RESETTLEMENT AND PEACE: EXPERIENCES OF BHUTANESE-NEPALI REFUGEES IN A UNITED STATES RUST BELT CITY

Anuj Gurung

This article, featuring the experiences of resettled Bhutanese refugees, considers economic development and post-refugee peace. It examines the US resettlement system and offers a critique of practices that perpetuate forms of structural violence within refugee communities. The article inspects refugee narratives through the lens of human needs theory—survival, freedom, well-being, and identity—and finds that while some refugees are able to satisfy their needs adequately, others become marginalized. The article draws on data from ethnographic field observations and thirty semi-structured interviews. The qualitative dimension of this research is especially useful in conveying the complex narratives of refugee lives in the United States.

> "[Resettlement is] … as if the whole refugee camp was transported to Akron. There are good things here. Also, bad things."
>
> Bhutanese refugee in Akron, Ohio

INTRODUCTION

Third-country resettlement is one of the three "durable solutions" in addressing the global refugee problem outlined by the UN. [1] "Resettlement is [a family-based] transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another State that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent

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residence." [2] Resettlement is a consequential policy but its structure and its impact on refugees are not fully understood. In this special issue of *Peace Research*, I examine development and peace as they relate to the Bhutanese refugee community resettled in the rust belt city of Akron, Ohio. [3] Refugee resettlement should lead to peace by progressively satisfying human needs of refugees. However, the negotiation of human needs leads to contrasting refugee experiences. With the help of Bhutanese-Nepali [4] narratives, I argue in this article that systemic drawbacks of resettlement contribute to structural violence and divergent experiences.

The role of economic development is important in peacebuilding.[5] Challenging conditions surrounding economic development, from a sense of relative deprivation to competition for resources, can initiate and sustain violent conflict. Therefore, conflict transformation and sustainable peace require a meaningful engagement with economic development. Academic works have adopted individual-centred perspectives like human needs on development, [6] viewing "development in terms of the fulfillment of basic needs at the individual level." [7] In resettlement, economic participation of refugees is easily available, but this does not guarantee the attainment of human needs. If post-refugee peace can be construed as satisfied human needs of refugees, resettlement does not translate into peace for all refugees.

My work juxtaposes refugee scholarship and peace and conflict studies frameworks, making three important contributions to scholarship in these fields. First, by framing the satisfaction of human needs as a proxy for peace, I treat resettlement as an ongoing negotiation of human needs. Economic participation and subsequent pursuit of human needs are felt in various manners within the community. In contrast to generalized assumptions about refugee behaviour, individual-level frameworks such as human needs theory are useful in drawing attention to how resettlement directly affects individual refugees and the community of which they are a part.

Second, refugee narratives highlight the limits of solutions like resettlement. The experience of Bhutanese-Nepali refugees in Akron is decidedly mixed, underlining the imperfection of resettlement. It has empowered many refugees, but also led to the marginalization of others. This is partly because existing policies are based on generalized assumptions about refugees rather than their heterogeneous needs. In the political discourse, it is commonplace to justify refugees' place in the United States via economic

checklists of labour participation, tax payments, and home ownership. [8] Such an economic perspective privileges selective stories of "refugee success" and tends to obscure alternative narratives. [9] Resettlement of refugees has obvious merits, and is particularly necessary for exigent circumstances like those in Afghanistan, but the system requires a reconsideration of refugee needs. Only by paying attention to the diversity of refugee experiences and subsequent challenges in addressing their human needs can resettlement be structurally repaired.

Third, I expect this and the other contributions to this special issue to broaden the scope of our understanding of peace and development. Narratives emerging from resettlement experiences merit our attention, as they offer nuanced insights into better addressing refugee needs. Work like this provides examples of elevated refugee agency and resourcefulness, without ignoring the existing challenges. Bhutanese-Nepali refugees are perceived as inspiring leaders and role models in Akron, and their individual and collective agency deserves recognition. Yet many of these leaders have expressed legitimate and urgent concerns about the unmet needs of their family members and neighbours in Akron.

This article proceeds in six sections. In the first, I elaborate on the historical context of Bhutanese refugees and Akron. Employing the extant scholarship on refugee integration and my field observations, the second section deconstructs the US system of resettlement, and how it leads to structural violence, that is, the denial of human needs. The third section of the article explores post-refugee peace in the context of human needs. The discussion traces the evolution of human needs theory from the perspectives of peace and conflict studies scholars, particularly Johan Galtung. The fourth section describes my ethnographic research in Akron, recounting my initial access to the Bhutanese-Nepali refugee community and my data collection methods, including the recruitment of Bhutanese-Nepali individuals for interview. The fifth section presents the findings under the themes of economic development and exploitation, social marginalization, and in-group identity segmentation. Here, I describe the Bhutanese-Nepali community's economic role in Akron, underlining its agency and adaptation to resettlement. The refugee accounts reveal the exploitative nature of economic participation, as well as the community's ongoing battle with social marginalization (denial of freedom needs) and segmentation (denial of identity needs) in resettlement. [10] In the concluding section, I make some concrete recommendations to

repair the resettlement system to better serve refugee communities.

BHUTANESE REFUGEES AND AKRON: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The Lhotshampas largely lived in southern Bhutan, where they stood out as a population that spoke the Nepali language and largely practised Hinduism. Although the Lhotshampas possessed little political power, the Bhutanese government enacted a series of draconian policies to repress their way of life. [11] The 1988 census deliberately categorized many Lhotshampas as "illegal migrants," despite their having lived in the country for generations. [12] Consequently, Lhotshampas (including many of my interviewees) were marginalized as *saat numbere*, a slur referring to their alleged illegal immigration status. The Bhutanese government imposed *Driglam Namzha*, a policy that blatantly favoured the Tibetan ethnic identity.[13] Adoption of this policy banned cultural expression of Nepali culture and Hindu religion as well as the instruction of Nepali language in schools. In response, Lhotshampa groups sprang into dissident action, organizing nationwide nonviolent protests. At this juncture, the government's political heavy-handedness was replaced by a ruthless adoption of violence through its military: arrests, beatings, and harassment of Lhotshampas followed.[14] The early departees were political dissidents and their families who were "*forced* to sign a … '*voluntary* migration form,' disqualifying them from eligibility for Bhutanese citizenship." [15] Others, forced out of their jobs and businesses and fearing further persecution, were next. Rural villagers, cornered by the military and the anti-government guerrilla forces, followed. The Lhotshampas who remained in Bhutan had to sign and produce a government-enforced No Objection Certificate (NOC) to prevent their eviction or to access education and employment. [16] In examining refugee negotiation of conditions of structural violence and human needs, it is necessary to remember these instances of direct and structural violence that precipitated their departure and exile.

This displacement of Lhotshampas culminated in a seventeen-year-long exile as Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. Their cultural heritage and ability to speak Nepali helped them obtain education, or seasonal jobs at farms and quarries, but these were surreptitious undertakings, as they couldn't reveal their refugee status. When resettlement was offered by countries like the United States, it was initially greeted with a mixed reception, [17] but most

Bhutanese refugees have now been resettled. Despite the humanitarian intention behind resettlement, refugees have little power in the process. Receiving countries decide the number and destination of refugees based on their domestic and fiscal policy, and the public mood on migration.[18] The US immigration system is known to be an instrument of inclusion and exclusion, [19] and its resettlement policy is no different. Resettlement of refugees can be viewed as an investment and a trade-off: in return for their political legitimacy, refugees are expected to contribute to the host society's economics. [20] It is no surprise that refugee families find themselves resettled in cities that, like Akron are afflicted by "uncertain future of industrial decline, an aging population or the outmigration of youth."[21]

Like the refugees, rust belt cities have largely been forgotten. [22] In the late twentieth century, Akron was considered the "Rubber Capital of the World." [23] Its decline began in the 1970s, when it was forced into economic restructuring and lay-offs as a result of increasingly stiff global competition.[24] This decline was exacerbated by suburbanization: Akron "lost … more than 38,000 residents between 1970 and 1980 (a 14 percent loss)."[25] This loss continues: between 2007 and 2013, Akron's population decreased by 1 percent.[26] The population loss in Akron would likely have doubled by 2013 without the influx of the foreign-born population in Akron.[27]

Defined by its economic decline, Akron has become a favoured location for refugee resettlement. Between January 2008 and August 2015, altogether 6,768 Bhutanese refugees were resettled in Ohio; during this time, Akron received 1,980 Bhutanese refugees (the second highest in Ohio).[28] In the absence of an updated record on secondary migration, the current population in Akron is estimated to be much higher. Among Akron's refugee communities, Bhutanese refugees are largely regarded as the most visible and organized group in Akron as well as in Ohio.[29] Incoming refugees fill the vacuum left by locals, who in turn had displaced Indigenous Peoples from Ohio.[30]

RESETTLEMENT: A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

A structural perspective is important in understanding power and its incredible effects. "Violence" or injustice can be deeply embedded in a structure, and "shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances."[31] The benefit of a structural point of view is that it can expose

inequalities and injustices and be applied to a range of societal structures.[32] The US resettlement process delivers unequal effects to incoming refugees, which are especially pronounced in the economic scene. Resettlement applies pressure on refugees and makes them "self-sufficient" almost immediately.[33] The state requires refugees to be employed within three months of their arrival and be independent of welfare as soon as is feasible. Refugee families are sent to neighbourhoods and cities in economic decline and are immediately made eligible for legal employment.[34] In reality, "the goal of the resettlement process is not family sustenance, but individual job placement."[35] The pressure of self-sufficiency imposes conditions of structural violence, evident in the disparate experiences of the Bhutanese community.

Prior to their forced departure, Bhutanese refugees faced both physical and structural violence, and in relation to structural violence, there are parallels between the Bhutanese government's political exclusion and the economic pressures of US resettlement policy. Thus US resettlement policy reimposes conditions of structural violence on refugees, prioritizing short-term economic output at the expense of the long-term social-psychological well-being of refugees. In contrast, the United States does not appear to have an interest or a clear strategy on refugee integration challenges.[36] The state support offered is minimal, and largely translates to financial support for three months.[37] Many of the state programs are geared toward finding employment and job training.[38] Therefore, refugees find it difficult to anchor their social experiences within American society,[39] struggling to manage their past trauma or stresses of unemployment, and feelings of uncertainty.[40]

It is now understood that resettlement favours "ideal" refugees, in other words, young, educated, and able-bodied individuals.[41] Since resettlement is a family-based migration, the ideal individuals often find themselves responsible for most or all other family members unable to work on account of their advanced age, deteriorating health, lack of transportation, or limited language proficiency. The other effect of structural violence is the separation of refugee communities from the host society. Refugee communities often become insular, relying on their community for cultural, social, and economic support, explicitly captured in the formation of ethnic enclaves.[42] Local attitudes and suspicion often contribute to this isolation. Some US-born residents view incoming refugees as increasing the competition for jobs and posing a threat to their social status.[43]

When refugees are subjected to an inflexible structure like resettlement, the end product is structural violence, where many are not able to meet their human needs. Some scholars would judge refugee resettlement to be a continuation of settler colonialism, which refers to a process of colonization of Native Americans and continued structural marginalization of people of colour.[44] In examining refugee life and agency in the United States, it is important to remember the country's colonial history. The land where the refugees are resettling is owned by the displaced Indigenous Peoples.[45] The argument that settler colonialism contributes to marginalization is a potent one, as resettlement benefits from the labour of refugees while tending to separate them from the host society. In Akron, immigrant groups as well as the Black population have suffered such marginalization. Over the past few decades, Akron has witnessed an urban removal of African American businesses, a gap that is now filled by the refugee newcomers who are becoming the target of local distrust.[46]

It is imprudent to view resettlement as a panacea or a faultless long-term solution. It is an imperfect system that delivers varied consequences to the incoming refugees. Resettlement is ill-understood in isolation but should be studied as an important part of the overall journey of refugees.[47] As this article articulates, experiences of resettlement vary among refugees, and it is by heeding these disparate experiences that the resettlement process can be sufficiently improved.

POST-REFUGEE PEACE AND HUMAN NEEDS

By offering economic participation and political rights, resettlement helps address statelessness and concomitant challenges.[48] However, does resettlement offer positive and sustainable peace to refugees? How do we conceptualize peace in relation to a post-refugee setting? These questions are admittedly complex yet necessary.

Our conceptualization of peace is inherently linked to conflict and violence. It is important to remember that groups like the Bhutanese became refugees after fleeing situations of direct violence. Positive peace is imagined as an explicit absence of direct and indirect violence.[49] In conditions of positive peace, individuals can satisfy their human needs. Exiled refugee communities have imagined peace to be a holistic experience, or a simultaneous satisfaction of personal, social, economic, political, and psychocultural

needs.[50] Attainment of human needs in resettlement, however, can be a challenging task because of the way resettlement is designed (as discussed in the previous section). For some refugees, resettlement offers a space where they can satisfy their human needs and empower themselves. Others can find it more challenging to negotiate their needs because of the restrictions imposed by the host state.

Galtung's theorization of human needs—survival, well-being, freedom, and identity—is intentionally broad, and is particularly applicable to examining the refugee experience. It is difficult to pursue satisfaction of needs in situations of personal and structural violence. In that sense, the satisfaction of human needs is a process of moving away from conditions of violence.[51] Survival needs translate to the absence of conditions of physical violence and exploitation; well-being needs similarly require the absence of misery and exploitation; identity needs are better satisfied in the absence of segmentation; and freedom needs require the absence of repression and marginalization.[52] Refugee camps naturally represent an environment of violence, detrimental to the satisfaction of needs. These are vulnerable and restrictive spaces, where refugees encounter "daily hassles … from a lack of opportunities, such as free movement, access to employment, health care and education."[53] Resettlement, therefore, appears to be a positive action; it represents a move away from conditions of violence toward an environment where refugee needs can be satisfied.

At a resettlement site like Akron, a refugee should be free from the threat of physical violence and death; furthermore, they should also be able to fulfill their freedom needs (without a fear of social marginalization), identity needs (without segmentation or disparate identification),[54] and well-being needs (free from misery and alienation).[55] It is important to note that these needs are broadly construed and are contingent on circumstances.[56] In my view, the broad conceptualization of these needs makes room for more refugee voices and experiences to be included. In resettlement, utilizing opportunities that were not easily available in refugee camps—from finding a job to starting a new business to pursuing higher education—allows many refugees to pursue their needs. However, when the restrictive features of the resettlement system are accounted for, many refugees find satisfaction of their needs a challenging task and their resettlement experience to be worse than that in the camp setting.

As discussed in the previous section, the US system of resettlement is built on exploitation of refugee labour and capital and is not explicitly designed to meet the needs of refugees. Even the needs of survival and mobility are not satisfied in some cases. Refugees, especially in the Bhutanese-Nepali community, are reported to commit suicide in resettlement.[57] In cities with a poor public transportation system, refugees without personal vehicles commonly find their mobility restricted,[58] to the detriment of their social life and mental health. Refugee needs of freedom are difficult to meet if they face an inversion of their social and familial roles, resulting in their social marginalization. Furthermore, identity needs are observed to diverge in resettlement, since identification is linked to age, social status, and history.[59] Consequently, this can lead to a segmentation of identities within the refugee community. Consideration of refugee needs, therefore, is a sophisticated undertaking. While the success and empowerment of refugees—and the satisfaction of their needs—should be rightly celebrated, it is wise to pay attention to the refugee needs that go unsatisfied—and worse, unnoticed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I spent more than three years (March 2015 to July 2018) observing the Bhutanese community in Akron. The data presented here come from my observations and semi-structured interviews. During my fieldwork, I initially spent time at a refugee-serving local organization, the International Institute of Akron (IIA). This experience was useful in developing a keen understanding of the organization's role, the delivery of its resettlement services, and its eventual shortcomings. My professional engagement with Bhutanese refugees helped me establish contact that strengthened into advocacy and friendship over time. My research strategy was simple: I elevated my visibility in the neighbourhood, and I approached and engaged prominent community leaders from the community whenever I could. As Giorgia Dona reflects, "while there is no one best practice, knowledge of the target cohort and use of multiple gatekeepers, consideration of methodological and ethical concerns, and development of estimates would advance the study of forced migrants."[60] To that end, my ability to speak in Nepali, the language spoken by Bhutanese refugees, as well as the extended time spent with the community proved to be crucial.

My initial contact and interaction were with my co-workers at the IIA, from

case managers to interpreters to English instructors. Initial conversations with them formed the backbone of my understanding of refugee life in Akron. I carried a laptop at the organization to take notes. My participant observation took place in English classes, refugee grocery stores, and a through variety of cultural programs hosted by the Bhutanese-Nepali community. At the conclusion of each day, I updated my field memos on NVivo software and reflexively explored emerging themes of integration.

In addition to my ethnographic observations, I conducted thirty semi-structured interviews (n = 30). This included twenty-five Bhutanese refugees who lived and worked in Akron. The interview sample is more or less split into two groups. The first group is composed of business owners, local staff, and college students. The other group has a contrasting profile to that of the first group. These were elderly and unemployed Bhutanese refugees; the reason for their unemployment ranged from old age to chronic health issues to mental health challenges. I interviewed eighteen men and seven women. Recruitment of women was less successful. This was partly a reflection of the patriarchal expectations of the community, where women were less visible outside of certain social contexts. I was perceived as an authority figure in many contexts, which possibly dissuaded women from participating. In addition to members of the Bhutanese-Nepali community, I interviewed five local experts. I adopted a combination of purposive and snowball sampling for interview recruitment. With my professional connection to the agency, the snowball sampling method served me well in identifying and approaching well-established refugees.

From a methodological standpoint, I gradually became intentional in seeking and including diverse refugee experiences. This meant realigning my recruitment strategy in order to speak to elderly refugees. Data from initial interviews and informal conversations similarly steered me in that direction. Therefore, I started observing English classes at the refugee organization, which attracted older and unemployed refugees. Although it took some time to familiarize myself, I was able to gain their trust and recruit them for interviews. This decision was vindicated, as their narratives provide diversity and richness to the data, while underscoring the challenges in their integration. I decided to anonymize my participants to protect their identity and privacy, considering the Bhutanese-Nepali community is an intimate one where most people are familiar with one another.[61]

I conducted the interviews in English or Nepali, contingent on the preferences of the participants. I recorded the interviews with the written and verbal consent of the participants. I personally transcribed the interviews and translated them, as necessary. I engaged with my reflexive field notes and interview data on NVivo on a regular basis. These iterative coding and concurrent data collection processes were helpful in identifying recurring themes. As a researcher of refugee issues and conflict processes, I am careful about a meaningful representation of refugee voices. This is especially pertinent in presenting refugee narratives. Wherever applicable, I present narratives "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."[62] Bhutanese narratives serve as data in this paper and, more importantly, provide a glimpse of their life in Akron.

FINDINGS

Economic Development, Well-Being, and Exploitation

The Bhutanese community is built on strong family and ethnic ties, exported from refugee camps in Nepal. These bonds are responsible for the growing community of Bhutanese refugees in Akron. Bhutanese refugees reportedly request Akron as their preferred destination for resettlement. According to a staff member at a local organization: "The UNHCR is entrusting us with twice the number of Bhutanese coming here … The word has gone out Akron really has its stuff together in terms of resettling refugees." The attraction of Akron is also illustrated in the Bhutanese-Nepali community's pattern of secondary migration, the tendency of refugees to move from their initial settlement to a new site. Secondary migration is motivated by economic prospects as well as familiar ethnic networks,[63] and is commonly observed in rust belt cities.[64] Some of the secondary migrants I interviewed had made their way from Texas and New Hampshire, reportedly to be part of the growing Bhutanese-Nepali community of Akron and take advantage of the city's job market and affordable living costs.

Bhutanese-Nepali entrepreneurs have performed well in Akron, but it is worth noting that not all secondary migrants have fared well. Some face poverty and isolation; secondary migrants are not eligible for public benefits in their new destination.[65] This has exerted pressure on local organizations,

according to an official:

> 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 … because there's more of them here.

While institutional services are important for incoming refugees, family and ethnic networks often provide the necessary assistance in helping them find housing and work.

Refugee participation in manufacturing jobs has elevated the local housing market, job creation, and home ownership.[66] The economic stability enjoyed by the Bhutanese-Nepali community is largely built on manual labour. Most are employed in meatpacking farms, followed by rubber and toy-making companies. These sites serve as immediate options for refugees with limited language skills, helping relieve the exigent economic pressure of resettlement. Thanks to their growing reputation, Bhutanese-Nepali refugees have also developed informal professional networks, evident in carpooling to work and recruiting community members for new jobs. This network has especially benefited the new arrivals and secondary migrants.

Although these jobs are dominated by men, women are also known to work in factories and hospitality services. Women's participation has been necessary for many families' economic survival. Hence, I have noticed the initial reluctance over women's employment is superseded by a quiet resignation. According to one of the local experts,

> [Women who hold jobs] are becoming increasingly common, but this is not a norm yet … but I will say that they are definitely taking a lot more control of the 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.

Immigrant women are commonly confined to the role of "natural" care providers within their community.[67] Despite their contributions, Bhutanese-Nepali women are similarly restricted to supportive roles, ranging from family caregiver to nurse to cashier (at male-owned grocery stores).

"Unsavoury" and "dirty" industries like meatpacking farms are intentionally obscured from society's immediate line of vision.[68] The Bhutanese-Nepali labour is similarly tucked away from the attention of most residents of Akron. Instead, the community's economic activity is most visible in its entrepreneurship. My ethnographic fieldwork coincided with a discernible increase in the opening of immigrant-owned businesses. The majority of the new businesses in the city were started by Bhutanese-Nepali individuals or families. Groceries are the most common and popular business in the Bhutanese-Nepali community. These carry unique forms of products, native to the community. Moreover, these refugee-owned businesses serve as a thriving space for socialization. Immigrant-owned businesses act as socio-cultural expressions of their respective community.[69] The Bhutanese-Nepali businesses, where credit-based transactions are commonplace and entrepreneurs are known to assist one another through counsel and labour, offer a space for socialization.

There is a strong correlation between new refugee communities and ethnic entrepreneurship.[70] It is difficult for refugees to compete effectively in the mainstream market of the host society. Apart from adjusting to the economic pressure of self-sufficiency, refugees struggle to match their qualifications with the jobs available.[71] Therefore, they establish an alternate market, prioritizing their "economic, organizational and motivational advantages over the businesses of natives or ethnic groups."[72] There are inherent risks in these ventures; one businessman described it as a "trial and error ordeal" in which he struggled to find an appropriate property, having to address unexpected building and code violations. Therefore, the Bhutanese-Nepali entrepreneurial ambition is often hindered by a distinct lack of knowledge, resources, and connections.

Despite these obstacles and frustrations, the appetite for entrepreneurship remains high. There is a well-founded recognition that business ownership is favourable to labour-intensive work in meatpacking farms in the long run, and many entrepreneurs mitigate the risks through their familiar ethnic networks. These businesses in Akron are male owned; co-ownership is shared between brothers and close family relations. The presence of women is largely

limited to cashiers in these enterprises. In such familial and extrafamilial investments, families provide capital and labour, often at low or no income at all.[73] A business owner framed his experience in starting his business as a necessary struggle:

> I basically had nothing when I moved here. So, I started working here at my grocery store. I would take no salary or profits from the sale. I took no day off throughout the year. I worked 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 with goods … And business is going fine now.

These groceries are remarkably similar in the products they offer and cater mostly to the immigrant population. Despite the rising number of groceries vying for their attention, Bhutanese-Nepali individuals often felt an obligation to patronize most of them.

From a policy perspective, the community's economic performance is encouraging and offers a vindication of the resettlement program. However, the economic pressure has an exploitative effect, forcing many refugees to toil in meatpacking farms and rubber factories. Although entrepreneurship is an easier and preferable option, it also comes at the expense of aspirations to higher education, a professional career, or even farming. Although the Bhutanese-Nepali businesses are deservedly celebrated, entrepreneurship is not a commonly available option. It requires capital in the form of money, language skills, and connections, as well as a safety net of family support and ethnic networks. Put differently, Bhutanese-Nepali businesses are built on economic investment as well as an ability to navigate the host society's norms and rules. My observations support existing work that argues refugees with favourable capital and class positions perform better economically.[74] In resettlement, economic development is closely related to fulfillment of needs, but it has led to mixed experiences within the Bhutanese-Nepali community.

Freedom and Social Marginalization

For my ethnographic research, I spent some time volunteering at an English language class. The classroom was mostly occupied by the older generation of the Bhutanese community. For many of them, this space doubled as a space for socialization. Although Bhutanese families rented homes in the same neighbourhood, their mobility was restricted. Lack of transportation options, a fear of getting lost, and limited language skills severely curtail the movements of many refugees, in acute contrast with the intimate social setting of 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.

For refugees, language can be an important currency and a form of social capital, the loss of which leads to anxiety and a sense of loss of control.[75] Students of this language class routinely attested to their linguistic restrictions leading to their overall isolation.

Over time, it was easy for me to see why some refugees missed the familiarity and accessibility of Bhutan and refugee camps in Nepal. Life in resettlement has exacerbated a sense of social marginalization for many of them. As stated in the methodology section, half of my interview sample consisted of de facto community leaders, whose economic success and social elevation was evident. Their visibility was built on their capital—relative youth, language proficiency, education, and in some cases, caste-based ethnicity—and professional success in Akron. These individuals were frequently approached by other community members, local organizations, and often local media to represent the Bhutanese-Nepali community. Upon a closer look, individuals without these attributes often suffered a loss of social status and therefore, marginalization.

This marginalization especially burdened the elderly, the unemployed, and the disabled members of the community. The Bhutanese-Nepali community rests on a hierarchical, caste-based system, with patriarchal roots and expectations. These norms, however, have been upended in many families. In some families, traditional gender roles are challenged by the exigencies of resettlement. As men were forced into immediate labour participation, women went to language classes and learned their family's affairs. As stated earlier, women's participation in the economy is also becoming more common. In a patriarchal society, these actions cut into the traditional power structure. Similarly, the growing agency of the younger

generation has contributed to this sense of marginalization. Equipped with the necessary language skills and adaptability, the young have taken over tasks like paying bills, acquiring a driver's license, and setting up medical appointments for their family. This inability to access appropriate resources cuts into parental status and authority: some parents have reportedly been unsuccessful in assisting their children in applying to colleges or dissuading them from working at factories. According to an elderly couple,

> 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.

One of my respondents joked that he cannot even express his authority by physically disciplining his children in the United States, for they might report him to social services. The older generation, especially the unemployed, routinely complain about their lack of freedom and relevance in Akron:

> I didn't want to come at first [for resettlement] … my intention was to return to Bhutan. I wanted to return to *aafno desh* [our 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.

This sentiment, laced with bitterness, was common among many students of the English class. These narratives provide some justification for their initial resistance to resettlement.

The consequence of marginalization can be observed in cases of individual isolation and loneliness, and in some cases, suicide. The Bhutanese refugee population is noted to suffer from a high incidence of suicide,[76] a fact that seems to be quietly accepted by many in Akron. The annual suicide rate among resettled Bhutanese refugees is 21.5 per 100,000,[77] compared to Ohio's rate of 13.3.[78] Suicide is an important subject that transcends refugee experience and is made more urgent when seen from a perspective that views structural violence as an inability to meet human needs. One of the most alarming stories I came across was about a man—lost, unable to find his way home or communicate his predicament—who hung himself at a bus station. The Bhutanese-Nepali community, mostly through the Bhutanese Community Association of Akron (BCAA), has attempted to address issues

of social marginalization faced by the community's elders by organizing cultural celebrations and elder-centred picnics. However, these well-intentioned efforts often fall short because of busy schedules and economic pressures. Refugee-serving organizations are similarly aware of this challenge but are unable to address it because of a lack of capacity. According to a director at such an organization:

> Well, I think the requirements [for refugees] are rigorous … everybody talks about strength-based management … 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 we are sent folks who are never going to be self-sufficient … They're dependent and we've seen so many issues.

Therefore, many Bhutanese-Nepali refugees find themselves marginalized within Akron, not only because of their restrictive economic role and dependence, but also limited mobility, and diminished social roles.

Shifting Identities and Segmentation

Today, identity is one of the most significant representations of individuals and communities. In the context of Akron, negotiation of identity-based needs has segmented the community. It is interesting to observe that the cultural content of the community is stable and uniformly celebrated, especially in its religious and ethnic festivals. However, there is internal dissent when it comes to its identification. Nine of my interviewees identified themselves as "Bhutanese." This label is primordial and simple, tying the community to 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 … 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.

Such an ardent position was especially common among the elderly

population of the community, or the generation that spent most of its life in Bhutan. In their present circumstance, they appeared to be trying to prevent a loss of their Bhutanese identity.

Others appear to be undergoing a fluid negotiation of their identity. Twelve of my interviewees self-identified with a hybrid label such as "Bhutanese-Nepali" or "Nepali speaking Bhutanese." Some interviewees provided keen insights on the fluidity of identity:

> 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?

Three of my interviewees identified as "Nepali" but they used it interchangeably with the hybrid identifiers:

> 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 time 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.

There is a strong correlation between the new identity labels and the more empowered, young refugees. For some of them, hybrid labels link both their Bhutanese and Nepali history, and represent a new beginning. On balance, "Bhutanese-Nepali" is the most popular and commonly used label in Akron. This can be partly attributed to its usage by community leaders and local organizations. This is most evident in the actions of the BCAA. Organizations like the BCAA are generally known as "ethnic organizations," established to help immigrant groups adjust to integration demands. Ethnic organizations also contribute to defining the immigrant group's identity.[79] This is evident in the use of the Bhutanese-Nepali label; most organizations and residents have come to use this designation, which has been popularized

by the BCAA's language.

The BCAA's organizational presence has inspired in-community mobilization along ethnic and religious lines. As observed in this case, immigrant communities attempt to recreate their old social structure.[80] Using the BCAA's strategies and approaches, various religious (Hindu and Christian) and caste-based groups have started to organize cultural gatherings and celebrations of festivals. Based on my observations of these gatherings, they serve a similar function—a re-creation of their participants' former cultural way of life. For individuals who have had their cultural expression and identity suppressed in Bhutan,[81] such celebrations represent the community's cultural agency. For many Bhutanese-Nepali refugees, agency and identity have intersected in meaningful ways in the United States. In the unfamiliar environment, many seek to preserve their way of life, while some prefer to start anew, often by changing their name or caste-based affiliation. As a business owner explained,

> 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.

His choice was understandable, as he belonged to one of the lowest castes, some of which are even considered 'untouchable' by other castes.

My interactions indicated that the hybrid identification of the community is gradually becoming more accepted. This preference irks some refugees, who fear their culture and identities will dissolve away in resettlement:

> There's a concern if the children will retain the same [Bhutanese] 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 [discipline] your children.

> The young generation doesn't like traditional food. They go to McDonald's and so on and eat the fast food for two or three dollars. [Then] why bother cooking at home? Why wash the dishes? That's where the youths thought process is headed.

Identity, therefore, represents an ongoing negotiation of refugee needs in resettlement. The in-group segmentation of identities can be connected

to marginalization and economic exploitation. In other words, these are interconnected unmet needs that are largely faced by refugees who are disregarded by the resettlement system. Nevertheless, a consequential examination of resettlement requires engagement with and inclusion of these narratives that underline the challenges in meeting human needs and acquiring peace.

CONCLUSION

Resettlement is largely gauged as refugee contribution to the host society and its economy, frequently measured in refugee labour participation, entrepreneurship, home ownership, and citizenship acquisition.[82] From the perspectives of refugees, however, it is evident that resettlement is a flawed process that contributes to structural violence, social isolation, and poverty among refugees.[83] The pressure of self-sufficiency, combined with limited state support, makes it difficult for many refugees to satisfy their needs. Incoming refugees in the United States would be better served by a resettlement system that can balance its economic expectations with a support mechanism catering to their needs. Based on my work, I suggest four interrelated ways to serve refugee groups such as the Bhutanese-Nepali community.

First, the US state's priority must shift away from short-term economic gains to long-term refugee needs. The expectation of economic self-sufficiency is myopic and yields short-term benefits by applying pressure on incoming refugees. Instead, a simple and immediate resolution is to offer refugees financial support for a at least a year, as Canada does,[84] and waive the cost of their flights to the United States.[85] This will ease the immediate economic concerns and mitigate social and psychological stress on refugees. The US government will similarly benefit from a long-term, strategic investment in refugee talent and capital. There is a mountain of evidence on refugees' economic ambition: refugee wage reaches parity with the US-born population in about six years;[86] refugees make long-term investments by acquiring citizenship, starting companies, and buying homes at high rates.[87] The apparent gains of resettlement can be short-lived, as many refugee families face the threat of economic stagnation and poverty.[88] Young refugees also find themselves restricted in accessing the labour market outside of their ethnic communities[89] and in pursuing higher education.[90]

Better access to higher education, medical facilities, and diverse employment opportunities will, therefore, help refugees address their needs of well-being while contributing to the American economy and society.

Second, the host state must strengthen its social support so that refugee families can better address their freedom and identity needs. Refugees are increasingly settling in smaller cities like Akron, contributing to these sites' demographic and economic change.[91] While facilities offering job training and translation services are now available in some places, there is a distinct scarcity of programs dedicated to social interaction between refugees. These programs should not only cater to new refugees but also engage cross-cultural communication between refugees and their local counterparts. Having organized several contact-based programs in Akron, I can confirm that the level of social engagement between refugee groups and other Akron residents is limited and quite poor. A fear of authority is well-documented among refugees,[92] but this lack of engagement often exacerbates the local prejudice and suspicion of refugees.[93] The vacuum of interaction and diminished trust can culminate in tension and violent conflict. Adequately planned social programs can reduce the social gap between US-born residents and refugees and help address refugee marginalization and segmentation.

Third, the implementation of the first two recommendations—and reduction of structural violence of resettlement—requires an intentional investment in pertinent actors. In my view, this requires engagement with organizations like the IIA and BCAA that are aware of refugee needs and are best placed to implement these solutions, especially in comparison to their federal counterparts (i.e., voluntary agencies).[94] In Akron, many organizations with different missions and specializations employ refugees. Some of these, like the IIA, have benefited from the "bridge building" role of refugees, connecting the needs of their respective community and organizations.[95] Empowering these networks and organizations will help refugees develop trust and familiarity beyond their immediate community. This is already evident in the advocacy work of Bhutanese-Nepali leaders and the BCAA in reducing the incidence of suicide; similarly, Bhutanese-Nepali attendance at a local hospital increased with the appointment of a Nepali doctor familiar with the community's language and culture.

Fourth, the US resettlement program should prioritize bottom-up programs on gender equality. Resettled immigrant communities tend to recreate the

social structures and concomitant inequalities of their native society,[96] and a community like the Bhutanese-Nepali is no different. Addressing this issue requires culturally appropriate interventions that empower refugee women without alienating their position in the society. In Akron, some local organizations are currently working on developing women-centred coalitions within and across refugee communities. Others are geared toward skill development and employment of refugee women. For these interventions to succeed, they require time, capacity, and more importantly, trust from refugee women participants.

During the tenure of the Trump administration, refugee-serving organizations like the IIA, as well as the national resettlement system, were almost dismantled.[97] If the Biden administration is serious about repairing the resettlement system, it should not limit its action to the reinstatement of the refugee ceiling. It must relieve the economic pressure of self-sufficiency and provide a broad system of social support for incoming refugee groups. At the time of writing this, the city of Akron is preparing to receive Afghan refugees with very limited preparation and resources. It is likely that many Afghan refugees will find themselves exploited by the economic system and struggle to meet many of their needs. While the celebration of entrepreneurial and professional success of Bhutanese-Nepali individuals in Akron is merited,[98] it is necessary to pay attention to their narratives that point to economic exploitation, social marginalization, and identity segmentation. Only by heeding these voices and experiences will we be able to transform the present resettlement system and possibly deliver peace to refugees.

ENDNOTES

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