF and refugee-specific ORR disbursement are positive indicators of secondary migration to the state. This inference has crucial implications for our understanding of resettlement and refugee behavior. Refugees are pragmatic individuals who appear to consider and understand the central position of welfare in their lives. Refugees, especially with close ties to local agencies, are likely to absorb quickly the importance of incoming ORR funds; secondary migration generally takes place within the first year or two of refugee arrival (ORR 2012, 2013, 2014). On the other hand, TANF is likely to become pertinent with the passage of time. The economic performance of refugees is observed to improve with time (Potocky-Tripodi 2001), which is likely a reflection of their gradual adjustment in resettlement. With the passage of time, refugees attain citizenship, and become better-organized and less reliant on local support agencies (Interview 30). Therefore, consideration of welfare in the form of TANF is likely to be more relevant in the long term. It is of little surprise that welfare is a significant predictor of secondary migration. This secondary migration-welfare link merits further scholarly attention, possibly with nuanced, disaggregated data in the future.

I find mixed support for Hypothesis 3. While both *Caseload* and *Number of Reception Sites* are statistically significant predictors of secondary migration, they express divergent directions in relation to the dependent variable. The former is a positive predictor, i.e. higher the number of refugees managed by refugee institutions, higher the number of in-migration of refugees in the state. To secondary migrants, caseload probably symbolizes institutional support from local agencies (like IIA in North Hill). By contrast, larger number of volags (or, their national affiliates) in the state are unlikely to lead to secondary migration of refugees. More specifically, higher number of these reception sites is likely to dissuade incoming refugees.



The theoretical difference between *Caseload* and *Number of Reception Sites* is likely the impression of services rendered. The number of national-level refugee institutions is distributed asymmetrically. Large states that are traditionally considered to be gateways for immigrants and refugees—for instance, Texas, California, New York, and Florida—predictably boast significantly higher number of national institutions. The extant literature, however, emphasizes that secondary migration trends appear to be moving away from these states (Rumbaut 1989; Singer and Wilson 2006). A high number of reception sites doesn't translate into higher quality of service provision, just as a liberal orientation of a state doesn't equate to high welfare disbursement (Hero and Preuhs 2007). On the other hand, caseload of a state represents the population of refugees being serviced by state institutions. From an information-based perspective, refugees are likely to consider the caseload information more positively. In summary, the information on how many refugees are being served is likely more relevant than the number of 'relevant' institutions.

Finally, this brings me to the examination of Hypothesis 2. This hypothesis is especially salient because it comes closest to mirroring my field-based work. It is interesting to note that the presence of refugee populations is a statistically significant predictor of secondary migrants. States with high number of specific refugee populations will attract secondary migrants from other states. By contrast, the effect of a foreign-born population, while positive, is far weaker. Hence, in the secondary migration of refugees, consideration of refugee networks is more salient than the consideration of the rather broad category of foreign-born. This observation provides some support to the ethnic network hypothesis. With the availability of disaggregate data, empirical analysis of ethnic networks would yield more nuanced interpretation.

On the other hand, proxies for ethnic networks in the form of Bhutanese, Burmese, and Iraqi refugees yield statistically significant yet unclear observations. State-years with high number of Burmese refugees are likely to attract secondary migrants into the state. On the other hand, the relationship of state-years with Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees is negative. Theoretically, these proxies were a long shot; without disaggregated, sub-state level data it is difficult to determine the precise impact of ethnic networks on secondary migration. In the given state-years, Bhutanese refugees may not have been recorded as part of the migrating population; or, perhaps its effect is lost in the overall aggregate form. On the other hand, it is possible that Bhutanese refugee in-migration takes place to a minority of states (like Ohio and Pennsylvania) whereas Burmese migration might be more extensive across the US. The best I can deduce here is that some ethnic networks of refugees are stronger than those of other networks and is contingent on state and regional context.

As expected, minimum wage as well as unemployment rate of states had a negative impact on the incoming secondary migrants. On the other hand, educational attainment of the state was highly influential, which further attests to the forward-leaning tendency of refugees. The models highlight the salience of refugee-specific context—from affordable costs to provision of welfare—in the understanding of secondary migration, in contrast to traditional immigration-based variables like state minimum wage. Put differently, the positive measure of living situation is less important for refugees compared to measurements catering to their specific needs.

The explanatory power of my models here is fairly high and consistent across models. The R-squared values of the models range from 75 to 78 percent. The impact of ethnic network

proxies on my empirical model (i.e. model 3) was quite marginal. In other words, economic factors

## Chapter Conclusion

Why do refugees leave their initial settlement site and migrate to a different place? This chapter places this behavior under the rational microscope. Overall, my statistical models have yielded an interesting and perhaps, consequential picture of refugee behavior in resettlement. As I have learned and attempted to articulate throughout my dissertation, it is difficult to study resettlement without paying attention to its complex, moving parts. This complexity is visible in the models presented in this chapter. In addition to secondary migration being an economic decision, partly enforced by the structure of resettlement, it is also about social and cultural proximity. The latter effect is better observed through my fieldwork and will likely require precise, disaggregated data to be detected in a quantitative form. On the other hand, the overall economic decision-making of refugees in this chapter is a reflection of refugee strategic considerations as well as the structural constraints of resettlement in the US. This is reflected in the empirical significance of affordable cost of living to TANF and ORR funds to local refugee populations. In my assessment, disaggregated data would be more fruitful for my analysis, but this is a promising start. I view the empirical results in this chapter interesting but caution is necessary. Given the restriction in regards to data, it is difficult to establish a definite causal connection. The results, while intriguing, point to a series of correlations.

There is an increasing consensus, at least at the policy level, that refugees become economically self-sufficient with time, and bring direct and indirect benefits to their immediate locality (Byard 2014; Capps et al. 2015; GAO 2012; *New American Economy* 2016; Singer and Wilson 2006). Embedded within this new research trajectory, the study of secondary migration has the potential to yield theoretical, inferential, and policy-based implications for refugee-based agency as well as the understanding of resettlement policy. Also, this is the most important time

to study refugees and their agency in resettlement, so that we can better inform ourselves and educate the public.

## CHAPTER VII

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

History has failed us, but no matter.

—Min Jin Lee, *Pachinko*

#### Reflection of the Research Question

History forgot and failed the Bhutanese refugees for a long time. The political world remains a harsh place for refugees and individuals without a legal national identity (Arendt 1958; Chimni 1998). I gravitated to my research question because I was interested in examining refugee actions and their identities in third-country resettlement—a ‘solution’ to the refugee crisis. It was my assumption that one of the effects of resettlement would be an enhanced agency (or, at least more opportunities) for incoming refugees, and perhaps a positive transformation of refugee identities. As my inferences in Chapter VI show, my assumptions were valid ... for the most part.<sup>135</sup>

The effect of refugee resettlement, as observed in North Hill, is responsible for the evident economic progress of the Bhutanese-Nepali refugee community. The immigrant-owned business scene in North Hill is clearly dominated by the entrepreneurs from the Bhutanese-Nepali community (Chapter V, Table 9), and it continues to grow, within and outside of North Hill. Although not as celebrated in comparison, Bhutanese-Nepali individuals predominantly supply a much-needed labor to local companies like Case Farms in Akron (Field notes

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<sup>135</sup> If I am honest, there’s an instinctive element to my supposition; I believe I borrow my own experiences as an immigrant and my past connection with Bhutanese refugees in this assumption.

7/24/2019). The fervent ambition driving this economic participation is appropriately reflected in the following quote by an aspiring Bhutanese-Nepali entrepreneur:

*...if you want to blame [someone for your misfortune], no matter where you are [like resettlement site] you won't succeed...laziness and poverty are always neighbors [or, accomplices].*

(Interview 9).

I find this attitude represents not only the Bhutanese narrative of the necessity of hard work but also the local impression of them as 'hard-working' and 'quiet' immigrants (Field note 07/12/2018).

I find it pertinent to briefly discuss the relevance of case and site selection in the reflection of my research question. Before I began my field research, I wasn't aware that the Bhutanese population and North Hill were respectively part of the successful refugee case narrative. While it is not the subject of my research, the context of host society is important for refugee reception, especially in the US states (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Nawyn 2006, 2010; Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006; Singer and Wilson 2006). My research is based on a stand-alone case study; therefore, I can't make accurate generalization for all refugee communities or sites, but my interviews, field observations, and archival research strongly suggest that North Hill is a 'success story' despite Bonacich's (1987) caution on premature celebration of refugee communities.

My extended time spent in the field has provided ample instances of challenges faced by the community but the Bhutanese-Nepali group in North Hill is economically stable and

continues to expand.<sup>136</sup> There are many different components to this economic success (to name a few): the initial services provided by the International Institute of Akron, the community's pre-existing social organizational structure, affordable housing, the influx of secondary migrants, and the availability of labor-based employment. These are some of the few of the factors that stood out during the course of my field research.<sup>137</sup> This is not an exhaustive list but there is confirmation of some of these observations in my examination of refugee decision to undertake secondary migration (Chapter VI). In my empirical models, the average earning potential of the refugees was less relevant compared to the state's affordable monthly median housing cost and the potential for refugees to enter employment (Table 12). Similarly, higher rates of educational attainment as well as the presence refugee population in the state were attractive factors for refugees to undertake secondary migration. The impact of ethnic network variables on the decision to move is mixed (mostly given the relative paucity of accurate and precise data). These statistical inferences point to a series of important correlated relations but admittedly fall short of a causal path.

As a starting point, my statistical inferences distinctly capture the significance of economic potential and stability of the refugee site:

*[Before] coming to Akron, I wasn't employed for a while. I had some relatives in the neighboring states [and] here. I felt Dallas, Texas was a big state where I had no relatives.*

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<sup>136</sup> During a recent conversation, I found that the Bhutanese-Nepali community is actively fundraising to construct a Hindu temple (Field note 08/13/2018). I find this an ambitious goal and another evidence of the rising influence of this particular refugee group in North Hill.

<sup>137</sup> An Afghan refugee from North Hill identified their community's lack of organizational capacity by contrasting it with that of the Bhutanese-Nepali community in a recent conversation (Field note 08/13/2018). The Bhutanese-Nepali community's ability to organize has been identified by many of my local professional contacts as well.



*That's why ... in order to have more interaction and get together, and to hunt for a job I came to Akron, Ohio. (Interview 5).*

Based on my analysis, economic consideration is an crucial factor. While a few refugees may arrive at North Hill just to be close to the refugee community (and often face difficulty adapting), most come here based on a strategic calculation of economic potential and ethnic proximity (Interview 30). Hence, I find it difficult to separate secondary migration to North Hill from its potential economic rewards. I believe this is a question that needs to be further analyzed and explored in the future, with potential implication for our understanding of refugee behavior and the structure of the US resettlement. On the other hand, my field observations articulate an interesting picture of refugee resettlement in the US. In contrast to positivist debates on the economic contribution of refugees (Borjas 1989, 1999; Potocky-Tripodi 2001, 2003a, 2003b; Rumbaut 1989), my dissertation provides a more nuanced contribution to the understanding of resettlement as well as the adjustment it requires from refugee communities. The challenges I have observed—from the urgent need for medical care to the lack of access to pertinent information and resources in education and business—should paint a much-needed and nuanced picture of refugee life, and their subsequent actions. Therefore, I expect my work to contribute to a picture of refugee behavior over the years.

The impact of resettlement on identities is reflected through a variation of experiences within the community. As I have articulated in Figure 6 (Chapter V), pre-resettlement and particularly the resettlement-based experiences influence the social agency (or, actions) of refugees which can affect their identities. The community's older generation suffering from a lack of involvement in their resettled life (contrary to their past experiences in Bhutan and

refugee camps) has further lost its former position of authority. These individuals appear to hold on to their Bhutanese identities and culture, trying to remain secure in their pre-refugee history:

*We had lived in Bhutan before coming to Nepal. We have to say Bhutan, don't we?* (Interview 20).

*When we introduce ourselves, it has to be Bhutanese. Our ancestors were born and raised in Bhutan. So we have to introduce ourselves that way.* (Interview 23).

In a contrasting manner, the Bhutanese-Nepali population's younger generations have made the use of resettlement to often re-identify themselves but without sacrificing their attachment to the aforesaid culture. In other words, they are simply tweaking or revising their identity instead of making wholesale changes to it:

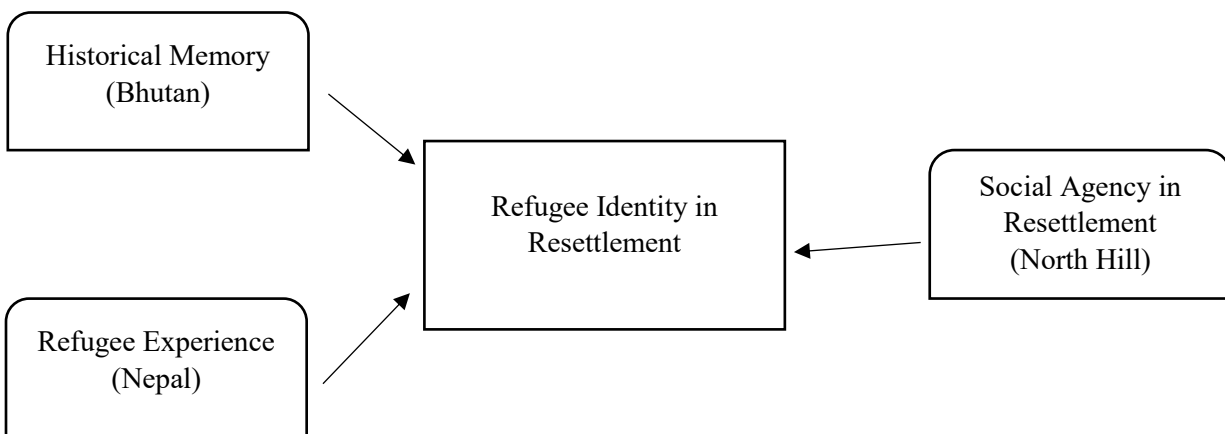
*I say I am Bhutani-Nepali. This is because our forefathers went from Nepal to Bhutan. We lived in Bhutan but we don't know how to speak their language. We always spoke Nepali.* (Interview 8).

*The question of identity and categorization seems to be an old one. [Name redacted] provided an interesting self-categorization. While this might solely be [Name redacted]'s point of view, but he referred to himself, and by extension the community, as Nepali-speaking Bhutanese. According to him, there's a large debate on the topic of the group identity. Given their experience as refugees, Bhutanese and Nepali are more prominent [or, common markers], even if their life is now based in the US.* (Field note 2/3/2016).

I have found history to be a convenient source of justification for many of my interviewees irrespective of the identity preferences. One's origin can be marked by their birthplace (either Bhutan or Nepal), or the ethnic origin of their forefathers (again, either Bhutan or Nepal). These differences and debates are largely based in the context of representation of the overall

Bhutanese-Nepali community to the outside world but not in regard to what constitutes the cultural content of their group identities.

In his investigation of identity choices under uncertain situations, Laitin (1998) found conglomerate or hybrid identity—for example, Russian-speaking-Estonian in the context of his research—became new identity categories, even though these were designed so the population could hold on to their cultural and linguistic Russian heritage. As “categories of identity change, the old labels are no longer relevant” (198). Based on my analysis, hybrid identities like ‘Bhutanese-Nepali’ labels provide much-needed comfort and affirmation to some, while gradually replacing identity markers like ‘Bhutanese.’ As I have emphasized in Chapter V, this shift in identity labels don’t necessarily reflect a change in the refugee culture (at least, for now). Therefore, I have observed the deviation of identity categories, as presented in Table 5, to emerge not from the change in cultural way of life, but one’s social agency in the context of resettlement. The works of Byrne (2013), Evans (2010b), Jaji (2015), and Malkki (1995a, 1995b) have articulated the refugee perspectives and identities to be far from monolithic, and my work further confirms their inferences. Overall, I view the impact of resettled life on Bhutanese-Nepali refugees through a refugee-centric identity framework. I have learned that refugee identities in resettlement is a function of the refugees’ present social status as well as impressions of their past. Precisely, the Bhutanese refugees’ identity-based calculus in resettlement is based on their past memory, experiences during refugee years, and their perceived social agency in resettlement (Chapter V, Table 10). Figure 15 below is a visual depiction of identity-based preferences and its determinants. Looking back, my study addresses my original research question through inferences of agency of the Bhutanese-Nepali community at large as well as individual identity preferences.



*Figure 65: Determinants of Refugee Identity Preferences*

The considerable volume of the data I have collected helped me develop a significant understanding of resettlement and refugee identities in resettlement. As is the case with qualitative research methodologies like ethnographies, these observations raised new possible avenues of research. For instance, I learned Columbus and Cincinnati in Ohio are similarly growing resettlement sites for the Bhutanese refugees (Field note 4/25/2017). A comparative case study between North Hill and these two sites would surely yield interesting and engaging insights. It would allow me draw robust conclusions of refugee experiences as well as differences of institutions and their services between these locations. I remain intrigued by the process and conditions responsible for a city or neighborhood’s development into an ethnic oasis

for refugee or immigrant communities. Refugees are increasingly adopting smaller semi-urban cities and surrounding areas as their preferred homes over traditional gateway cities like California and New York (*RRSC* n.d.; Singer and Wilson 2006). This phenomenon of refugee geographic shift is as interesting as it is understudied. Apart from some location- and state-specific projects, I am not aware of an academic or institutional effort to study this subject.

Case studies, especially in ethnography, allow researchers like me to be immersed in a group's 'world' and study its development and evolution (Yin 1989). Consequently, there are other related avenues of research that my research question does not address. Although I expect to find similarities between the Bhutanese-Nepali community of Akron and other parts of the country, my work unfortunately does not yield generalized inferences. Put differently, the resettlement effect I study is restricted solely to the Bhutanese-Nepali community at North Hill. Although my research has a statistical corollary, my paramount research goal was to produce a nuanced understanding of resettlement and refugee life at a community. While I have achieved this goal, I view it as an initial step in garnering a better knowledge of the structure of refugee resettlement and more importantly, a better understanding of refugee life in resettlement.

## Research Implications

### Structure of Resettlement

I view my ethnographic research to be a refugee-centric, community-based response to the traditional state-centric understanding of refugee resettlement. My research helps fill some crucial gaps in the existing literature on immigration and refugee issues. My research question developed partly as a response to the underexplored state of investigation into refugees and refugee resettlement. Existing inquiries remain scattered throughout social sciences disciplines; the investigation is especially underwhelming in the political science scholarship. IR scholars' interest in refugee situations is anchored to the political factors behind refugee exodus (Davenport, Moore, and Poe 2003; Moore and Shellman 2004, 2006, 2007), or their connection to armed conflict (Salehyan 2007; Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006). It is understandable that refugee entrance into host countries like the US would bring the subject into the domain of American politics and policy. Political science has paid little attention to refugees, or tends to study refugees uncritically, i.e. as part of the overall immigrant population (Hein 1993). The discipline's approach to immigration is still dominated by survey-based work, articulating and interpreting the impression of American population on immigrants and their impact on the US economy and welfare (Hawes and McCrea 2018; Rehm et al. 2012). Reflecting on my review of the pertinent scholarship, political science lags far behind other disciplines like sociology and geography in the investigation of refugee communities. My decision to pursue a refugee-centric approach in my investigation was also an attempt to address this research gap on resettlement albeit with the help of 'real' narratives of refugees.

Moreover, as I have discussed earlier in Chapters I and II, I also remain uneasy with the lack of academic scrutiny of the structure of refugee resettlement. There is a considerable value

in the resolution in the shape of resettlement to refugees, but it is almost treated like a panacea. Historically, immigration has been a function of some form of political trade-off (Zolberg 2006). Resettlement is no better, and refugees, more than anyone else, understand this trade-off and associated costs even before the process of resettlement has begun. The refugee decision to resettle or not is intimately linked with the history and identity of the people involved (Byrne 2013). Evans (2010b) noted how some pro-resettlement Bhutanese refugees were pressured and harassed by repatriation-minded refugees in Nepali camps. The dilemma and shame associated with the option of resettlement were variously revisited by Bhutanese-Nepali individuals during interviews and conversations during my fieldwork:

*Some people accused us of being 'traitors' for accepting resettlement. There are people who still live in refugee camps [in defiance to resettlement]. (Interview 1).*

*The baathaa-taathaa [the elite] had already left the camp long time ago. Us simple-minded folks and refugees with difficult cases were the only ones left behind. And also the riff-raff [like] the people who would say bad things about their parents were left behind. So, I didn't want my children to fall under the influence of such people. If we were abroad I thought my children could get more opportunities and be separated from such bad influence youth. My children had grown up and they needed opportunities in congruence with their training. Us old folks would just come as family. With that understanding, we came to the US. (Interview 12).*

*[Name redacted's] father didn't want to come to the US. He spoke of how it took him a long time to convince his father [to file for resettlement] ... His would leave the camps in the morning so that he didn't have to address the matter of resettlement. [Name redacted] spoke of the dynamic of resistance to resettlement in Nepali camps ... Many families, according to [name redacted], would conceal information about their resettlement application; they would travel [out*

of camp] with false pretense. They didn't want to deal with the judgment and marginalization [of the rest of the community]. (Field note 07/24/2018).

To spell it out, there is an obvious human cost to resettlement as articulated in above statements. Even before we weigh the diurnal challenges faced by refugees in their survival or making a living in resettlement, the incontrovertible price paid before resettlement is the turning of their backs to their homeland. There's a deeply resonant quote in Nepali language: *matri bhoomi swarga bhandaa pyaaro huncha*. Roughly translated, homeland is considered to be far more preferable to heaven. I would argue that for many refugees, resettlement is not an easy decision, but a poisoned sacrifice. As articulated in Figure 16, along with the stigma of choosing resettlement at the camps, Bhutanese-Nepali interviewees revealed different forms of challenges they faced in resettlement (Chapter IV).

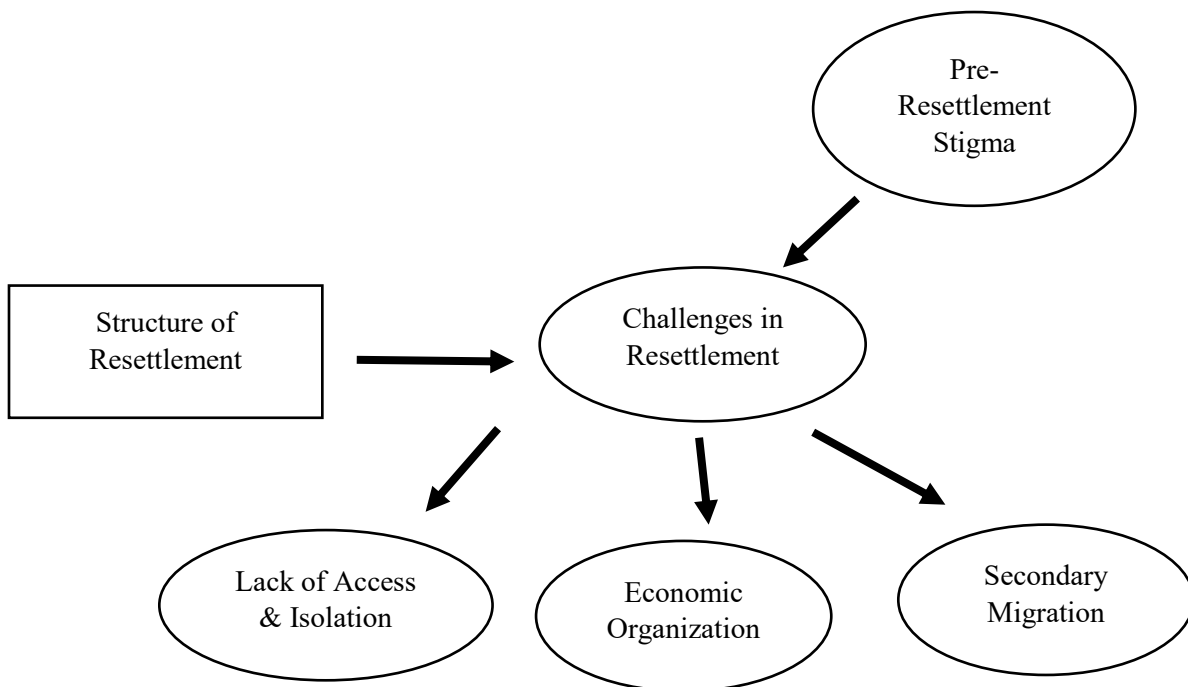


Figure 16: Structure of Resettlement and its Human Toll



Looking back at my research, resettlement translates to a long-term political transaction with obvious benefits for host countries like the US. Every refugee family is responsible for its economic self-sufficiency (Hein 1993; Nawyn 2006; Rumbaut 1989), and this rule is largely non-negotiable. Given the strict nature of resettlement policy, many refugees have expressed different types of challenges they have faced in Akron:

*When they got here [from camps] they were charged about \$1500 each for airline ticket to get here from Nepal...And she said 'oh no, he was never told that.' Well, he thinks he did. As a result of that, he didn't make the payment. He didn't pay anything. That's why he got a bad credit. Well, if they don't pay it back their credit rating gets bad. (Interview 4).*

*For people who are coming here with no cultural knowledge, is tantamount to a spider's web. City life is a spider's web. They don't know which road leads to where. They don't know what facilities are available and where they are. (Interview 5).*

*I basically had nothing when I moved here. So I started working here. I would take no salary [or profits from the sale]; I took no day off throughout the year. I work continuously. I also got my sons to come and help out at the shop after work. That's how I filled up the entire store. After a long time, and many rotations, I have managed to fill up the whole store. (Interview 10).*

*One of my sons is a lafdaa [rascal] type. Recently, he had worked for about two months. They saw that two of the family members were working...apparently you have to show pay stubs [for welfare]. So they cut off the food stamps [for having more than minimum level income and income earners]. So he has to quit the work, banking on his older sister's food stamps. (Interview 18).*

*Many [refugees] appear content to work in the same area and stay there (so expectation of resettlement is vindicated in some areas). [Name redacted] talked about her family worked hard for down payment to buy a home. Resettlement was always going to be better than what they (didn't) have at refugee camps. (Field note 07/12/2018).*

*Now, [name redacted's] father works at Case Farms ... [where] hundreds of Bhutanese-Nepali refugees work. This work is best-suited for refugees with minimal English skills, which translates to older generation for the most part. The work is reportedly cold and repetitive. He poignantly spoke of how his father (and siblings') work allows him and his older brother to attend college. If his father didn't work, [name redacted's] options would shrink tremendously. I think he doesn't want to work in such companies because he has seen his father struggle, and he understands that he has the opportunity to escape that type of life [at the factories]. (Field note 07/24/2018).*

I have cited a broad range of quotes and field observations here to highlight the diversity of challenges experienced in resettlement. Every refugee individual has had their personal challenges and suffering, including the perceived gatekeepers of the community. While many of the individuals I spoke to, are charting ambitious path to their future—this includes medical school, college education, opening a multi-site business venture. However, such path is often paved by personal and family sacrifice. These are the stories that exist within refugee resettlement in Akron and reflect the experiences of resettlement in the community. To detach these narratives from the academic interpretation of refugee resettlement would be erroneous and unconscionable.

In resettlement, refugee communities appear to have separate economic and social-cultural lifestyles. Put differently, refugee economic participation is made structurally necessary in resettlement, but refugee communities tend to resist cultural integration (Franz 2003; Ives

2007; Nawyn 2006, 2010; Portes and Rumbaut 2006). This has been evident in the case of Bhutanese-Nepali community as well, confirming the economic-social division common in many immigrant groups. As opposed to its strict economic expectation, the US government largely appears to be less uninterested in the societal integration of refugees (GAO 2012). This lack of political effort has been observed in the formation of ethnic enclaves and a sense of suspicion in host societies (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). Unlike the federal institution and volags, local agencies on the ground (like IIA) are usually in the best position to help refugee communities integrate. However, according to my research as well as the inferences of Nawyn (2010, 154), these local institutions are instead known to help create a cultural space for refugee communities. Integration of diverse communities is mostly evident in cities and urban areas (Ray 2003), but refugee populations have been shifting from metropolitan cities to semi-urban areas like North Hill (Singer and Wilson 2006). At least in the case of Bhutanese-Nepali community in North Hill, their cultural resistance should be credited less to the location but attributed more to its desire to preserve its way of life.

My research successfully establishes a theoretical link between the state-centric bureaucratic view and refugee-centric experiential perspective (Chapter II). Since the academic interest on resettlement has been conspicuously missing, I view this link as the beginning of a necessary research trajectory. As the urgency of refugee situations around the world persists, comparative investigation of resettled communities and resettlement of host societies—between the US, Western European countries, along with Australia and New Zealand—would be fruitful. This research path remains particularly relevant in the context of the US: the country has historically received the highest number of refugees every year (UNHCR n.d.), and its decentralized policy generally leads to an inequality of refugee experiences due to varying state

institutions and services (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011; Nawyn 2006, 2010). As I have learned during my fieldwork, there is a tremendous interest and acceptance of refugee communities in host communities like North Hill.<sup>138</sup> While the refugee communities are far from socially integrated into the local society, the Bhutanese-Nepali and other groups have brought with them an injection of labor and capital to their neighborhoods, reflecting the recent national trend (GAO 2012; *New American Economy* 2016). The structure of refugee resettlement is far from perfect but has helped North Hill with its economic development. Apart from the ethnic enclaves of the past, as studied by Gold (1988), and Portes and Rumbaut (2001, 2006), there hasn't been a serious investigation on similar neighborhoods and communities. As stated earlier, I view my research to be the starting point of a meticulous research path to a rigorous study of resettlement policies and their impact on refugee communities, especially at the grassroots level.

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<sup>138</sup> There are of course exceptions as well. I observed a variety of individuals express resistance and dissatisfaction at the rising profile of the refugee communities in North Hill.

## Study of Refugee Identities

The label of refugee is a powerful one. Zetter (1991, 45) proposed that the refugee label is a designation that is not self-defined; instead, this is forced upon them. This label is also an emblem of refugee powerlessness. Even in resettlement, this label isn't completely erased and has significant implications for refugee identities. The intimate link between identity and refugee experiences is well-established (Byrne 2013; Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Evans 2010b; Jaji 2015; Malkki 1995a, 1995b). My ethnographic investigation of the Bhutanese-Nepali community can be construed as a tale of empowerment of some individuals through their revised identities. On the other hand, my research also provides evidence of the uncompromising nature of identities for some individuals. Yet, both identity approaches are a function of agency of Bhutanese refugees in resettlement. Deviating from the clichéd impressions of refugees—as victims or welfare abusers (Ludwig 2016)—my results point to the value of a context-driven study of identities of refugees.

Constructivist scholars of identity emphasize the fluidity of identity frames. The paramount implication of my research is the linkage between the perceived social agency of refugees and their identities. In line with constructivist scholars such as Barth (1969) and Jenkins (1994, 1996), I have observed that disparate identity frames can be rooted to the same content (in this case, the culture of the Bhutanese-Nepali community). This is evident in the identity-based dilemmas faced by my interviewees and their tendency to use disparate identity frames interchangeably:

*So [among] all the Bhutanese artists we have, this debate persists. Are we Bhutanese artists? Are we Bhutanese-Nepali artists? Are we Nepali artists? We sing, compose, and write in Nepali*

*language. That debate is going on. My explicit opinion might be different from others. So I define myself as Bhutanese-Nepali. Now I am [also] a US citizen. (Interview 7).*

*They said we weren't Nepali. I think we will say we are from Bhutan. I guess we are Nepali from Bhutan. (Interview 22).*

*[I couldn't get a Nepali] citizenship. In that regard, I feel wronged to an extent. Then, my father and mother [are] from Bhutan. I don't know anything about Bhutan other than what I have been told. It sounds great. They talk of what we owned, our own land. They speak of the animals we owned. When I hear about these things, I wonder about that life. I wonder about the identity they had ... when someone asks me of my birthplace, I don't answer 'refugee camp'; I just say I was born in Nepal. That's why after leaving Nepal, I guess you remember the place you've left behind. (Interview 27).*

*Transcribing interview no. 17, it was interesting how the interviewee identified himself as Bhutanese, but earlier he had referred to himself as Nepali, while describing anecdotes. It leads me to think Bhutanese and Nepali identities may not be replacement of one another but layers of identities. In other words, Bhutanese is the state-based identity while Nepali is more of a social identity, like their caste system. (Field note 04/27/2017).*

*When talking about the younger generation, the older generation understands that the former's tendency is to adopt a Nepali identity, and for the most part they're [i.e. the older generation] resigned. Their resignation is also reflected in the power dynamic in the family structure. (Field note 03/01/2018).*

These excerpts are instrumental in illustrating how identity, although a constant, can have a fluid disposition. Furthermore, these narratives separately refer to elements crucial in the development of our identities: birthplace, historical narrative, national origins, ethnic traditions, family structure, and social role. Yet, individuals can interpret and employ these factors

differently in determining their identities, leading to diverse narratives within refugee groups. Upon consideration of all these factors, study of refugee identities is not only complex but incredibly fascinating.

My inferences are easily applicable in identity-based scholarship. These can be readily applied to the typical Manichean divide of primordialism and constructivism. There's ample evidence applicable for both forms of identity frameworks. More importantly, my observations will be more helpful in building exploratory frameworks in understanding refugee and immigrant adaptation. As I learned inductively, refugee identities should be explored within the context of their past life (including pre-refugee and refugee experiences) and the present situation in resettlement, as I have done here (Figure 17). A sense of continuity is important in the understanding of our social lives and identities (Eastmond 2007; Sani et al. 2008; Smeekes and Verkuyten 2015). In identity-based investigation of refugees, an intimate understanding of the past (as I have done so through a separate presentation of Chapter IV) and how it connects to the refugee present is crucial.

As I have explained earlier in Chapter V, the labels of Bhutanese or Bhutanese-Nepali represent only one (albeit significant) dimension of their identities. The community is quite active in organizing and celebrating sub-national caste- and ethnicity-based practices, as referenced here:

*[We meet on] ... Saturdays and Sundays every week. These days tend to be auspicious here. Whether last rites, or cleansing ceremonies, if we can plan for weekends, the friends and community members can visit, and arrange for a lama [priest]. I found that there are some Buddhist gumbas [monasteries] so it's easy for us to continue our cultural practices and traditions. It must be good for other castes and ethnicities. I only know for my caste and*

*community. We go to some place in Ohio; I don't remember the name [of the place]. We can get there in 19 minutes in a car. Our family tends to travel there. (Interview 12).*

*We have one adhyaksha [coordinator] who organizes Sangranti [festivals] and other events. He manages to organize something during Chaitya Dashain [festival in the last month of the Nepali calendar]. He brings us invitation to congregate ahead of time. We have that adhyaksha of our Magar Samaaj [Magar Community]. (Interviews 13 and 14).*

*Ya they organize programs on an annual basis. Once a year. Usually it's at a gumba [monastery]. Last time, it was organized at a school too. Gurung community organized it at the school. The Tamang community organized it at the gumba. (Interview 18).*

In my analysis, these regular meetings of caste- or ethnicity-based groups is an illustration of the Bhutanese-Nepali community's growing agency. At the end of Chapter V, I discussed the organizational role of BCAA and its contribution to the community. Although its influence is arguably diminishing in the recent years, its most significant legacy to date is providing its organizational platform to these ethnic groups within the community.

In his ethnography based on meat processing plant in Nebraska, Pachirat (2009) explored a dynamic world of violence and power that existed far from the gaze of the society. Unbeknownst to the society at large, there existed this interesting world where economics, social status, and identity intersected in an organic yet complex manner. I find parallels between my work and Pachirat's ethnography. The position of Bhutanese refugees is not quite as obscured, although many of them also work in meat packing plants themselves (far from North Hill's 'view'):

*There's interaction between the Bhutanese community [and the North Hill locals]. But I don't think there's interaction to the level that's necessary [for us]. Sometimes I wonder if we are a*



*little isolated. That's one of the reasons we celebrate multi-cultural festival [in October].*

*That's why the BCAA organize[s] the cultural festival.*<sup>139</sup> (Interview 7).

During my field work, I often noticed that the Bhutanese-Nepali community is largely hidden and remains somewhat of a mystery to many local residents (Field note 12/7/2016). Perhaps, this is because the community isn't socially integrated into the North Hill society. While polite and often participative, I don't think the community is interested in a consistent engagement with the rest of the community, or worse, assimilation. Consequently, this relative isolation has allowed a degree of social autonomy to the Bhutanese-Nepali group, which has helped them practice their culture and understand their identities in a new setting. Put differently, ethnic oases (as opposed to enclaves) like North Hill serve an important cultural function parallel to its economic contribution (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006).

In addition to a nuanced view of resettlement (from a refugee-centric perspective), my identity-based findings have relevant implications for immigrant- as well as US identities. Identity 'choices' in resettlement for refugees, as explored in Chapter V, can appear complicated. The Bhutanese-Nepali individuals are legally no longer refugees. But then again, they're not quite seen as US citizens even though they are, legally speaking. They're not Bhutanese anymore even though many would protest this claim. They're not quite Nepali either. They find themselves at a very unusual intersection of legal and normative definitions of identities. As immigrants and refugees integrate over time, their economic contribution improves (Capps et

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<sup>139</sup> I have described the political and social function of this event in Chapter V. However, BCAA reportedly hasn't organized this event in the last few years (Field note 07/12/2018). Based on my observation, this event was more successful in attracting other refugee groups of North Hill, and the group's allies and supporters, rather than local population of North Hill.

al. 2015) but their ethnic connection inevitably weakens (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). This possibility was not lost on Bhutanese-Nepali interviewees:

*There's a concern if the children will retain the same culture. If the children don't speak the language, how would they understand the culture? Another challenge seen here is that all these kids getting all this freedom. Back home there was a bit of fear of parents [and punishment]; here, you can't beat your children. So the good kids will always end up being good. But some children, exploiting the different cultural expectation here, go on the bad path. (Interview 7).*

*...the time [for Nepali grocery stores] will come to an end. The young generation doesn't like the traditional food. They go to McDonald's and so on, and eat the fast food for \$2-3; why bother cooking at home? Why wash the dishes? Rather, rest during the free time. That's where the youth's thought process is headed. (Interview 10).*

*After the children grow up, they stand up on their own feet [and become independent] here it seems. However, it is the Nepali custom that children watch over their families when they are old and sick. They do. I don't know about our future. (Interview 17).*

*He spoke of how he's always going around, helping relatives and family members. He analyzed his own inability to say 'no' to many of these requests ... He seemed to take pride in this system, claiming this system will never disappear from the Bhutanese-Nepali community [I hope he's right]. He made an excellent point that different generations develop disparate perspectives. He spoke of the youngest generation in the US having the 'perfect accent' (i.e. American accent) and distance from their cultural values and expectations ... [he considers himself to be from the middle generation]. (Field note 07/24/2018).*

The Bhutanese-Nepali community appears to be progressing in terms of economic security and self-sufficiency. I have observed the ethnic connections to remain strong between families and within the community (Field note 07/24/2018). Currently, the community is ardently working

toward maintaining their cultural way of life. This strong emphasis on cultural practices and celebrations appears to be especially important to the community. At this point, the resettled community is new enough to remember its refugee experiences, so I expect the persistent identity label to remain Bhutanese-Nepali. However, with time immigrant identities and culture dilute and often get assimilated into the broad ‘American’ or ‘hyphenated America’ identity (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). The level of assimilation depends on family connection and the strength of ethnic networks. The next generation of Bhutanese-Nepali individuals would serve as the ‘second generation immigrants’ and it would be interesting to see if the historical memory and currently identity-linked narratives move forward with them.

In sum, we need to revisit how we see resettlement, and especially, how refugees are adapting their identities to resettlement. Rigorous and longitudinal scrutiny of refugee identities across generations and within communities will deliver important understanding of resettlement and refugee lives.

## Research Challenges

### Lack of Critical Understanding of History

The epigraph by Min Jin-Lee is a meditation on the struggle immigrants and refugees have faced throughout human history and have yet survived. The present anti-immigrant attitude around the globe and especially in the US is concerning but it is not novel. It is also a reminder of my short-sightedness. In preparation of my research, my attention to the role of history and past memory was cursory. As a researcher, I was perhaps overtly invested in identifying instances of active agency of the community, and implicitly make a statement about refugee abilities. Through my continued exposure to the Bhutanese-Nepali community in North Hill and transcription of the first few interviews, it was clear that I needed to be more attentive to the narratives of the Bhutanese past. The label of refugee is inherently a function of a 'lost' past and consequent powerless state (Zetter 2001). This is a powerful experience which enriches the study of refugee identities. Chapter IV, therefore, is an extensive exploration of the Bhutanese past, and serves as a necessary pretext to my data analysis in the following chapters.<sup>140</sup> The organization setup of my dissertation provides a linear trajectory to the experiences of Bhutanese refugees. Various scholars emphasize the importance of a sense of continuity in the understanding of our life and identities (Eastmond 2007; Sani et al. 2008; Smeekes and Verkuyten 2015).

Individual testimonies on the past was instrumental in supplying a rich, diverse context to my investigation:

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<sup>140</sup> The organization of past experiences into a separate chapter was first suggested by Dr. Hancock, my committee chair.

*I think around 1990s, there was a huge demonstration [protesting the Bhutanese government's actions against the Lothshampas]. In part of the country there was giant protests. After the military rule, people ran away because now they would kill you by beating you up. Later on, they would trouble the whole families. (Interview 1).*

*[The Bhutanese government's action was about h]ow to cleanse the ethnic Nepalis. Whether through assimilation or eviction. This was going on. We were kids and we didn't understand it then. (Interview 7).*

*Many people were registered into the census categories of 3 and 4, because people couldn't produce the C.O. [Certificate of Origin] from their rural residencies. Even when they served jail sentence, they wouldn't get their place back, which would be distributed to other people ... A person, ill-categorized, would mean that their children would be placed into sub-optimal, lower categories. The consequence of this is that the children might not be able to get higher education. This is reminiscent of the repressive caste system. (Field note 05/02/2017)*

Bhutanese population may often be perceived as a homogenous group (Interview 1) but my interview data is undergirded by a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives. These narratives are contextually rich and detailed; they're also a far better recollection history of Bhutanese government's repression compared to the existing literature I have come across. One of my future research goals is to articulate these stories of Bhutanese repression and the situation in which the *Lothshampas* were forced to leave their homes behind never to see them again.

## Access and Rapport

Although I spent considerable time in North Hill, my field experience could have been even more extensive. Although I observed some cultural functions and gatherings, I couldn't attend many ethnic celebrations. I wasn't invited to some of these, or only found about them after they had already passed. Due to my language skills, many individuals were curious about my ethnic and caste affiliations. On two separate occasions, I had been asked to 'help' a Hindu organization (Field note 11/30/2016) and a Gurung-based society (10/13/2018). I didn't attend the former because I wasn't quite comfortable with the individual who had invited me; in the second case, despite future connection the actual invitation never materialized. To address these issues, I spoke to the expert interviewees who had observed these celebrations. The general consensus was that these events served as a way to celebrate their religious-cultural heritage (Interviews 3, 4, and 30). With time, organization of these ethnic and cultural functions are becoming more exclusive to the specific ethnicities (Field note 07/12/2018). This is also a function of the fact that the Bhutanese-Nepali population is growing due to secondary migration, and the intimate sense is slowly dissipating:

*At the refugee camps, the refugee families were in constant contact with one another. Although this was replicated in the early phase of resettlement, this has been changing gradually. The intimate tone is disintegrating, especially with the incoming secondary migration to North Hill. Nilam's overall perspective is that the community has gotten quite big now. She hardly recognizes people from the community like she used to. (Field note 07/12/2018)*

Part of my access was hampered by the fact that I began my field research by volunteering at IIA. This organizational affiliation provides me with a deeper understanding of the resettlement process and the role played by local institutions, as well as several relevant

professional opportunities. Upon a personal introspection, my association with IIA mostly helped but often hindered the development of rapport with the Bhutanese-Nepali community. IIA was incredibly useful in establishing initial contacts with pertinent individuals, most of whom were considered community leaders or gatekeepers. I remain in contact with these individuals as we share mutual respect. These are the *taathaa-baathaa* individuals, i.e. the elite of the community. Although I was able to interview the older generation and record their rich and divergent experiences, I felt less welcome. This relative distance was expressed in their perception of me as a figure of authority. Part of their hesitation is probably a result of their difficult refugee past:

*He [teacher of the English class at IIA] suggested that students' hesitation will not be out of privacy or confidentiality concerns. He says that they will be skittish, and they lack confidence in speaking with individuals they see as authority. So he believes it's better to inform the whole class about the objectives of research. He offered to formally introduce me to class, and I can come prepared with a statement. (Field note 04/11/2017).*

In hindsight, his formal introduction might have only helped a little bit. Being introduced by the teacher (another form of authority) as an academic perhaps enhanced my stature instead of diffusing it. Therefore, on the insider-outsider continuum of a researcher (Labaree 2002), I was more on the outside with some of my interviewees. A few of my interviewees often insisted on calling me 'sir' (a clear designation of authority figure); I was once asked if I was a refugee as well as a way of confirming my background (Interview 19). Although my Nepali identity and language allowed me relatively easy access to the community, some kept me at a distance. On the balance of events, I don't think this affected my research overtly. I don't believe the data I have collected would have been any different if I was able to

build a more intimate rapport with some of my interviewees. A relative distance from familiar populations and cultures can even be useful for a researcher (Angrosino 2007).



## Research Intrusion and My Status as an Advocate

Although localized, the Bhutanese-Nepali community boasts a bit of a celebrated space in Akron.<sup>141</sup> Local media have covered and celebrated the communities of stories of success. The community continues to attract consistent interest, both academic and popular.<sup>142</sup> As a scholar, my work is critically connected to the community, and my future research will be undergirded by community's testimonies. I take my role as the community's storyteller quite seriously, and have become a bit protective of the community. I am concerned the community will solely be seen as a subject for research and inquiry. I am concerned this will further lead to refugee individuals feeling powerless; this would be antithetical to my vision of refugees as agents in resettlement.

My stature has evolved from a researcher to an advocate of the community over the years. Consequently, I have received multiple research-related queries and requests, as well as invitations to panels. With time, I have become more selective in offering my expertise. Even when consulting with other researchers and teams, I am perpetually concerned about the privacy of my contacts. I have been more receptive to educational panels. In these various settings, I have often ended up taking a protective (even confrontational) stance on refugees:

*Today I participated [in a panel] and defended refugees and immigrants in the Refugee Story panel at 340 Franklin Hall. This was a student-organized event ... I think the idea was that of*

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<sup>141</sup> The following links provide a sense of the positive news coverage of refugees in Akron:  
<https://www.ohio.com/akron/news/reports-show-immigration-aiding-akron-s-population-economy-housing>  
<http://www.ohio.com/news/local/stores-in-north-hill-neighborhood-of-akron-reflect-influx-of-asian-immigrants-1.525919>

<sup>142</sup> The following reports (I contributed on the second) reflect this attention:  
[http://research.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Welcome-to-Akron\\_Partnership-for-a-New-American-Economy\\_June-2016.pdf](http://research.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Welcome-to-Akron_Partnership-for-a-New-American-Economy_June-2016.pdf)  
<https://www.kent.edu/spcs/executive-summary-north-hill-economic-development-survey-and-focus-group-report>

*'education'; of understanding what it means to be a refugee ... I view it as another example of 'contact' and education program, the kind that fosters in a state university. Still, the reception wasn't entirely positive ... There was definitely some resistance, which ranged from ignorance to the idea that migrants and refugees should be grateful (implicitly if not explicitly). I pushed back as much as I could. The resistance ranged from a relatively ignorant undergraduate to an almost-lawyer with a refugee grandfather (yet, it seems the history of refugee past does not provide you with the semblance of compassion). I tried to drive home the point that the narrative on immigrant and refugee is lopsided, with the expectation that they should be grateful. While economic integration is quite necessary of immigrants and refugees, the stark differentiation in group identities is also necessitated by the American identity politics, as articulated by Portes and Rumbaut (2006). I am frustrated by this expectation that refugees should stay in their lane, and not do anything remotely aggressive. (Field note 11/17/2017).*

I don't consider myself a refugee researcher alone. Although not entirely intentional on my part, I have become an advocate of refugee rights. I feel a sense of responsibility because a number of reports and projects on North Hill refugee community bears my name.

In ethnographic research, protection of vulnerable populations is a sensitive and critical matter (Clark 2016). Although stories and testimonies of refugees deserve to be told, I am witnessing this trend where refugees are perceived as 'easy' sites of research. In my view, the balance between respect and inquiry needs to be established. I am doing what I can as a researcher-advocate to address this as best as I can. In the recent community dialogue, I (along with Johanna Solomon) created an environment where different sets of refugees were brought in contact with other residents of North Hill, and addressed and treated all participants at an equal status. While this is not a long-term solution, I view such initiatives to be better instruments of research and respect for individuals involved.

## **Research Path Forward**

My field work and subsequent analysis has led to important inferences on resettlement, and on refugee lives and identities. The project has also opened possibilities of new avenues of research in the future. As I have asserted earlier, my work should be the beginning of a more extensive research into refugee communities and resettlement in host societies. At this point, on a personal level, the initial and an urgent step would be to elaborate on the testimonies of repression and the context of departure from Bhutan, as I have presented in Chapter IV. I find it incredibly important to tell the story of Bhutanese refugees from their perspectives, before their memory is diluted and they're consigned to history. The following sub-sections articulate some interesting avenues of research in resettlement and refugee identities.

## Potential for Inter-Site and Inter-Case Comparison

Moving forward, a similar analysis can be conducted at a number of different sites, especially with a longitudinal framework. As I mentioned earlier, there are thriving Bhutanese-Nepali communities in Columbus and Cincinnati; some of the Bhutanese-Nepali entrepreneurs from North Hill have extensive business investments and contacts in those locations:

*[Name redacted] informed me that Akron's society (as well as the secondary migration rate) is not as impressive or intense as that of Columbus. He claims there's 15,000 to 20,000 Bhutanese people living in Columbus. (Field note 04/25/2017).*

*After emailing [name redacted] a few times ... I called him. He was out of town but the reason was intriguing. He is in Cincinnati to open another grocery store. He sounded excited and mentioned that the Bhutanese-Nepali community in Cincinnati is even bigger [compared to North Hill], and hence, [he has] the room to expand his grocery market. (Field note 07/10/2018).*

A comparative case analysis has the potential to unlock a more nuanced picture of resettlement and the subsequent experiences of the Bhutanese-Nepali community. This would also be an excellent opportunity to investigate the attraction of Ohio for Bhutanese-Nepali residents. I didn't inquire this matter thoroughly but I have observed that Bhutanese-Nepali refugees tend to prefer Ohio as their destination for its relatively low cost of living and its immigration policies:

*According to [name redacted], Ohio is more flexible (or, perhaps less stringent) on awarding citizenship to the refugees. For instance, one can apply for citizenship based on a medical emergency; that's how his mother got her citizenship at 87 years old; apparently, Ohio is a little lenient on mental health patients, even allowing them to use interpreters at the citizenship interviews (Field note 04/25/2017).*

This line of research has potential implication for further exploring the dynamics of secondary migration in the US. My empirical analysis of state-based economic, organizational, and ethnic attraction is only an initial marker; a state's citizenship policy could be an important explanatory variable in the study of secondary migration.

The comparative case analysis can be further expanded to include other refugee groups. I found it intriguing that even though North Hill was home to a variety of refugee groups, the Bhutanese-Nepali community was the most visible and organized. The lack of visibility of the Karen community was especially conspicuous as it boasted a similarly significant population in North Hill.<sup>143</sup> I especially noted the Karen community's social absence and its relatively closed nature during my time at the IIA offices:

*[In comparison to the Bhutanese] the Karen ... are more interested or invested in individuals than institutions ... There's a hierarchy but in support of that there's no one leader [among the Karen]. [Name redacted] is someone who manages the grocery store but he is also someone who invests time on working with and mentoring the [Bhutanese] community. There are far fewer people among Karen working on that. Most of them are working paycheck to paycheck. (Interview 3).*

*She spoke of the Karen community and its closed character, especially in relation to the Bhutanese-Nepali community. It appears that the Karen community is aware of it. [Name redacted] shared an anecdote where Karen youth attempted to organize, but was rebuffed by the elders for the most part. I think the hierarchy is very strict in the Karen culture. (Field note 07/13/2018).*

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<sup>143</sup> In comparison to at least nine Bhutanese-Nepali owned businesses in North Hill, I came across only two Karen businesses, even though they settled in North Hill before the Bhutanese population.

The Karen community boasts a significant refugee presence in the US (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011). A comparative case analysis between the Bhutanese-Nepali and Karen communities could provide very interesting insights on the role of cultural content and identities in their adjustment in resettlement. Despite my research on and attachment to the Bhutanese-Nepali community, I am intrigued at the possibility of researching a variety of refugee communities in the US, especially through a refugee-centric framework of research.

## Study of Potential Conflict in North Hill

Historically, North Hill used to be a community of Italian immigrants. The Bhutanese-Nepali community appears to have taken that mantle. Although this refugee community is known to be fairly reserved—establishing impressions as hard working and quiet immigrants (Field note 11/03/2016)—their community status has led to some instances of conflict in North Hill. There was an isolated case of the murder of a Bhutanese refugee:

*And ... well there was one incident where someone was shot ... have you heard that story? ... he was a Tamang. I think it was because of a gang [rite of passage]. If I have to kill someone why don't I kill a refugee? It was 2013 or 2014...I think it was 2013. That was very very sad.*

(Interview 2).

The community has worked closely with the law enforcement ever since. My impression is that the community has accepted this violent case like they have accepted suicide deaths of its community members—quietly and sadly.

There also have been instances of misunderstanding among neighbors:

*A lot of the conflicts people bring up are simple misunderstandings ... Because as part of their [i.e. Bhutanese] mourning routine [or rituals] when a parent dies, the children will dress in white. As they were mourning, some neighbors thought they were involved in Klan activity. And they almost got evicted because the neighbors didn't understand that it was the cultural way of showing respect for their dead parents. (Interview 29).*

There have been IIA-directed events like community dinners to address many of these issues of cultural confusion in the past.

As a researcher, I see value in examining the African American community's impression of the Bhutanese-Nepali refugee community. Although I haven't observed this directly, I have heard that the African American community of North Hill feels like it's being left behind with the rise of refugee communities:

*And I think that's where a lot of the conflict we deal with from wider community has come from. We weren't necessarily involving some folks in the conversation, especially the African American community felt really, or at least the members of the African American community, have expressed that they feel like they're getting pushed out. Gentrification is the real issue.*  
(Interview 29).

There is some truth to this sentiment. It is likelier to run into Bhutanese-Nepali or other immigrant businesses than an African-American establishment in North Hill:

*The businesses run by the Bhutanese community is explicit in its Nepali theme, making them impertinent to most of the local, especially African American, population.* (Field note 12/17/2015).

*During our conversations [at IIA], we revisited this old subject of some African American leaders not being happy with the attention the refugees have been getting. The idea of [declaring North Hill an] 'international district' was a metaphorical slap to their face. And I personally get that. This is not the first time African American community has felt usurped by an incoming immigrant community. In the politics of distributing resource, somebody is going to be shifted around, to their dissatisfaction.* (Field note 11/01/2017).

*We briefly conversed about the interaction, or tension, between the African American community and the overall refugee populations. This is something that has come up in conversations at IIA many times. As the white population is leaving, the economic space in North Hill is being filled*



*up by immigrant businesses. In the process, the African American population feels it is being bypassed. (07/13/2018).*

This avenue of research offers an opportunity to examine relations between two different types of minorities: African American and resettled refugee communities. In my view, the viewpoint of African American population, contrasted with refugee experiences can help link inferences from American politics and immigration-based scholarship. It is an intriguing prospect to contrast identity narratives between these two marginalized and underrepresented groups.

These proposed lines of inquiry are as important as they are fascinating. I am personally curious about the development of Bhutanese-Nepali community in the future. Leaders of North Hill refugee community hold cautious optimism for their future generation, as they quietly address the problems plaguing their community. Whatever their future may hold in regard to their identities, I am grateful and privileged to have worked with the community, and I hope I can do a credible job in telling their stories.

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## APPENDIX A

### Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

**Study Title:** *Anatomy of Refugee Resettlement: A Mixed-Method Study*

**Principal Investigator:** *Anuj Gurung, ABD, and Dr. Landon Hancock*  
*Department of Political Science*  
*Kent State University*

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, what you will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose here is to study the agency of refugees in the resettlement context through group identity frameworks. Both refugees and resettlement are understudied concepts, which we strive to simplify by capturing experiences and narratives of Bhutanese refugees.

#### **Procedures**

For this study, interviews are the primary source of data. Additional personal records such as health information is not needed for the interviews. The respondents are selected based on the recommendation of the Bhutanese community as well as the International Institute of Akron (IIA) staff. Any future analysis will use pseudonyms to for the privacy and security of the respondents. The interviews are semi-structured, designed to last between 30 to 60 minutes. A written transcription of the interview will be offered and provided to the respondents within the week of the interview.

#### **Audio and Video Recording and Photography**

During the interview, audio recording device will be used to record the interview. The information recorded will be used solely for the research, i.e. it will not be publicly available. The recordings will be protected in a safe by the investigator.

#### **Benefits**

This research will not benefit you directly. However, your participation in this study will help us to better understand how refugee communities develop and organize the social life in a host country. This will also help us understand why Bhutanese community has been attracted to Akron, Ohio. Participation in this study will not have any effect on the services the participants receive from the IIA.

#### **Risks and Discomforts**

There are no anticipated risks beyond those encountered in everyday life. Some of the questions we ask may be upsetting, or you may feel uncomfortable answering them. If you do not wish to answer a question, you may skip it and go on to the next question. Anatomy of Refugee

**Privacy and Confidentiality**

Your study related information will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. Any identifying information will be kept in a secure location and only the researchers will have access to the data. Research participants will not be identified in any publication or presentation of research results; only aggregate data will be used. Your research information may, in certain circumstances, be disclosed to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees research at Kent State University, or to certain federal agencies. Confidentiality may not be maintained if you indicate that you may do harm to yourself or others.

**Compensation**

There is no compensation, financial or otherwise, included in participation of this study.

**Voluntary Participation**

Taking part in this research study is entirely up to you. Participation/non-participation in the study will not affect your standing at IIA. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact Anuj Gurung at 410-564-9170 or Dr. Landon Hancock at 330-672-0904. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at 330.672.2704.

**Consent Statement and Signature**

I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX B-1**

**Economic Development Survey**

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**International Institute of Akron (IIA)  
Local Business Survey**

We are surveying local North Hill and Temple Square businesses to assess your satisfaction and impact on consumers, and to gauge the overall effect of immigration population on businesses. We appreciate your participation in the survey. As a follow-up to the survey we will conduct a comprehensive focus group session in early November.

---

A: General Business Questions

1. Name and contact information of business owner.

\_\_\_\_\_

(Owner Name)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Street Address Line 1)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Phone)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Email)

2. Type of business:

- Auto Service/Sales
- Beauty
- Dry cleaner
- Restaurant
- Grocery store
- General retail
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Number of employees and hours of operation:

Full-time: \_\_\_\_\_ Part-time: \_\_\_\_\_

Hours of operation: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Type of ownership:

- Owner-operated
- Lease: Property owner's name and contact: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (e.g. length of lease, repair responsibility): \_\_\_\_\_

5. Duration of business at this location:

- Less than three years
- Between three and five years
- More than five years

6. Satisfaction with North Hill or Temple Square location:

- Overall satisfied
- Unsure
- Overall dissatisfied
- Additional comments: \_\_\_\_\_

7. In the past 5 years, have you taken a decision to expand your:

- Customer base
- Property holdings
- Type of products or services offered

8. Which describes your business revenue trend in the last three years:

- Overall stable
- Some fluctuation
- Don't want to share
- Additional comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**B: General Market Questions**

1. Which best describes your general customer base:

- Residents of North Hill
- Outside of North Hill
- A combination of both

2. What percentage of your customer base are repeat/regular customers (approximately)?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What forms of marketing do you use to attract customers (if at all)?

---

4. Does the immigrant population of North Hill patronize your business?

- Yes: What percent (approximately) \_\_\_\_\_?
- No

5. Do you consider the immigrant customer base essential for your business?

- Yes
- No
- Additional remarks: \_\_\_\_\_

6. In what way have you increased or plan to increase business investment:

- Increasing sales/customer base
- Decreasing operation costs (e.g. transportation, production, etc.)
- Increasing property holdings
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Do you belong to a business association within or outside Akron?

- Yes: \_\_\_\_\_
- No

8. Do you believe a business association focused on marketing and increasing the customer base in North Hill be of value?

- Yes: \_\_\_\_\_
- No: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Would a business association which assists in advertising of the NH/TQ business district be of value?

- Yes
- No

10. Do you have suggestions to strengthen the North Hill, Temple Square business district?

---

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C. Follow-up:

Thank you for your participation.

We are hosting a focus group session with local business owners in November. This will help the IIA and local businesses to identify areas of future economic improvement and successful integration of emerging businesses into the North Hill, Temple Square market.

1. Would you be interested in participating in the focus group?

- Yes
- No

2. Do you know of anyone who is planning on starting their own small business who could use assistance connecting to local business resources and networks?

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Additional notes for the data collector:

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## APPENDIX B-2

### Field Notes on Focus Group

12/7/2016: Focus Group Notes<sup>144</sup>

Today was the day I conducted the focus group. It wasn't a truly academic focus group.

It took place at the North Hill Public Library. Although about 14 people RVSP'ed (as per my suspicion) only 5 individuals showed up.

[Name redacted] and [Name redacted] from P.O.S. printing (right next to Bista Brothers); [Name redacted] from Alexander Auto Parts; [Name redacted] from Family Groceries, and [Name redacted] from Khusie Cosmetics.

[Name redacted] and [Name redacted] spoke of the language issues with customers. Everyone spoke of the crime and safety issue. It seems to be more of a problem within the immigrant community. The American business owners said "there is less riff raff now."

[Name redacted] perspective was interesting – starting business in N. Hill was through 'trial and error'. There is lack of knowledge sharing in terms of starting business here.

[Name redacted] spoke of how Summit County approved two businesses of same names.

People spoke of the need to introduce businesses such as café and tea place. Apparently someone called [Name redacted] tried to open a tea stall but couldn't get the right permits.

The Exchange House across from [Name redacted]'s FG.

[Name redacted] – we don't understand the make-up of the population. There is an increase in dealing with new immigrants, and they generally do what the insurance company asks them to do. Family roots are gone. We don't understand the population. Our ideal customer is someone who understands and takes pride in their cars. There are many wrecks. Happy to meet quarterly for business communication.

[Name redacted] - we are slowly growing but we are running out of space, and we can't really find space to grow.

Overall common considerations among the participants – safety, space, and interest into establishing communication among businesses

[Name redacted] was curious about resettlement and fate of refugees in the new administration. It came out of concern, which was very interesting. Although one would think of a different impression of them, 'their heart is in the right place.'

---

<sup>144</sup> My field note entry is on the short side because I was responsible for conducting and managing the focus group. I am in possession of notes from observers of the process. I can make them available if necessary.

Later on, Mark spoke of how many houses are coming down in Akron.

Susan: “We want refugees to trust people in the community other than us [the IIA]”.

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## APPENDIX B-3

### Proposal to use Economic Development Project Data for Dissertation (Request for Amendment)

#### Section III – DETAILS

1. Describe the change(s) to the research and provide a rationale for each change.

Between September and December of 2016, I worked as a consultant for the International Institute of Akron (IIA) on their business development project. My job included designing and distributing surveys, and conducting focus group interviews with American and refugee business owners. This allowed me to have conversations with refugee business owners and their socio-economic behavior. Their economic goals and challenges they face articulate their worldview and narratives, on which my dissertation is anchored. It also provided me a window into the relation between refugees and the American community. My work further allowed me to contact business owners who can are potential interviewees for my research.

The data I have collected through the surveys and focus group are pertinent to my overall research. The data will not change the direction or scope of the dissertation, but provide context and supplement my field work-related inferences. The IIA has agreed for me to use the data provided I respect the confidentiality of the participants (which I will, as a researcher).

- 
2. Are you requesting an increase in the total number of participants?  Yes  
 No

If **Yes** → Please answer the questions below.

Number to be added:

Rationale for addition:

- 
3. Will there be any change in the risk(s) to participants?  Yes → Explain below  
 No

Explanation:

- 
4. Will there be any change in the benefit(s) to participants? *Compensation is not to be considered a benefit.*  Yes → Explain below  
 No

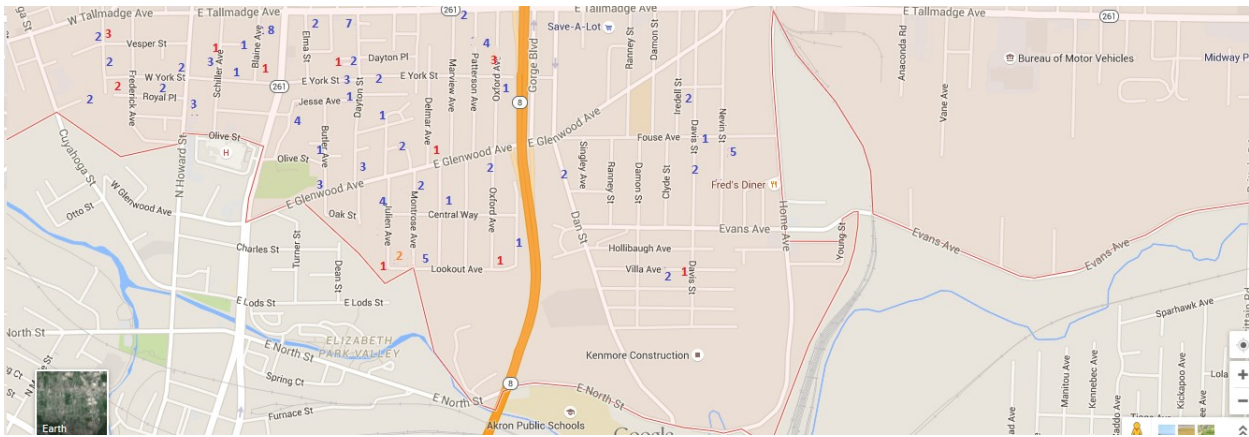
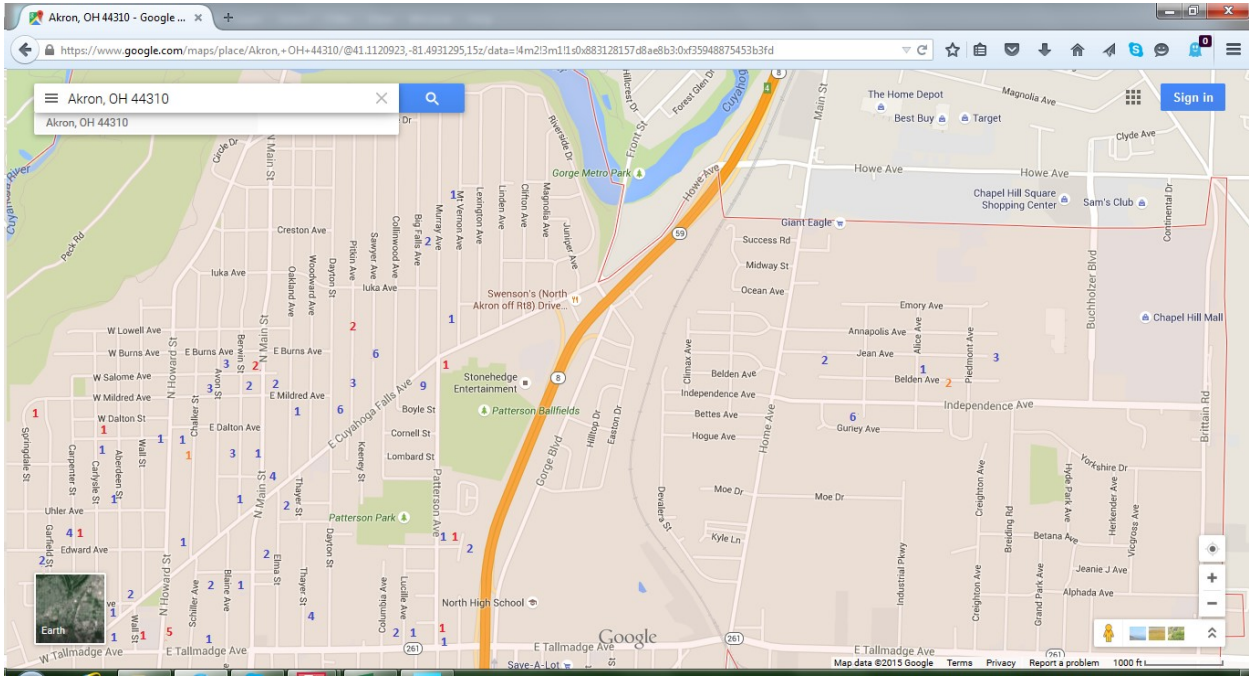
Explanation:

- 
5. Could the proposed change(s) affect participants' willingness to take part in the research?  Yes  
 No

**If Yes →** How will information be communicated to currently enrolled subjects (e.g., revised consent form, letter to participants, etc.)?

# APPENDIX C

## North Hill Residential Map (Source: IIA)



**Blue: Bhutan Nepalese**

**Red: Burmese**

**Orange: Other (Iraqi, Afghani, Pakistani, etc.)**

**Category 1: 1-5 cases**

**Category 3: 10-15 cases**

**Category 5: 20-25 cases**

**Category 2: 5-10 cases**

**Category 4: 15- 20 cases**

## APPENDIX D

### Bhutanese Community Association of Akron (BCAA) Brochure

#### WHAT IS THEIR CULTURE?

- **Family:** Strong family ties and multigenerational living arrangements provide for needs of all ages.
- **Food:** Rice is main staple with vegetable curry and pickle. Fruits, milk, yogurt, butter, fish, and occasional meat are also part of the diet.
- **Language:** Nepali is the native language, but there are sublanguages based on religious affiliation. Many understand Hindi.
- **Education:** English was taught in camp schools, as well as traditional subjects like mathematics, science, and Nepal history.
- **Dress:** Sari for women, and daura-suruwal for men. Young girls wear kurta-suruwal. Similar to dress in India.
- **Religion:** Hindu is the most prevalent religion, with some Kirati, Buddhist, and Christian followers.
- **Work:** Refugees were not allowed to work outside the camp, so they bring no professional skills or business experience.
- **Transportation:** They bring experience only with walking, bicycles, and busses.
- **Death:** Cremation is the preferred disposition of bodies after death. A period of mourning is observed.

#### WHAT CHALLENGES DO THE B/N REFUGEES FACE IN THE UNITED STATES?

- English communication.
- Transportation.
- Education, especially for higher level job opportunities.

#### WHAT IS BCAA DOING?

- It hosts elder picnics and cultural programs.
- It supports soccer teams and tournaments for the youth.
- It conducts citizenship classes.

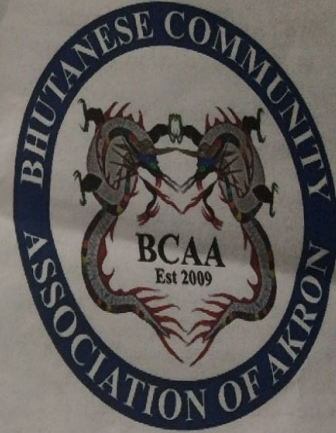


#### HOW ARE B/N REFUGEES IMPACTING AKRON?

- They rent and buy homes.
- They are good employees with a strong work ethic.
- They pay local, state, and federal taxes.
- They start businesses.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

[www.bcakron.org](http://www.bcakron.org)



578 North Main Street  
Akron OH 44310  
[www.bcakron.org](http://www.bcakron.org)

#### WHAT IS THE BHUTANESE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION OF AKRON (BCAA) ?

- BCAA is an organization that represents all Bhutanese/Nepalese (B/N) refugees in Akron.
- BCAA was created by B/N leaders in Akron to facilitate and promote the smooth transition and integration of B/N refugees into the population and culture of the United States.
- BCAA is a tax-exempt, 501(c)(3), not-for-profit organization.

## APPENDIX E-1

### Summary Statistics Table (Expanded)

Measures	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max	Source
<i>Dependent Variable</i>					
Incoming Refugee Population (logged)	4.05	2.07	0	8.13	Key Indicators for Refugee Stakeholders, ORR 2012-2014
<i>Economic Indicators</i>					
Refugee Average Wage	9.44	0.86	7.31	14	US Department of Health and Human Services
Median Monthly Housing Cost	801.93	173.4	552	1293	US Census Bureau
<i>Self-Sufficiency Indicators</i>					
Entered Employment (%)	55.39	18.5	0	100	Key Indicators for Refugee Stakeholders, ORR 2012-2014
Cash Assistance Terminations (%)	53.56	30.54	0	100	Key Indicators for Refugee Stakeholders, ORR 2012-2014
Cash Assistance Reduction (%)	17.74	21.86	0	100	Key Indicators for Refugee Stakeholders, ORR 2012-2014
Entered Health Benefits (%)	60.36	24.73	0	100	Key Indicators for Refugee Stakeholders, ORR 2012-2014
<i>Welfare Indicators</i>					
Total ORR funds (t-1)	11800000	21100000	85000	141000000	Key Indicators for Refugee Stakeholders, ORR 2012-2014
TANF benefit levels for family of 3	429.04	161.76	170	928	Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
<i>Ethnic Networks</i>					
Total Refugee Population (logged)	6.12	2.07	0	8.91	Refugee Processing Center – PRM
Bhutanese population (logged)	215.88	329.09	0	2166	Refugee Processing Center – PRM



Burmese population (logged)	299.28	399.11	0	2290	Refugee Processing Center – PRM
Iraqi population	340.71	650.42	0	3691	Refugee Processing Center - PRM
<i>Institutions</i>					
Caseload (logged)	6.47	1.6	0.69	10.22	Key Indicators for Refugee Stakeholders, ORR 2012-2014
Number of Reception Sites	6.63	6.54	0	33	Author's interpretation based on ORR volag maps
<i>Demographic Controls</i>					
State Unemployment Rate (%)	6.24	1.68	2.6	11.2	US Bureau of Labor
Total Foreign-Born Population	9.1	6.07	1.4	27.1	American Community Survey
Educational Attainment, High School	29.92	3.12	20.8	39.2	American Community Survey
State minimum wage	7.66	0.75	5.15	9.5	US Department of Labor



## APPENDIX E-2

## Empirical Table

VARIABLES	(1) Baseline Model	(2) Refugee Population	(3) Ethnic Networks
Refugee Average Wage	0.062 (0.043)	0.074* (0.039)	0.020 (0.030)
Median Monthly Housing Cost	-0.005*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)
Entered Employment (%)	0.013*** (0.003)	0.010*** (0.003)	0.008*** (0.003)
Cash Assistance Terminations (%)	0.004 (0.003)	0.003 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)
Cash Assistance Reductions (%)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.002)
Entered Health Benefits (%)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.000 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.003)
Total ORR funding (t-1)	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000** (0.000)
TANF for family of 3	0.003*** (0.000)	0.002*** (0.000)	0.002*** (0.000)
Caseload (logged)	1.135*** (0.077)	0.823*** (0.119)	0.805*** (0.109)
No. of Reception Sites	-0.028*** (0.005)	-0.028*** (0.006)	-0.024*** (0.006)
State Unemployment Rate (%)	-0.130** (0.064)	-0.123* (0.066)	-0.140** (0.061)
Foreign-Born Population	0.055*** (0.021)	0.043** (0.022)	0.025 (0.020)
Educational Attainment, high school	0.096*** (0.008)	0.091*** (0.010)	0.074*** (0.009)
State Minimum Wage	-0.179 (0.109)	-0.147 (0.107)	-0.077 (0.117)
Refugee population (logged)		0.256*** (0.057)	0.255** (0.103)
Bhutanese Refugee Population (logged)			-0.105*** (0.039)
Burmese Refugee Population (logged)			0.250*** (0.027)
Iraqi Refugee Population (logged)			-0.110 (0.080)
Constant	-2.671*** (0.831)	-2.703*** (0.821)	-2.397*** (0.775)
Observations	149	149	149

R-squared	0.750	0.758	0.777
Number of states	50	50	50

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Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1