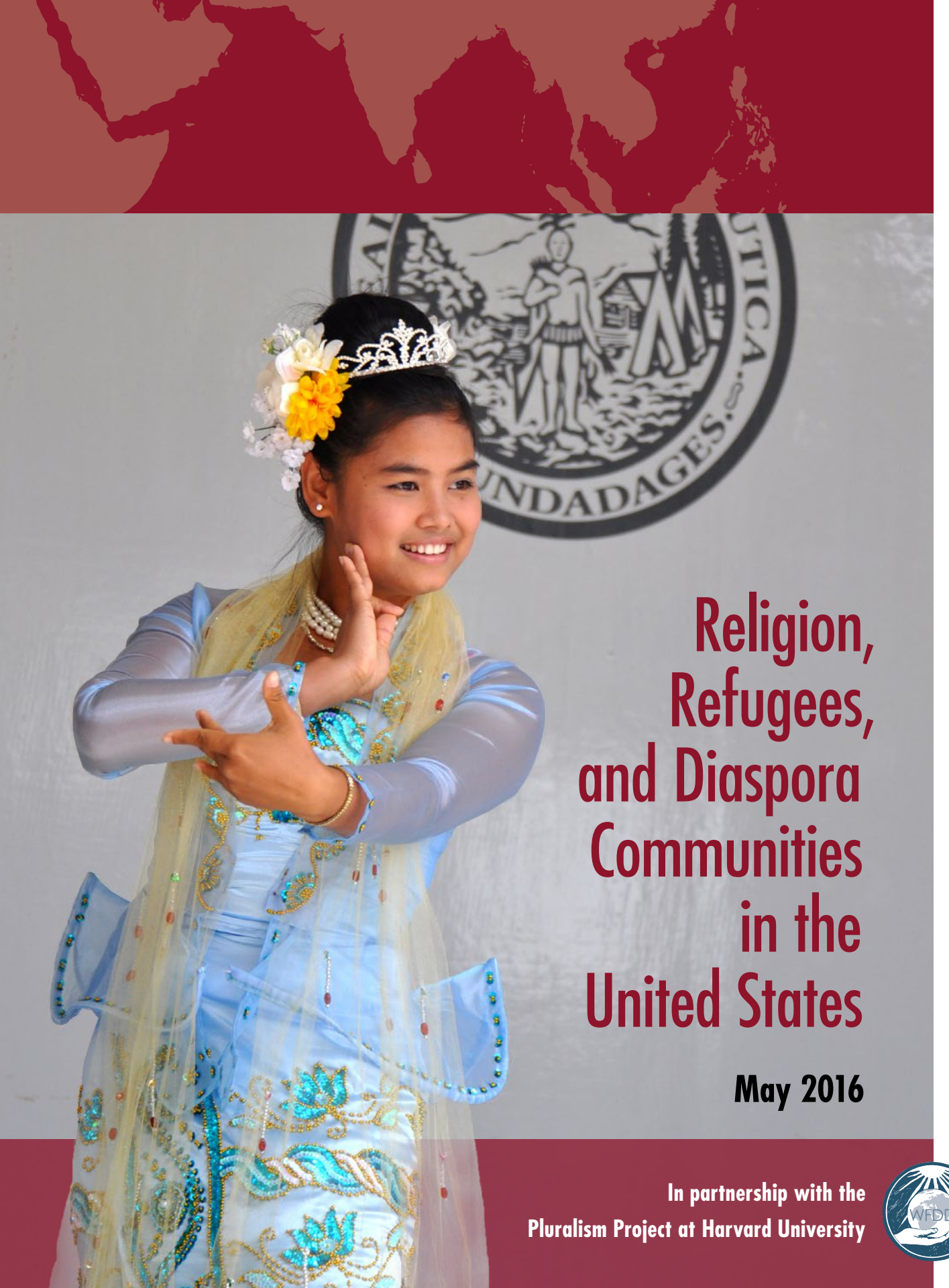

Religion, Refugees, and Diaspora Communities in the United States

May 2016

In partnership with the Pluralism Project at Harvard University

WORLD FAITHS DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE

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Several people from both the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) and the Pluralism Project at Harvard University contributed to this study at various stages. Katherine Marshall, executive director of WFDD, and Dr. Diana Eck, director of the Pluralism Project, served as the senior faculty advisors for the study. Crystal Corman, WFDD program manager, coordinated partnership with the Pluralism Project, edited this report, and contributed to project design and direction. WFDD research assistant Sarah Radomsky, a student at Georgetown University, conducted background research, drafting the introduction and literature review of this report. The pilot study field research was overseen by the Pluralism Project at Harvard University and was the result of collaboration between scholars and students from several institutions. In Utica, Dr. S. Brent Plate served as the lead researcher and senior advisor for a research team of three students, one graduate, and two undergraduate: Retika Rajbhandari, Shannon Boley, and Emmett Potts, respectively. Anna Lee White, a recent graduate of Mount Holyoke College, conducted the majority of the field research in Manchester and Nashua, New Hampshire. Pluralism Project research associate Mary Kate Long provided additional research assistance, including field research in Massachusetts and initial data analysis. Pluralism Project research associate Margaret Krueger assisted with data compilation on religious centers.[1] Pluralism Project research director Elinor Pierce provided research guidelines; Pluralism Project assistant director Whittney Barth facilitated this pilot study and contributed to the writing of this report. Preliminary findings were presented at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University in Washington, DC on February 25, 2016. Susan Martin, director of Georgetown University's Institute for Study of International Migration, offered a response at this event; her comments are incorporated here.

Funding for this pilot was provided by the GHR Foundation.

Design by Sensical Design & Communication
Cover photo by Lynne M. Browne © 2012. A young woman from the Karen ethnic group performing a traditional Burmese dance at Utica Music and Arts Festival.
Images of the Metta Health Center in Lowell, Massachusetts, by Stéphane Janin.
Photos from Utica, New York, by S. Brent Plate and the Snapshots of Resettlement project.

1. For more on the Pluralism Project's general methodology for collecting data on religious centers, please see www.pluralism.org/pages/directory/methodology.

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Foreword

A mark of the twenty-first century is the speed with which ideas travel across distant places, influencing people's approaches and behaviors in a flash. Part of today's fascination with the impact of religious movements is precisely this borderless journey of ideas. The influence of ideas is also important in the remarkable contemporary movements of people who settle, temporarily or permanently, far from the communities where they were born. Nowhere are the challenges of this modern duality of rapid transmission of ideas and unprecedented movements of people more relevant than in diaspora communities, whether they involve refugees displaced by conflict or migrants in search of a better life. Religious ideas and ties are a vital, if often poorly understood, part of diaspora members' lives and their dual relationships to their original homes and to the communities where they now live.

This report explores religious dimensions of refugees' experience from two perspectives. The first is a stock-taking of academic, operational, and policy approaches to refugees and migrants in the United States, focusing on what is known about the religious dimensions of their experience. The second involved field research on two specific refugee communities in the northeast United States (coming from Bhutan and Myanmar). We see this work as a true pilot venture, an exploration of a rather neglected topic that has great importance for policies, in the United States and beyond. The roles that religious ideas play in the very earthly, practical challenges of moving across the world are complex. Specifying how religion is involved can be elusive, but we are convinced that these dimensions are often central to the experience. It was our starting point and our central conclusion that religious aspects of the refugee experience deserve far more attention, as an integral feature of the refugee resettlement challenges of our time.

The report reflects a partnership between two centers that both focus on the roles of religion in public life: the World Faiths Development Dialogue, based at Georgetown University, and the Pluralism Project at Harvard University. The GHR Foundation, which shares a keen interest in the religious challenges facing refugees and migrants, provided generous support. Crystal Corman, WFDD, led the effort from start to finish. A February 2016 workshop at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs affirmed the importance and nuance of the challenge and helped to sharpen ideas and recommendations.

We welcome comments and look to a continuing dialogue on this important subject.

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Context and Study Focus

The United States is often described as a nation of immigrants, but certain groups, often because they have arrived relatively recently, maintain particularly strong ties with their place of origin; they are commonly referred to as diaspora communities. All arrive with cultural and religious heritage and practices that shape American culture continuously. Familiar services like grocery stores, restaurants, health centers, and places of worship established by diaspora communities are part of the American social fabric. Diaspora communities include "positive," deliberate migrants looking for education and jobs, hoping to fulfill an "American dream." They also include refugees or asylum seekers fleeing war and persecution for political, religious, racial, or social reasons.

Religious beliefs, practices, and institutions play important roles in many diaspora communities. They can have special importance in the lives of contemporary refugees from situations of conflict. Experiences as a refugee may have common threads of traumatic experiences and multi-phased journeys to a safer place, but all other aspects vary widely so that there may well be distinctive features of their religious experience. Extensive research and much anecdotal evidence about features and trends of plural communities in America exist, but how specifically religious beliefs and institutions are part of and shape pluralism is less well understood. Diasporas, including refugee communities, often retain important connections to communities of origin including ties of religious heritage and religious institutions; these connections and influences evolve over time. They also encounter new religious beliefs and communities both along the journey and in their newly resettled communities.

It would be useful to know more about how these multi-religious encounters and links to religious networks shape the experience of refugee adaptation, and the role their religious interactions play in the politics around U.S. approaches to the conflicts causing displacement. To what extent is religion a bridge or a barrier to full integration in the United States? Is the refugee experience different in comparison to other migrant groups coming to the United States and to what extent does religious persecution in a home country affect the religious experience in the United States? What lessons can be learned from the resettlement of successive refugee groups in the United States in terms of how religion plays a role in how refugees adjust over time and engage in U.S. and international politics? We need to understand better and distinguish the continuum of religion and ethnicity, appreciating when one identity is more important to an individual or community and also how refugees are perceived within their American community.

The World Faiths Development Dialogue, with support from the GHR Foundation, has undertaken a pilot project in partnership with the Pluralism Project at Harvard University to fill gaps in knowledge and frame research questions on this topic. The study explores the religious lives of refugees who settle in the United States to better understand how religious communities, traditions, networks, or personal faith play roles in adaptation, coping, community building, cultural navigation, political engagement, and living in a multi-faith, plural context. Religious affiliation was, in some instances, a reason why refugees left their home country and can be a significant factor in their resettlement experience. Religious values motivate organizations or individuals to respond and support resettlement; faith-inspired organizations (FIOs), notably the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Church World Service (CWS), Lutheran World Federation (LWF), and Islamic Relief (IR), are core actors supporting refugees at all stages of their journey from refugee camps to communities in the United States. Faith communities in the United States and FIOs are involved at the community level, and religious links can shape the resettlement experience.

As a pilot, the study focused on refugee communities from Bhutan and Myanmar resettled in Utica, New York and Greater Manchester, New Hampshire. The study involved a desk review by researchers at WFDD of religion in the home countries and the religious demographics of refugees. To better understand how refugees practice their religion after they resettle in the

United States, researchers from the Pluralism Project surveyed the two communities between May and October 2015 to develop a "map" of religious centers and resources in these cities. This "map" also looked at the religious dimensions of the two refugee communities (what they brought with them and what they encountered in their new environment), and thus the religious context of their refugee experience. The cities were selected based on the high number of resettled refugees from Bhutan and Myanmar and closeness to Boston.

Immigration, refugees, and the U.S. religious landscape

Immigrants have long played an important role in shaping the religious landscape in the United States. The Hart-Cellar Immigration Act of 1965 notably diversified the racial and ethnic background of immigrants in the United States. Coming largely from Latin America and Asia, these immigrants also transplanted their home country religions into new neighborhoods, either integrating into congregations or establishing new churches, temples, and mosques. The religious patterns of these "new immigrants" went largely unstudied beyond case studies of religion in specific ethnic and religious groups until the 1990s. Professor Helen Rose Ebaugh, a sociologist and founder of the Religion, Ethnicity, New Immigrants Research project in Houston, Texas succinctly summarizes central issues emerging from the increasing body of research supported by grants from the Lilly Endowment, the Pew Charitable Trusts, and the newly established initiative in religion of the Ford Foundation:[1]

> (a) the central role religious institutions play in the reproduction of ethnic identity; (b) the role of religion as an agent in the incorporation of immigrants into American society; (c) congregationalism as the primary form of organization; (d) conflict and segregation within multiethnic congregations; (e) the relationship between the second generation and immigrant religious institutions; (f) the role and status of immigrant women as impacted by their religious congregations; and (g) transnational religious ties between immigrants in the United States and their home communities.

Foner and Alba suggest that the religious lives of immigrants in the United States has often been overlooked because it is not seen as problematic and, in fact, many studies emphasize the positive role religion plays in facilitating smooth adaptation.[2] Since Americans tend to be relatively religious, various religious systems and structures exist that allow for acceptance and integration of non-Christian traditions. The attacks of September 11, 2001 brought increased attention toward Arabs, including immigrants, or anyone perceived to be Muslim, and prompted increasing research on the intersection of racial and religious identity in the United States.[3] However, underlying tensions and hesitations are reflected in recent political rhetoric suggesting a ban on Muslim refugees from Syria inspired by fear that refugees might contribute to terrorist attacks in the United States.[4]

Religion and congregations have played a role helping immigrants settle and adapt, but immigrants have also transformed religion in the United States.[5] Christianity provides the easiest route to assimilation; however increasing diversity within and outside religious communities in the United States allows immigrants, in many cases, to revitalize and/or transform religious institutions and even theology.[6] Rather than simply transplanting religious structures they bring with them, immigrants adapt to social conditions. In the United States religious adherence is voluntary and minority religious groups may advertise to attract immigrant adherents. Leadership may come from lay members and religious centers may be multipurpose, allowing space for cultural activities or social services as well. Rituals and language of worship may also differ from countries of origin, especially as membership expands to include people of various ethnic backgrounds, including native-born Americans.

Religion also plays a role as immigrants engage in the civic life of the United States and through transnational encounters, including their respective diaspora communities. Rather than engaging on religiously charged political debates around school prayer, abortion, or homosexuality, scholars Stepick et al. found that most immigrant communities, for example Haitians and Cubans living in Miami, Florida, oriented any political activities toward their homeland.[7] Religious communities have mobilized remarkable aid following natural disasters back home. Studies underscore how far the social and organizational ecology webs to which immigrants belong shape when and how a group chooses to engage with others;[8] geographic, economic, intra- and interdenominational, and interfaith influences are all at play.

U.S. refugee programs and faith engagement

The religious experiences of immigrants in the United States offer insight for the more specific challenges facing refugees resettled here. This study set out to understand better how the experiences might differ, specifically for refugees from conflict-affected countries. The two countries of origin selected for the pilot, Bhutan and Myanmar, include contexts where people were targeted specifically because of their religious identity. For these reasons, exploring how religious experiences in a home country, during displacement, and in refugee camps shapes religious lives in the United States has particular interest.

Over three million refugees have settled in the United States since a formal resettlement program was established with the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980. The United States considers a refugee to be anyone "who has fled from his or her home country and cannot return because he or she has a well-founded fear of persecution based on religion, race, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group."[9] The United States can host only those refugees who are not likely candidates for repatriation to their home country or local resettlement within an asylum country.

Approaches to refugee resettlement in the United States and religious roles in resettlement work were shaped by the mass refugee resettlement following World War II, when over 150,000 refugees were resettled in the United States from displaced persons camps in Europe.[10] Faith-inspired organizations were at the forefront of these efforts and successive developments. They were thus deeply involved in the ad hoc resettlement of refugees from 1946 to 1980, as the U.S. government authorized resettlement of particular populations of refugees. This notably included refugees displaced by the Vietnam War.[11]

The 1980 Refugee Act was an attempt to move away from an ad hoc response and provide a national policy and flexible mechanisms that could respond to contemporary refugee situations globally. The Act established comprehensive and uniform provisions to resettle and absorb refugees, standardizing procedures and creating the framework for the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). USRAP is administered by the Bureau of Population Refugees, and Migration (PRM) of the U.S. Department of State, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in cooperation with five private transnational organizations responsible for operating Resettlement Support Centers (RSCs),[12] and nine domestic organizations responsible for welcoming and resettling the refugees within the U.S. The nine domestic organizations in turn partner with approximately 350 affiliates across the country and rely on the support of thousands of volunteers in their efforts to welcome refugees, provide them with food, housing, and orientation, and connect them with educational opportunities, social services, and medical care. This formal assistance from government programs and resettlement agencies is limited to the first three months. After that point, refugees are expected to be employed and self-sufficient, also beginning to pay back loans for their transportation to the United States.[13]

Faith-inspired organizations play central roles in the refugee resettlement process, against the backdrop of this long history. Three of the five organizations operating Refugee Support Centers (RSCs) as part of the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program are faith-inspired: Church World Service (CWS), International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), and Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS). CWS formed in 1946 following World War II and formalized its work with refugees in the United States by establishing several offices throughout the country in 1976.[14] Founded in 1951, ICMC's

Nine agencies of the U.S. Refugee Reception and Placement Program FY2014[15]

Church World Service (CWS)*
Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC)
Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM)*
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)*
International Rescue Committee (IRC)
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS)*
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)*
World Relief (WR)*

* indicates faith-inspired organization

work with refugees adapted to the needs in the 1970s and the organization played a major role in resettling Vietnamese refugees to the United States in 1979.[16] HIAS began in 1881 by assisting Jews fleeing oppression and coming to the United States. In 1975 the U.S. State Department requested assistance from HIAS to resettle refugees from Southeast Asia. In the 2000s, HIAS expanded its work with refugees globally and with non-Jewish persons.[17]

Of the nine domestic private resettlement agencies that have signed cooperative agreements with the United States government to provide resettlement assistance, six are faith-inspired organizations (FIOs) (see box). In 2010, FIOs were responsible for resettling 70 percent of the refugee caseload in the United States.[18] More than half of the 350 local affiliates that support resettlement around the country are faith-inspired.[19] Both secular and faith-inspired local affiliates in turn partner with local faith communities to co-sponsor refugees.[20]

Faith-inspired resettlement agencies provide services without regard to the religious affiliation of the refugees, and explicit proselytism is not the norm. However, faith figures prominently in the rhetoric of these agencies' mission statements and motivation for working with refugees.[21] As an example, Episcopal Migration Ministries' vision for their work "honors both the Episcopal Church's baptismal covenant and the historical role of the United States as a safe haven for those seeking freedom from oppression."[22] Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services states that in "witnessing to God's love for all people," they "stand with and advocate for migrants and refugees, transforming communities through ministries of service and justice."[23] Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society emphasizes that they are "guided by our Jewish values and history."[24] The work of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services is "grounded by our belief in Jesus Christ and Catholic teaching" and "fulfills the commitment of the U.S. Catholic bishops to protect the life and dignity of the human person."[25] This language pervades not only official statements but also the way many staff members at these organizations talk about their work. In interviews at resettlement and refugee assistance organizations in Los Angeles, Chicago, Sacramento, and Minneapolis, Stephanie Nawyn found that staff members of these organizations often describe resettlement work as "divinely mandated," referring to a religiously-grounded "ethic of refuge."[26]

Table 1. Top 10 countries of origin of refugees resettled in the U.S. in 2014

Country	Number	Percent of total
Iraq	19,651	28%
Myanmar	14,577	21%
Somalia	9,011	13%
Bhutan	8,316	12%
Dem. Rep. Congo	4,502	6%
Cuba	4,063	6%
Iran	2,833	4%
Eritrea	1,445	2%
Sudan	1,307	2%
Afghanistan	758	1%

Source: U.S. DHHS Office of Refugee Resettlement, Fiscal Year 2014 Refugee Arrivals[27]

Notes

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2. Foner, Nancy and Richard Alba. "Immigrant Religion in the US and Western Europe: Bridge or Barrier to Inclusion?". IMR Vol 42, No 2 (summer 2008): 360-392.
3. For example *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects* edited by Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber. 2008. Syracuse University Press.
4. The Atlantic. December 7, 2015. http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/12/donald-trumps-call-to-ban-muslim-immigrants/419298/
5. See notably Diana Eck, 2002, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation.* HarperSanFrancisco (2nd edition).
6. See Yang, Fenggang and Helen Rose Ebaugh. "Transformations in New Immigrant Religions and Their Global Implications." American Sociological Review, Vol 66, No. 2 (Apr. 2001), 269-288. Also Leonard, K. I., et al. (2005). *Immigrant faiths: Transforming religious life in America*. AltaMira Press. Lanham, MD.
7. Stepick, Alex et al. Churches and Charity in the Immigrant City: Religion, Immigration, and Civic Engagement in Miami (2009). Rutgers University Press.

8. See Numrich, P., & Kniss, F. (2007). *Sacred Assemblies and Civic Engagement : How religion matters for America's newest immigrants*. Piscataway: Rivergate Books.
9. US Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, "Refugee Admissions," http://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/index.htm.
10. Jessica Eby et al., "The Faith Community's Role in Refugee Resettlement in the United States," Journal of Refugee Studies 24 No. 3, 588.
11. Eby et al., "The Faith Community's Role in Refugee Resettlement in the United States," 588.
12. Under cooperative agreement with the Department of State, Resettlement Support Centers (RSCs) process refugee cases and coordinate administrative aspects of U.S. refugee processing. Specifically, the RSC prescreens refugees to ensure they fall within the U.S. designated nationalities and processing priorities; creates case files for each case considered by the U.S.; and prepares refugees for their interviews with the DHS/USCIS. After the DHS/USCIS approval of a case, RSCs work with the IOM to arrange medical exams and transport to the U.S. for the refugees, and coordinates with resettlement agencies for resettlement in the U.S.
13. Chia Youyee Vang and Monica Mong Trieu. "Invisible Americans: Refugees from Burma/Myanmar and Bhutan in the United States." Asian and Pacific Islander American Scholarship Fund, 14.
14. http://cwsglobal.org/about/history-2/
15. US Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. "Fact Sheet: U.S. Refugee Admissions Program Reception and Placement (R&P) Program Agencies FY 2014." http://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/onepagers/228697.htm
16. http://www.icmc.net/about/history
17. http://www.hias.org/history
18. Eby et al., "The Faith Community's Role in Refugee Resettlement in the United States, 591.
19. U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, "Affiliate Directory," July 31, 2015.
20. Stephanie J. Nawyn, "Faithfully Providing Refuge: The Role of Religious Organizations in Refugee Assistance and Advocacy." Center for Comparative Immigrations Studies Working Papers, 18.
21. Eby, et al., "The Faith Community's Role in Refugee Resettlement in the United States, 594.
22. Episcopal Migration Ministries, "Who We Are," http://www.episcopalmigrationministries.org/about_emm/who_we_are.aspx.
23. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, "Vision & Mission," http://lirs.org/our-work/about-us/identityvision-mission/.
24. HIAS, "Mission and Values," http://www.hias.org/mission-and-values.
25. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Migration and Refugee Services," http://www.usccb.org/about/migration-and-refugee-services/index.cfm.
26. Stephanie J. Nawyn, "Faithfully Providing Refuge: The Role of Religious Organizations in Refugee Assistance and Advocacy." Center for Comparative Immigrations Studies Working Papers, 18.
27. Fiscal Year 2014 Refugee Arrivals published February 11, 2015. http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/resource/fiscal-year-2014-refugee-arrivals.

Selected Refugee Communities

Burmese and Bhutanese refugees are two of the largest groups of refugees resettled to the United States in recent years (see table 1 for 2014 numbers). Targeted group resettlement programs have resettled Burmese refugees from camps in Thailand and Bhutanese refugees from camps in Nepal. Both groups often spent decades in refugee camps with few employment or educational opportunities, few modern conveniences, and poor living conditions. They face significant challenges as they negotiate the transition to life in the United States, including poor English language skills and little education or work experience.[1] In both cases religious beliefs, practices, and institutions play roles in adaptation, community building, and cultural navigation for refugees.

Refugees from Myanmar/Burma[2]

Historical background. The Burmese refugee crisis has deep roots. Before the British colonial era, the area that is now Myanmar was made up of small ethnically-based kingdoms and city-states. The area, called Burma by the British, was fully incorporated into the British Empire by 1886 and was ruled as a province of India until 1937, when it became its own colony.[3] The British pursued a policy of "divide and rule" in Burma, emphasizing distinctions between the majority population of ethnic Burmans and the smaller ethnic minorities. These distinctions were compounded by different types of governance in the different areas, with central Burma being ruled more directly while some ethnic minority areas were granted a semi-autonomous status.[4]

Myanmar is an ethnically and religiously diverse country, with eight major ethnic groups. Of Myanmar's 56 million inhabitants, approximately 68 percent are ethnically Burman (Bama).[5] The other major ethnic groups include the Chin, Kachin, Karen (Kayin), Karenni (Kayah), Mon, Rakhine (Arakhan), and Shan, each of which is the majority in a state within Burma.[6]

There is much religious and linguistic diversity within and between Myanmar's major ethnic groups. The majority ethnic group, the Burmans (Bama), is mostly (90 percent) Theravada Buddhists.[7] The Mon, Rakhine, and Shan ethnic minorities are also majority-Buddhist.[8] The Karen are religiously diverse, including significant numbers of Christians, Buddhists, and animists. Educated Karen who identify as Christian (between one-fifth to one-third[9]) became leaders of the Karen independence movement.[10] The remaining Karen population is Theravada Buddhists or animists. Many Christian and Buddhist Karen retain traditional animist beliefs.[11] The Chin and the Karenni are traditionally animists, but many have converted to Christianity.[12] Among the Chin, the prominence of Christianity varies geographically, with figures ranging from 15 percent to 96 percent in various townships. The Kachin are majority-Christian, while the majority of the Rohingya are Muslim.[13]

British colonization was accompanied by Christian missionaries, who built schools and hospitals. The largest missionary efforts came from the London Missionary Society,

Figure 1. Ethnic Groups in Myanmar

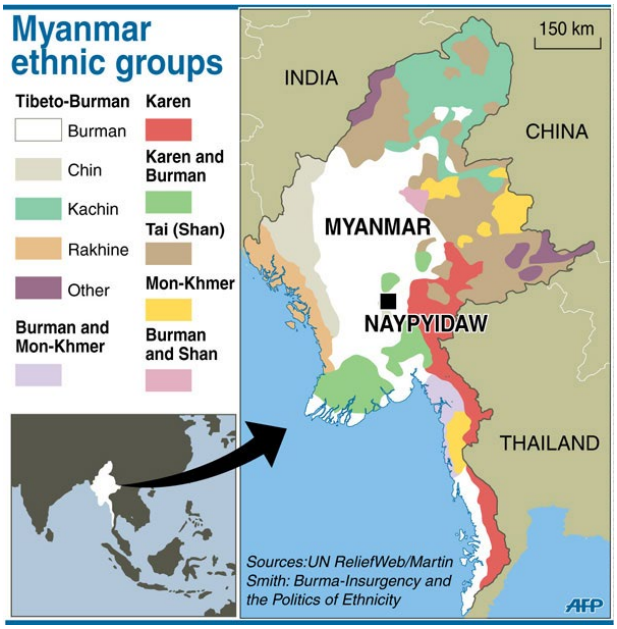


Table 2. Ethnic groups in Myanmar by percent of population

Myanmar Ethnic Groups[15]	% of Population
Burman	68%
Shan	9%
Karen	7%
Rakhine (Arakhan)	4%
Mon	2%
Kachin, Chin, Karenni (Kayah), Pa-O, Chinese, Indian, Danu, Akha, Kokang, Lahu, Naga, Pao, Palaung, Rohyinga, Tavoyan, and Wa	Together <10 percent

American Baptist Mission, and Portuguese Jesuits;[14] these were most successful in gaining converts among the Chin, Kachin, Karen, and Karenni populations.[16] The Chin were targeted for conversion by the British because their traditional religion encouraged social isolation and suspicion of outsiders. Other missionaries focused on the Karen because elements of their traditional beliefs, especially monotheism and their creation story, closely aligned with Christian teachings. Some of the early missionaries believed the Karen might be the 'lost tribe of Israel'; others hypothesized that the Karen had come into contact with earlier Jewish sources.[17]

For decades after independence in January 1948, Burma engaged in a protracted civil war centered on its minority communities. The Karen insurgency began in 1949, and other ethnic minorities also pushed for independence. After Ne Win seized power in 1962, imposing military rule, the Burmese military gradually reclaimed territory controlled by the ethnic minority armed groups.[18] The Burmese military launched waves of military offensives in the dry seasons, accompanied by the "four cuts" strategy which targeted civilian populations in an effort to deprive rebel groups of food, funds, recruits, and intelligence.[19]

The people displaced by conflicts and deliberate policies initially remained within Burma as internally displaced person (IDPs), but by 1984 there were major refugee outflows from Burma to Thailand.[20] Significant numbers of refugees, from most ethnic minority groups, have left Burma, fleeing not only armed conflict but also widespread and well-documented human rights abuses, including forced labor, sexual violence, torture, and forced relocation. Religiously linked conflict and religious persecution are important factors, though by no means the only ones.[21,22] Armed conflict and human rights violations have persisted, despite several changes in leadership, including the resignation of Ne Win and the establishment of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) in 1988. Refugees from Karen, Shan, Karenni, and Mon states have fled to Thailand, while refugees from Kachin State fled to China. Rohingya refugees from Araken State have largely fled to Bangladesh, with some attempting to travel onward to Thailand and Malaysia.[23,24]

From 2011 to 2015 Myanmar underwent significant political, economic, and administrative reforms that have opened the country and laid ground for democratic elections held November 8, 2105. The first credible democratic election

Table 3. Religious demographics of Myanmar and receiving countries, percent of total population.

	Myanmar	Thailand	Malaysia	Bangladesh
Buddhist	90%	93%	20%	
Christian	4%		9%	
Muslim	4%	5%	61%	90%
Hindu			6%	9.5%

Source: State Department International Religious Freedom Report, 2013

since 1990 resulted in a majority of seats in parliament for the National League for Democracy. Whether this will signal positive changes with regard to long standing conflict between ethnic minority groups and the central government is unclear. The military continues to reserve 25 percent of seats in parliament for its own appointed leaders. As parliament opened on February 1, 2016, there is cautious optimism for peace and development. Myanmar's president will be decided upon by the parliament in March 2016.[25]

Most refugees have gone to Thailand, which is not a signatory to either the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol. This restricts UNHCR's activities there.[26] The government of Thailand has firmly opposed local integration of refugees from Myanmar and prohibits refugees from seeking employment or education outside of refugee camps.[27] As a result, refugees in the camps are dependent on outside aid to meet their basic needs. A number of NGOs work to support refugees in the camps, including several FIOs. UNHCR's more recent update (2015) lists three FIOs as partners in the camps: Adventist Development and Relief Agency Thailand, the Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees and Jesuit Refugee Service.[28] UNHCR also partners with two consortiums of NGOs, The Border Consortium (TBC) and the Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT), both of which include faith-inspired members.[29] Refugees are deeply involved in camp administration and a variety of organizations and committees oversee most aspects of the day-to-day administration of the camps.[30]

Bangladesh first received an influx of Rohingya fleeing Myanmar in 1978 and again in 1991-92. As of September 2014, 32,355. Rohingya were registered with UNHCR, living in the two official refugee camps (Nayapara and Kutupalong) in the Cox's Bazar district along the Bangladesh-Burma border. UNHCR estimates that 200,000 to 500,000 additional Myanmar Rohingya are in Bangladesh unregistered and, therefore, unprotected and without assistance.[31] Bangladesh is not well placed to cope with this protracted refugee situation given poverty and high rates of population growth. The presence and general tolerance of such large numbers of Rohingya in Bangladesh derives in part from shared social, ethnic, linguistic and religious characteristics, particularly their common adherence to Islam.[32] However, political and public opinion in Bangladesh is generally not well disposed towards the refugees.

Religion in Thailand

Thailand is overwhelmingly Buddhist: 85-95 percent of the population practices Theravada Buddhism. This religious identity is enmeshed with national identity as many revere the king of Thailand as the supreme patriarch of the Thai sangha, protecting and leading Buddhism and the community.[33] Muslims represent five to ten percent of the population; groups with less than five percent include Christian, animist, Confucian, and Hindu.[34] Muslims in the southern region (historically part of Malaysia) often retain their own language and have requested education and government forms in languages other than Thai. A separatist movement in this region has been active since 1948 with low-level violence increasing from 2001.

In May 2015 Bangladesh officials announced plans to relocate Rohingya refugee camps to the undeveloped island of Thengar Char, which has no infrastructure nor, most critically, flood defenses given the several feet of water that cover the island at high tide.[35] The government has cited disruption of coastal tourism as its reason for the relocation of the camps.

A significant number of refugees from Myanmar have also fled to Malaysia by boat in search of job opportunities. As of August 2015, over 143,000 Burmese refugees were registered in Malaysia, nearly all living in or near major cities.[36] These refugees consist primarily of the Chin, Karen, Kachin, Mon, and Rohingya ethnic groups[37] of which the Chin and Kachin are predominantly Christian, Muslim Rohingya, and Buddhist Mon and Karen.[38] Malaysia does not distinguish between undocumented migrants and refugees, leaving the Burmese refugees vulnerable to arrest and deportation.[39] Without legal status, the refugees cannot access medical or social services, work legally, or send their children to school. After nearly 2,000 refugees were rescued from abandoned people-smuggling boats in May 2015, the government of Malaysia announced it would no longer accept new arrivals of Rohingya fleeing Myanmar.[40]

As Malaysia has no framework for evaluating asylum claims, UNHCR conducts refugee status determination (RSD) in

Religion in Bangladesh[41]

Bangladesh has the fourth largest Islamic population globally. Roughly 90 percent of Bangladeshis are followers of Sunni Islam, but there is significant diversity within the country's Islamic traditions. Islam in Bangladesh has long been noted for its openness and syncretism. There are many localized Sufi orders, as well as small but significant Ismaili and Ahmadiya Muslim communities. Hindus, at 9.1 percent of the national population, are Bangladesh's largest religious minority. Buddhist communities, concentrated mainly in the Chittagong region, make up another 0.5 percent. Christians from a range of denominations represent 0.2 percent of the population and live throughout the country. Animists, Bahá'ís, Sikhs, and Jains also have a presence in Bangladesh, though the communities are small.

Religion in Malaysia

The Malaysian constitution defines Islam as the state religion and the federal and state shari'ah systems draw from Sunni Islam's Shafi'i school of thought. The 2010 census indicates that 61.3 percent of the population is Muslim, consisting primarily of ethnic Malays. Minority faiths include Buddhists (19.8 percent of the population), Christians (9.2 percent), and Hindus (6.3 percent).

Malaysia and relies on NGOs and the refugee community to provide referrals for resettlement assessment.[42] Some NGO partners of UNHCR in Malaysia are faith-inspired, including Taiwan Buddhist Tzu-Chi Foundation of Malaysia, Persatuan Kebajikan Good Shepherd, Yayasan Kemanusiaan Muslim Aid, and Persatuan Jaringan Islam Global Masa Depan.[43]

Resettlement. With the support of the Thai government, the United States launched a group resettlement program for Burmese refugees in January 2005 as it became increasingly clear that neither repatriation nor local integration were possible solutions to the protracted refugee situation in Thailand.[44] At the time, there were approximately 140,000 refugees in the camps on the Myanmar-Thailand border of which the two largest groups were Karen (65 percent) and Karenni (18 percent).[45] When the group resettlement program closed for applications in late January 2014, over 73,000 Burmese refugees had been resettled in the United States with expectations to receive several thousand more over the next year as the remaining applicants were resettled.[46] Approximately 19,000 refugees from Myanmar in Thailand were resettled to other countries, including Australia, Canada, Finland, and Japan.[47]

The U.S. also resettled Burmese refugees from Malaysia. In fact, since the group resettlement program for Burmese refugees in Thailand ended, Burmese refugees in Malaysia are the largest group of refugees being resettled to the United States from East Asia. The U.S. State Department set a ceiling of 14,000 refugee arrivals from East Asia for fiscal year 2014, nearly all of who were expected to be ethnic minority refugees from Burma.[48] Between October 1, 2014 and July 31, 2015, the United States admitted 8,086 refugees from Malaysia, nearly twice the number that arrived from Thailand in the same period.[49] In total, the United States has resettled over 146,000 Burmese refugees from both Thailand and Malaysia since 2002.

Refugees from Bhutan

Historical background. According to the last census (2005), the population of Bhutan was 634,900.[50] There are three major ethnic groups in Bhutan: the Ngalongs, who speak Dzongkha and follow the Drukpa Kagyu school of Mahayana Buddhism; the Sharchops, who speak Tsangla and follow the Nyingmapa school of Mahayana Buddhism; and the ethnic Nepali Lhotshampa, who speak Nepali and practice Hinduism. Bhutan is a Buddhist-majority country (approximately 75 percent of the population[51]) where Mahayana Buddhism was codified in the 2008 constitution as the "spiritual heritage" of the country. The largest minority religion is Hinduism, practiced by just over 22 percent of the population, mostly ethnic Nepalis living in the south.[52] Estimates for the number of Christians in the country range from 2,000 to 25,000 as many do not practice openly. A small Muslim community is

comprised mostly of Indian migrants. Statistics on both ethnicity and religious affiliation are disputed and vary. In the 1980s, the Ngalongs comprised between 10 to 25 percent, Sharchop and Kheng together accounted for 30 to 40 percent, and the Lhotshampa made up 25 to 53 percent.[53]

The ethnic Nepali Bhutanese began to settle in the south of Bhutan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[54] Larger groups of Nepalis arrived in the middle of the twentieth century as the government of Bhutan actively recruited Nepali settlers to cultivate the sparsely inhabited south, and later as skilled labor.[55]

Government policies were initially welcoming to the Nepali settlers, and the 1958 Citizenship Act gave Bhutanese citizenship to anyone who had lived in Bhutan for ten years or more and who owned agricultural land.[56] However, by the 1970s, growing concern among the Ngalong elite about the growing numbers of ethnic Nepalis led to allegations that most Nepalis in Bhutan were illegal immigrants who had overstayed their visas or labor contracts.[57] Seeing the ethnic Nepali Hindu minority as a threat, government policies worked to exclude ethnic Nepalis from Bhutanese citizenship. Citizenship laws were first tightened in 1977 and again in 1985.[58] The 1985 Citizenship Act, for example, required resident registration in Bhutan by 1958.[59] After the 1988 census, which was conducted only in the south, the Bhutanese government evicted anyone who could not produce documents showing residence in 1958.[60] Laws restricting citizenship were coupled with discriminatory Bhutanization policies as part of the "One Nation, One People" policy introduced in 1988. These policies removed the Nepali language from instruction in schools, required that Dzongkha be spoken in all public places, and required that all Bhutanese citizens observe the Drukpa code of etiquette, dress, and values known as driglam namza.[61]

The response to new citizenship and cultural protection laws was mass demonstrations in September and October 1990. The government of Bhutan moved quickly to quash them, declaring all participants "anti-nationals."[62] Government troops opened fire on one demonstration in September 1990, killing three people.[63] Amnesty International estimated the number of people arrested for suspected involvement in opposition into the thousands between 1990 and 1992. Many refugees and released detainees reported degrading treatment, rape, or torture while in custody.[64] Some of the imprisoned ethnic Nepalis were released on the condition that they leave Bhutan. Security forces conducted raids in the south, harassing ethnic Nepalis, destroying their homes, and forcing them off their land. The majority of the ethnic Nepalis who fled or were expelled from Bhutan were forced to sign "voluntary migration forms" stating that they were willingly surrendering their rights to Bhutanese citizenship, allowing the Bhutanese government to claim that they were voluntary migrants rather than refugees.[65]

Table 4. Religious demographics of Bhutan and Nepal, percent of total population

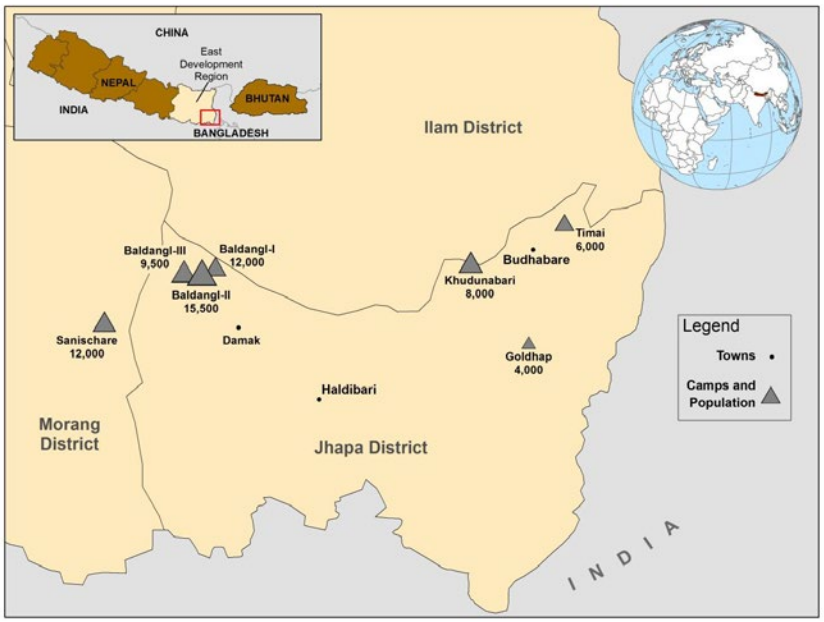
	Bhutan	Nepal
Buddhist	75%	9%
Hindu	22%	81%
Muslim		4%
Christian		>2%
Traditional	2%	

Source: State Department International Religious Freedom Report, 2014

By 1994, seven different refugee camps had been set up at five different sites in Nepal. UNHCR began providing assistance to the refugees in 1992 and the camps in Nepal are jointly administered by the government of Nepal and UNHCR.[66] UNHCR has partnered with several NGOs, including faith-inspired organizations. In its October 2011 update, UNHCR listed nine partners in Nepal, including one faith-inspired organization, Caritas Nepal.[67] Human Rights Watch identified other actors in the camps, including Lutheran World Federation. These organizations help to meet refugees' basic needs, but refugees are not permitted to work or pursue higher education as they cannot leave the camps.[68]

Resettlement program. Given ongoing human rights violations, government opposition, and discrimination against ethnic Nepalese in Bhutan, repatriation has not been a viable option for the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal.[69] As a result, on October 6, 2006, the United States offered to resettle up to 60,000 refugees from the camps in Nepal.[70] The program began in 2007 and over 92,000 refugees had been resettled as of

Figure 2. Location of Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal (and size as of April 2011)



Source: Kevin Liske, DGMQ, CDC And Health Information System (HIS)

September 2014.[71] The resettlement program is open only to refugees registered within the camps in Nepal, which excludes refugees who live outside of the camps in Nepal or in India. The government of Nepal estimates that 10,000 to 15,000 ethnic Nepalis from Bhutan have settled in Nepal outside of the camps.[72] Estimates of the number of ethnic Nepali refugees from Bhutan residing in India range from 15,000 to 30,000.[73] As of June 2015, over 21,000 refugees remained in two camps in eastern Nepal.[74]

Burmese and Bhutanese refugees in the United States

Burmese and Bhutanese refugees have been resettled across the United States. The majority of Burmese are resettled in Texas, New York, Indiana, and North Carolina and most Bhutanese in Pennsylvania, Texas, New York, and Ohio.[75] A majority of the resettled Bhutanese refugees are Hindu, with a large minority (17,000) identifying as Buddhists, and smaller minorities identifying as Christian (over 7,000) and Kirat[76] (approximately 7,000). Over 70 percent of the Burmese refugees resettled to the United States from Thailand and Malaysia are Christian, with the rest identifying as either Buddhist or Muslim.[77]

Burmese and Bhutanese refugees face significant challenges in adjusting to life in the United States. Many of the resettled refugees had lived in refugee camps for decades and have limited education, work experience, and familiarity with modern conveniences.[78] Burmese and Bhutanese refugees also struggle with mental health issues, which often go untreated. A recent study showed that the suicide rate for Bhutanese refugees in the United States was 20.3 per 100,000, nearly double the U.S. national average, but consistent with the suicide rate of 20.7 per 100,000 found by the IOM in a study of Bhutanese refugees in refugee camps in Nepal.[79] The study identified the following risk factors for suicidal ideation: not being a provider of the family; having low perceived social support; screening positive for anxiety, depression, and distress; and increased family conflict after resettlement. Both Burmese and Bhutanese refugees also report language barriers as the most common post-migration difficulty; many refugees have little or no knowledge of English, and access to interpreters can be limited.[80]

Refugees receive transitional assistance in the United States, both through resettlement agencies and through direct government assistance. This is supplemented by local affiliates and local faith communities that support newly arrived refugees during their transition to life in the United States. Faith communities or organizations involved in formally co-sponsoring a refugee or refugee family generally provide housing and cash assistance, furniture, clothing, and support with paperwork and documentation. Some co-sponsors also provide English language tutoring or assistance in finding employment.[81] Faith communities that are interested in supporting refugees but that lack the resources to commit to full co-sponsorship often choose to provide one type of service, such as language tutoring, translation services, or housing assistance.[82] In addition to organized services, congregations and FIOs provide access to networks that can assist refugees in finding employment or housing.[83]

Table 5. Top Five U.S. states receiving refugees from Myanmar and Bhutan in 2014

Myanmar	Total refugees received	Myanmar	Percent Burmese
Total in the U.S.	**69,986**	**14,577**	**21%**
Texas	7,214	2,132	30%
Indiana	1,613	1,270	79%
New York	4,082	1,107	27%
North Carolina	2,443	806	33%
Illinois	2,578	749	29%

Bhutan	Total refugees received	Bhutan	Percent Bhutanese
Total in the U.S.	**69,986**	**8,316**	**12%**
Ohio	2,815	1,248	44%
Pennsylvania	2,739	983	36%
New York	4,082	860	21%
Texas	7,214	607	8%
Georgia	2,694	550	20%

Source: U.S. DHHS Office of Refugee Resettlement, Fiscal Year 2014 Refugee Arrivals[84]

Networks are valuable in providing tangible assistance as well as emotional and social support. For refugees who have lost or left behind many of their friends and family members, faith communities can be an important source of support.[85] Faith communities can also play an active role in fostering a welcoming atmosphere for refugees in the broader host community; congregational influence within a community can encourage leaders to speak with moral authority in favor of dialogue and understanding.[86] Various studies suggest that refugees who are co-sponsored by faith communities have had measurably better outcomes in language acquisition, employment, and integration.[87]

In some instances, ethnic or religious ties with newly arrived refugees motivate engagement from faith communities. A study of faith communities working with refugees in Philadelphia found that half of the congregations shared ethnic or geographic ties with the refugee populations they served.[88] In some cases, refugees who arrived in the first waves of resettlement were able to form community organizations and congregations that could support later arrivals and even attract co-ethnic and co-religious refugees for secondary migration.[89]

Religion has also been reported to complicate the transition of newly arrived Burmese and Bhutanese refugees in the United States. In discussions with Karen refugees resettled to the United States, Paul Kenny and Kate Lockwood-Kenny found that Christian Karen refugees reported feeling obligated to attend religious services at the church that supported them.[90] Dependent on the services provided by faith communities or FIOs, refugees may inadvertently feel constrained in terms of religious freedom. Another study, among newly resettled Hindu Bhutanese refugees, by Odessa Benson et al (2012) contrasts with much of the existing literature on the effect of religion on acculturation stress among refugees. This story found that Hindu Bhutanese refugees who rely on their faith and religious community to cope with acculturation stress may become further isolated from the broader host community. This may ultimately limit their access to varied kinds of social support and increase the internal challenges they face in reconciling their values with American cultural values.[91]

Religion intersects in the lives of refugees at various times in their journeys, however relatively little is known about the role religion plays as they flee violence or persecution, live in refugee camps, resettle to third countries, and attempt to integrate into new communities. The purpose of this study is to investigate the complexity and varying experiences of refugees who have resettled in the United States, asking about their religious lives in their new communities and within the larger diaspora.

Notes

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Case Study Methodology and Site Selection

The Pluralism Project at Harvard University has, from its inception in 1991, placed a special emphasis on "mapping" new religious centers—mosques, temples, *gurdwaras*—in specific cities and towns.[1] The Pluralism Project was invited by the World Faiths Development Dialogue to utilize this methodology to "map" two cities, Utica, New York and Manchester, New Hampshire, in a pilot study aimed at better understanding the religious dimensions of refugee communities from Bhutan and Myanmar. During the months of May-October, 2015, researchers interviewed resettled refugees and community leaders from Bhutan and Myanmar in the two metropolitan areas of Utica and Manchester, as well as social service providers and other community members who work with them. This section summarizes key findings from that research. Each city section begins with a general introduction and then moves to more detailed analysis from conversations with respondents from specific communities. Maps illustrating the religious diversity of the two cities were created, as were a select number of religious center profiles.[2]

In Utica, researchers conducted 19 interviews: three with Bhutanese Hindus; eight with Bhutanese, Burmese, and Euro-American Christians; two with Burmese Buddhists; three with Burmese Muslims; and two with social service providers who were neither Burmese nor Bhutanese. In New Hampshire, researchers expanded their geographic scope beyond Manchester to neighboring Nashua, NH, Concord, NH and the Boston Metropolitan area in Massachusetts to better understand the networks between co-religionists (those who share a faith but are not of the same cultural or ethnic background) and between different refugee groups. Researchers conducted 13 interviews in total, eight with Bhutanese and Indian Hindus, three with Muslims from Myanmar, and two with Burmese and Bhutanese Christians. Interviews and field research were conducted in Manchester and Nashua, New Hampshire, as well as in Allston and Malden, Massachusetts.

A note about the limits of this methodology

In Utica, where long-established refugee communities have founded places of worship, the "mapping" approach proved a helpful lens: a comprehensive map exists with more than 60 religious centers, seven of which are majority Burmese or Bhutanese, not including other groups that serve these communities as part of a larger mission. In Manchester, however, the mapping approach had significant limitations. Neither refugee community has established a formal religious center, except for a Nepali Bhutanese Christian church founded in 2009. As detailed in the Manchester section below, the diverse religious practices of these refugee communities are best understood as participation in home-based practices, use of rented or "unofficial" spaces, and attendance at religious centers in neighboring towns. This situation provides a useful challenge to the emphasis placed on the built environment or the confines of the city as determinants of religious participation. This is an area ripe for further research for two reasons. First, community leaders in Manchester continually express the desire to establish their own religious centers. Second, the evolution from informal to established religious centers is already underway in Utica.

Notes

1. See "America's Changing Landscape" in *On Common Ground: World Religions in America* (www.pluralism.org/landscape) and *World Religions in Greater Boston* (www.pluralism.org/wrgb).
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Manchester, New Hampshire

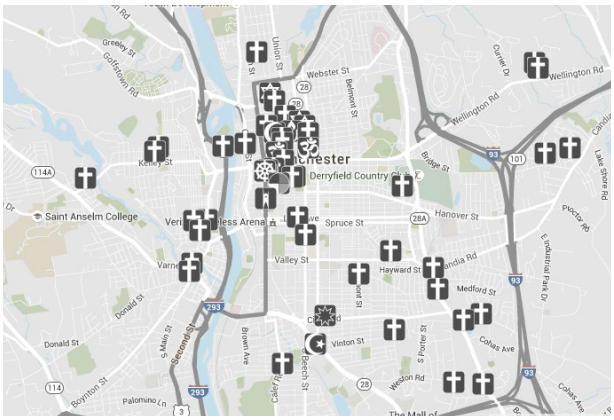
From mill town to microcosm

Manchester, the first city in New Hampshire, is now the state's largest and most diverse. The area was first home to the Namaoskeag people who lived at Amoskeag Falls, along the Merrimack River. Established in 1846, Manchester, then known as "Derryfield," quickly became industrialized thanks to Amoskeag Mills, the largest textile manufacturing company in the world at the time. The mills in Manchester, as in nearby Nashua and Lowell, were powered by water, and recent immigrants to the United States made up much of the mills' labor force. By 1890, almost half of Manchester's residents were immigrants, mostly from Ireland, Germany, Sweden, and Canada.

Irish immigrants had arrived in the 1840s, fleeing the potato famine. French-speaking Québécois had arrived in the 1830s and, by the 1890s, made up a quarter of the population. Although the Québécois and the Irish shared a faith tradition, this did not guarantee peaceful relations between the two groups. By the turn of the twentieth century, anti-Catholic sentiment was strong. "Know-Nothings" attacked Irish Catholic individuals and parishes. At the time, Manchester boasted eight French language parishes—more than any other city in the nation. The legacy of the Québécois tensions would affect Manchester well into the twentieth century.

During the eighteenth century, nearby Nashua was a primarily agrarian town, known as the "Gate City" of economic and cultural transmission between Boston and the rest of New Hampshire. Between 1865-1900, immigrants to Nashua mostly came from Canada and European countries such as Ireland, Greece, and Lithuania, and the city benefited from its proximity to the large-scale cotton textile manufacturing in Lowell, Massachusetts. These regional connections are still important today and, in recent years, have included longer established immigrant communities able to meet the needs of more recently arrived groups.

In 2014 New Hampshire ranked as the second least religious state in the United States, just after neighboring



Map data © 2016 Google.
via http://pluralism.org/landscape/manchester/

Vermont.[1] After the "Nones," the largest single group is Catholic.[2] In recent decades, the influx of immigrants from Puerto Rico, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, India, Russia, and Cambodia has made its mark on the religious landscape of both Manchester and Nashua. New Hampshire's first purpose-built mosque, the Islamic Society of Greater Manchester, was built in 2006 after nearly two decades of meeting in a private apartment, then at Southern New Hampshire University and, later, in an office building. The *Union Leader* reported that the construction of the mosque, by volunteer labor, attracted the help of a local interfaith organization, and one organizer likened the partnership to "an old-fashioned New England barn raising."[3] The first Hindu temple in the state was founded in Nashua in 2008. By 2013, more space was needed and the community bought property to relocate.[4] The new property includes a farmhouse-turned-office-building and a red barn, which are used for religious instruction and the temple, respectively.

Refugee resettlement. A 2014 report by the Carsey Institute shows that Manchester is more diverse and younger than the rest of the state, a direct result of refugee resettlement.[5] The Federal Refugee Act of 1980 established Manchester as a refugee resettlement site, and refugees have been arriving at a steady rate ever since. Between 2008 and 2014, the largest

Table 6. New Hampshire refugee resettlement 2008-2014 (selected cities)[6]

	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014
Manchester	246	303	341	314	115	136	130
Concord	192	188	187	178	206	199	189
Nashua	12			17	41	90	53

number of refugees arriving in New Hampshire was from Bhutan, followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, and Myanmar. The U.S. Departments of State and Health and Human Services oversee this process and they work with two refugee resettlement agencies in New Hampshire, the International Institute of New Hampshire and Ascentria Care Alliance (formerly Lutheran Social Services).

Ascentria is based in Worcester, Massachusetts, with 60 locations throughout New England, including Concord, New Hampshire.[7] The International Institute of New England (IINE) has two Massachusetts offices (Boston and Lowell) and an office in Manchester.[8] A city with a large and longstanding Cambodian community, IINE has also resettled Burmese refugees in Lowell, making it the closest major settlement of Burmese to the Manchester area. Ascentria and the International Institute of New England are responsible for providing services such as case management, initial cash assistance, English classes, and employment services to all refugees.

Several other nonprofits, including the Bhutanese Community of NH (BCNH), the Somali Development Center, and the Organization for Refugee and Immigrant Success, were established by individuals who were once refugees and who now help more recent arrivals. BCNH aims to "create an enduring legacy of Bhutanese heritage for future generations through stewardship of successful integration, and community contributions."[9] BCNH also works in tandem with other organizations like IINE to host special programming. In 2014 they jointly offered a two-day suicide prevention workshop to proactively address at a local level the rising number of suicides among Bhutanese refugees nationwide.[10]

Various factors stressed the Manchester community, leading Mayor Ted Gatsas and the city's Board of Aldermen in 2011 to enact a moratorium on any new refugee arrivals to the city. The mayor called for the city to shift focus to supporting current residents who need assistance rather than bringing in more refugees without being able to provide for them adequately.[11] Concerns were exacerbated by the impact of the 2008 economic downturn, which led to cuts in both city and agency budgets, and newspaper reports of refugees being resettled in sub-standard housing and not receiving appropriate services from the agencies. The call for a moratorium was not binding, as refugee resettlement is decided at a federal level, but it did give voice to the frustrations of some local residents and sparked debate across the state.[12] Some took to the local newspaper in support of the measure, criticizing the IINE for not providing refugees with proper support. Although a state or federal moratorium was never granted, Manchester did receive fewer refugees in the years since the debate (see table 6).

Religious expression and ethnic ties. Both Burmese and Bhutanese communities resettled in Greater Manchester are seeking to establish their own religious spaces. As of August 2015, Pluralism Project researchers were not able to identify any formal brick-and-mortar mosques, churches, or Hindu or Buddhist temples established by either Burmese or Bhutanese groups in Manchester. This was confirmed in interviews with leaders from both communities. However, researchers found that this lack of established centers did not mean that communal religious practice did not exist. Instead, expressions were often modified and led to further connections that transcended a particular ethnic and/or religious group. Although both Rohingya Muslims and Nepali Bhutanese Hindus reported interacting with their co-religionists from different ethnic backgrounds, each group also expressed interest in establishing their own mosque or temple and/or organization that would serve to preserve their cultural, as well as their religious, traditions.

Nepali Bhutanese community in Greater Manchester[13]

From 2008 to 2014, more than 2,000 Bhutanese refugees were resettled in New Hampshire, the majority in Manchester and Concord.[14] The Bhutanese refugee community is predominantly Hindu, with smaller Christian, and Buddhist populations. Researchers were not able to identify a formal Bhutanese Buddhist community in Manchester or in the larger New England area.

Nepali Bhutanese Hindus.[15] While leaders from the Bhutanese Hindu community in Manchester hope to establish an official temple, most religious practice currently takes place at home, often in modified forms.

> In Nepal and Bhutan we used to do a prayer where we put ghee in a fire. We can't do that here in a house, so we have to be satisfied with a candle… Here we put water in a bowl, and put a candle in the water so we don't have any fire issues. Everyone has an altar in their house.

One respondent noted that holidays are a particular challenge for the community.

> The problem is that everyone is working and is busy here. We get days off on Thanksgiving, Christmas, Memorial Day but not on our holy days. So we have to postpone it to the weekend…. But it's not as effective as in Nepal. But we never give up; we are trying to persevere.

Another respondent described the difference between religious practice within the refugee camps and in the United States:

> In the refugee camp there was more freedom. One thing people were able to enjoy in the camp was religion. We had churches made in the camp, we had temples, we had monasteries. They experienced the freedom of religion in the refugee camps. In the U.S., yes, there's freedom, but they don't have the resources. So it's freedom in spirit, but they don't have a place to practice it, so that's the difference.

Beyond the home, Bhutanese Hindu religious practice does sometimes include worship in rented spaces in Manchester or Concord, in outside venues like public parks and parking lots, or, less frequently, at Hindu temples in Nashua or Ashland, Massachusetts. Some described a cultural and linguistic gap between their community and the Indian-American temples in the area. One respondent explained that some efforts are underway to find ways to collaborate with their co-religionists, specifically Indians and Nepalis, but he was also keen to think about how to "protect and preserve our culture, so we can leave our legacy for future generations."

When asked whether members of the Bhutanese Hindu community attend the temple in Nashua, one respondent noted that some do, on occasion, but many do not "because it's far," however, "as we are Hindu, we celebrate together. And when we celebrate here we invite them and they come here [to Manchester]. Sometimes we do joint events with the Nepalese and Indian communities." He also noted note that interfaith relationships are positive with one respondent citing a vigil held for victims of the 2015 earthquake in Nepal:

> We had Christians praying for the same, Hindu priests praying at the same table, and Buddhists. Three religious groups, we get together and pray at the same temple. So we really get along. Whenever Buddhists have events, we work together. Whenever Hindus have religious festivals, we call them and they come, too. We really get along, there is no doubt.

The Hindu Trust of New Hampshire organized a seven-day long Purana (Srimad Bhagavata Purana) celebration in Concord in both 2014 and 2015.[16] Three national organizations, Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, the Hindu American Foundation, and Sewa International, were among the event's supporters.[17] The celebration brought together Hindus of Indian origin with those from Bhutan and Nepal and local *pandits* joined religious leaders from nearby states. Organizers estimated that more than 200 people came daily.

In 2015 the celebration made local headlines when a neighbor posted a handwritten sign in a second floor window telling people to "GO HOME." According to the *Concord Monitor*, the neighbor who posted the sign insisted that it was referring to the length of the festival, not commenting on immigration. Still, the sign did prompt social media responses that expressed broader concerns about the neighborhood's changing demographics.

Nepali Bhutanese Christians. A Nepali Bhutanese Christian church was founded in Manchester in 2009 and meets in a local Baptist Church. In nearby Concord, NH, there are three other Nepali Bhutanese Christian churches and the leadership and membership of each is largely composed of former Dalits. Back in Bhutan, most Christians are non-caste or ethnic minorities. This is not the case in Manchester where one respondent described the congregation's demographic as "very mixed" when it came to caste. At the church in Manchester, congregants are "people from all caste groups and all of them are facing the same kind of opposition and social pressure" from family members who do not convert to Christianity. One respondent estimated that 80-90 percent of Nepali Bhutanese Christians converted after arriving in Manchester, not in Bhutan or Nepal.

Responding to why some Hindus convert to Christianity when they come to Manchester a respondent said, "they are looking for some kind of help or solution;" their "challenge is how to make sense of all these new things, in terms of old or existing practices." Conversion to Christianity can cause tension and distress for some families.

> It depends on the individual families, but I would say most of the converts are facing very difficult times... especially during festivals. They both go through emotional and social stress right now because of other family members, especially those converts whose family members are still Buddhist or Hindus. And there are cases also where Hindu parents and relatives have been very opposed to what converts are doing.

For households with both Hindus and Christians, it can be difficult for both to find ways of practicing their respective faiths. A few respondents described a sense that some Christian groups involved in the process of resettlement blurred the lines between assisting and proselytizing. These concerns sometimes dovetailed with concerns about cultural preservation and intergenerational connections. As one respondent in Manchester explained:

> I would like to at least educate our youth, those coming up, about our value system. They can make their informed decision of conversion later on, but when they convert from Hinduism to maybe Muslim or Christianity, they should have an informed idea, maybe a comparison of Hinduism is this, Christianity is this, so I like this... I don't really mind, it is on them, it one of their freedoms to enjoy or to have in their place. But my thing is, they should be informed.

Burmese in Greater Manchester

Data on refugee resettlement in New Hampshire suggests that Burmese settlement in the area is recent, small in size, and specific to Rohingya Muslims: the category "Burma/Rohingyan" was only tracked beginning in 2011 onwards. No other groups from Myanmar have been resettled in New Hampshire.[18] Nearby Massachusetts is home to a small number of Burmese Buddhists and Burmese Christians, as well as Rohingya. Most Buddhists and Christians who have come from Myanmar to New Hampshire, however, are immigrants, not refugees.

Rohingya. New Hampshire's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) estimates that 125 Burma/Rohingyan refugees were resettled in the state from 2011-2014. When city leaders in Manchester proposed a moratorium on resettlement in their city, refugees, including Rohingya, began to be resettled in Nashua, New Hampshire's second largest city.[19] Others have been resettled in nearby Massachusetts. Respondents' statements about the challenges of settling in Nashua reflected their very recent arrival.

> I was resettled here only one month ago. First of all I have to get my job. After that I can learn more about daily life here. When we were living in Malaysia we could not have any government services. But here I am thankful because right now I don't have job, but we can get food and support for rent.

Rohingya living in Nashua attend the Islamic Society of Greater Nashua, which is located next to a DHHS building, a yoga studio, and a café. One respondent described his hope for the community's future, once their numbers grow and people have been in the area longer:

> Because we're a different culture, we need to find out how to establish our own organization. In Malaysia we were living as illegal, because the government recognized us as illegal. But here we are legal, so any organization, we need to establish as legal. So that's why we are taking

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> time to establish it. We already have in our mind what kind of organization. More people are coming- before there were only 25, now there are almost 100.

One respondent reported learning about the Islamic Society of Greater Nashua when he attended the mosque in Lowell, Massachusetts. This is telling of the role physical spaces can play in convening and networking between co-religionists from the same and from different ethnic backgrounds. Although he acknowledged that local Muslims are "divided by culture, but our practices are the same," he is hopeful that the growing Rohingya community will also seek to establish their own mosque.[20]

One non-Burmese respondent in Massachusetts shared his thoughts on the burgeoning relationship between Nashua's Rohingya refugees and the Islamic Society of Greater Lowell:

> Even though they don't speak English, through translation they can communicate with the congregation what their stories are. So having begun that, we formed a relationship that has gone beyond that. At this point they're more friends than anything else. That's one of the things we tell the congregations, that there are people here and they would like friends, not more than that, just to be friends.

While actively putting down roots in America, many still feel tension over leaving Myanmar, in part because of a desire to hold the government accountable for communal recognition. One respondent of the fledgling Rohingya group in Nashua put it this way: "We ask our community, try to die over there, don't move. If you move, we'll lose." Others recall the discrimination faced in refugee camps in Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines. "We've never been accepted, even in our own country," one Rohingya woman told a *New Hampshire Sunday News* reporter in 2013. Her sister added, "We really hope they accept us here [New Hampshire]... So far, they really do."[21] The women are part of a small group of Rohingya women who, with help from Ascentria (formerly Lutheran Social Services), founded a jewelry cooperative. Recounting the first time they spotted their handiwork being worn on the streets of Nashua, one member said, "We can see by that the future."[22]

Institutional connections in Massachusetts. The Burmese community also connects to other ethnic groups through the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association of Greater Lowell, a non-profit group that works primarily with the Cambodian community in the area.[23] Lowell is estimated to have the second largest Cambodian American community of any city in the U.S. Here, Calvary Baptist Church ("a multi-cultural congregation") hosts Burmese and Cambodian congregations.

In 2012, the SayDaNar Community Development Center developed out of the Burma Volunteer Group. It "provides advocacy, education and services promoting self-efficacy and empowerment of new immigrants and refugees to enhance their economic, health, educational and employment status in the United States to become active citizens contributing positively to their wider communities." [24] A recent benefit for SayDaNar, the Lowell Burmese Food Fair, was hosted in the basement of the Calvary Baptist Church. The event drew diverse members of the Lowell community and beyond.

Lowell's Community Health Center has developed the Metta Health Center to better meet the needs of the large and diverse Southeast Asian populations of the city. The MHC works with local temples and churches, and although it was established to serve the Southeast Asian communities, today, they also provide culturally sensitive care for a range of refugee communities, including Burmese, Bhutanese, and Iraqi, Somali, and others.[25]

Photos by Stéphane Janin

Left, at the entrance of the Metta Health Center, one of six community health centers in Lowell, Massachusetts. Informational materials are translated in Khmer and Lao and Cambodian or Lao-speaking staff is hired to serve the patients. Right, the Metta Health Center mixes western medicine and traditional Asian practices such as acupuncture, massage, and meditation to heal physically as well as psychologically.

The closest dedicated Burmese Buddhist temple in the region is located in Malden, Massachusetts. A monastery and temple, Buddhist missionaries first established Mahasatipatthana Meditation Center of Malden in a three-story house in 1999.[26] Today, the temple continues to thrive in its new location on Quincy Street, a welcome change from the first center (whose location near the Orange Line of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority meant that the rumble of passing trains regularly interrupted the quiet setting preferred for meditation). New construction is made possible by the generosity of local and international donors. Mahasattipathana Meditation Center of Malden is affiliated with the America Burma Buddhist Association (ABBA). ABBA is part of a larger network of affiliated Mahasi Meditation Centers throughout the world.[27]

Not far from Boston, the Overseas Burmese Christian Fellowship (OBCF) gathers in Allston, Massachusetts. Established in 1997 by immigrants, the OBCF is located in the International Community Church, an American Baptist host church that shares space with several other Christian congregations.[28] OBCF is a member of the Burmese Christian Association of North America (BCANA) an organization that links a network of sixteen churches throughout the U.S. BCANA holds biennial meetings and conferences. OBCF hosted a national conference in 2013.

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20. In 2014, the *Boston Globe* reported that a small number of Rohingya living in Nashua had turned an apartment into a mosque where, due to financial constraints, an imam could only come once a week. (See: Jessica Meyers, "New England's Rohingya refugees seek hope in Obama's visit to Myanmar," *The Boston Globe*, November 13, 2014. http://www.bostonglobe.com/news/nation/2014/11/12/new-england-rohingya-refugees-seek-hope-obama-visit-myanmar/aRYcdU76X3RQVe2yxiQ0NM/story.html#.)
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26. It is possible that some members of the Burmese Buddhist community may attend primarily Cambodian Buddhist temples in Lowell. Lynn, located on Boston's North Shore, is home to the International Shakyamuni Buddha Vihara and Vipassana Center (ISBVVC) whose leaders and members reflect diverse South and Southeast Asian communities, bringing together Burmese Buddhists with Cambodian, Thai, Nepalese, Bangladeshi, and others. (See: International Shakyamuni Buddha Vihara and Vipassana Center. "About Us." http://isbvvc.org/about/about-us.)
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Utica, New York

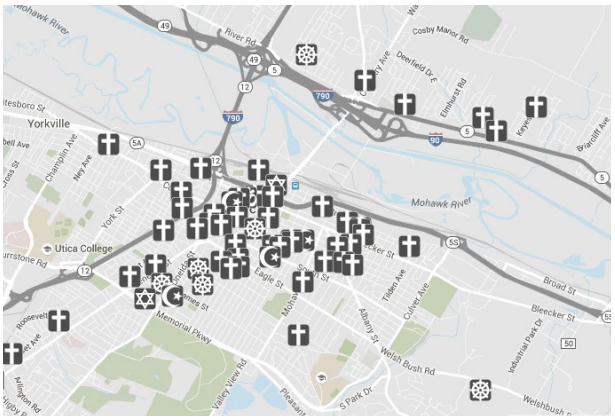
"The City that Loves Refugees"

Utica began as a military outpost in the midst of Oneida Indian country. The Oneida are part of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) league, and their present-day cultural center, Shako:wi, is on the Oneida Nation lands, 20 miles west of Utica. Among the first non-indigenous religious spaces created by Euro-Americans were Welsh and English speaking Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Congregational, and Methodist churches. Protestant mainline and Catholic churches flourished from the mid-nineteenth through the mid twentieth century.

The Erie Canal began to operate between Utica and Rome in 1817, turning Utica into a major economic center. When Irish immigrants came to help build the Canal, they established St. John's, the first Roman Catholic Church west of Albany. The Canal, and later the railroad, brought new industries which, in turn, brought more immigrants, and more religious diversity: German Catholics, German Lutherans, Italian Catholics, Polish Catholics, and by the 1880s a strong Jewish community settled after fleeing pogroms in Eastern Europe.

The Underground Railroad operated along the Erie Canal, and free blacks found sanctuary in Utica homes and church basements. As the number of African Americans in Utica increased, Hope Chapel AME church was organized in 1848 by the Reverend Jermain Loguen and is in operation still today. The African American population of Utica remained relatively small until the Great Migration of the 1920s through 1960s, when blacks from the South came to work the agricultural fields and machine industries in the area. By the 1940s, black churches were established throughout the city, including the denominations of Church of God in Christ, Baptist, and AME.

Economic downturn, population upturn. The 1960s began an economic downturn for Utica, not unusual among rust belt cities. The mid-twentieth century population peaked at 100,000, and by the year 2000 it was down to 60,000. Since then, however, the population has remained fairly steady, due



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via http://pluralism.org/landscape/utica/

almost entirely to the influx of immigrants and refugees. The Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees (affiliated with the Lutheran Immigration and Refugees Service) was established in 1981 in response to the influx and remains a key resource.

The first wave of refugees in the 1980s came chiefly from Southeast Asia, especially Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Buddhist temples from each group are seen throughout Utica today. Through the 1990s, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and resulting economic and military upheavals, Eastern Europeans began to find new homes in Utica. Key among these refugees have been Russian Pentecostals who fled oppression from the Russian Orthodox Church, and Muslim Bosnians who fled the wars occurring in the former Yugoslavia. The Bosnian population is estimated to be as high as 10,000 people, and in 2008 the community purchased the former Central Methodist Church building from the city for $1. After pouring a few years of solid labor into it, the Islamic Bosnian Association mosque stands on the same block as City Hall; the *adhan* (call to prayer) can be heard on Friday afternoons, broadcast from the minaret across downtown Utica. The mosque has become something of a "mother mosque," as Somalis, Iraqis, Sudanese, and Burmese now also pray there, and they have helped seed newer gatherings around town, including a recently opened Burmese mosque. As of 2015, there are at least four mosques operating in Utica.

"Immigration and Utica are Inseparable." While immigration has been part of Utica life for two centuries, the last quarter century has seen unprecedented growth in diversity; in 2015 approximately 17 percent of the city's population was foreign-born. According to the U.S. Census, the white population was 98.4 percent in 1950. In 2010 it was 69 percent. Today, one-fourth of the city's residents speak languages other than English at home. Equally significant, recent polls indicate that more than two-thirds of the population agrees that immigration is a good thing for the city.

Racism and xenophobia are not absent, but in account after account from pollsters, journalists, filmmakers, and others, Utica has been noted as an exceptional place in its welcoming of others in the midst of economic hard times. Articles in the *New York Times*, *Christianity Today*, and the United Nations magazine *Refugees*, have published positive stories of the city, calling it "The City that Loves Refugees." A 2015 documentary *In God's House: the Religious Landscape of Utica, NY* observed: "Immigration and Utica are inseparable."[1] Responding to the needs of new populations, various groups beyond local congregations have begun to work with refugees and their religious commitments, supplementing the ongoing work of the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees. The Midtown Utica Community Center meets in a former Episcopal church and is open to a number of cultural events for newly settled people. The Jewish Community Center, the Salvation Army, and Utica Rescue Mission all have resources for the area, and in 2014, several constituencies gathered to form the Interfaith Coalition of Greater Utica.

Since 1999, large numbers of people from Burma/Myanmar, especially ethnic Karen, have arrived and begun to reinvigorate older established Protestant churches such as Tabernacle Baptist (ABS) and Grace Episcopal. Other Burmese refugees are Buddhist and Muslim and have established new centers for their religious ceremonies. And since 2009 refugees from Bhutan, especially ethnic Nepalese, have come to Utica, establishing a Hindu center and a number of Christian gathering places. Significant numbers of Iraqis, Somali Bantu, Sudanese, and Ukrainians, as well as people from several Latin American nations have also settled in the area.

Burmese communities in Utica

According to the New York Bureau of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance, 95 percent of all refugees coming to the state in FY14 were resettled in upstate New York and 48 percent of all refugees to the state came from Bhutan and Burma.[2] The larger of the two groups was the Burmese (1,108).[3] Researchers identified two mosques, three Buddhist temples, and two churches that specifically serve the Burmese population of Utica, New York. As noted below, these centers are in addition to several mosques and churches that serve the wider community and attract Burmese participants.

Burmese Muslims. One respondent who had arrived in 2007 told researchers that he was surprised—and happy—to find Muslims already living in Utica. Another who came to the United States in 2008 first resettled in Cleveland, Ohio, and then moved to Utica. He reported that he wanted to come to Utica precisely because he knew "there are a lot of Muslims here, and [he] wanted to live in a community." By that time, not only were there Muslims living in Utica but the Bosnian community had concrete plans to turn a former church building into a mosque. A few short years later, that mosque, the Islamic Bosnian Association, would serve as an anchor not only for Bosnian Muslims but for other immigrant groups as well.

Some members in the Burmese Muslim community "practice in a slightly different way," from other Muslim communities in Utica and decided to establish the Nurul Islam Nabu Myanmar Muslim Association in 2014. The association attracts worshippers beyond that particular community. "Arabs, Bosnians, and Somalians, will come to pray here, too. And we sometimes go to their mosques, too." When asked about collaborating with other Muslims communities, one respondent explained:

> ... We work together. But we came here, and we see them and we work together whenever we need something regarding religion. We go to [non-Burmese Muslims] [and] talk because they've been here longer than us.

In recent years, Bosnian, Somali, and Burmese Muslims worked together to jointly establish a Muslim cemetery where, as of mid-2015, 50 members of the local Muslim community have already been interred.

Photo by Emmett Potts

Sign in the new Burmese Mosque Association of Utica.

Another institution, the Burmese Muslim Association, sustains another mosque that provides Burmese Muslims not only with religious ties but with important social ones as well. One respondent summed up the situation, saying that the mosque "is the place we pray, and this is the place that we talk about the future of the mosque. The future of the community is here." One respondent reported offering rides to the grocery store, Walmart, and the *masjid* (his social hub) to recently arrived families without cars. Eid celebrations also bring the Burmese Muslim community together for prayer, food, and soccer matches.

Interviews also brought to light relationships between Burmese refugees living in different cities across the United States. One respondent noted connections to Burmese communities in Albany, Buffalo, and Rochester, as well as California, Indiana, and Texas. He also reported networking with interfaith groups in Syracuse in an effort to find ways to spread awareness about interfaith among the Burmese. He was keen to promote the separation of church and state, recognizing that Muslims and others "are not a state alone here." In efforts to promote democracy in Myanmar, one Muslim respondent mentioned that this led him to work with Burmese Buddhist leaders both in Utica and in Myanmar and Thailand.

Karen Christians. Karen Christian communities in Utica coordinate with established Christian churches in Utica to use space. Utica Karen Baptist Church, for instance, rents space from First Presbyterian Church and a congregation of Karen Christians has also formed within, rather than apart from, Tabernacle Baptist Church. In both situations, the Karen Christian group is growing while the host faith community is shrinking. Although both groups report good relations with their hosts, one Karen Christian respondent articulated their vision for the future:

> It is our dream to build our own congregation. As we are a new church, a new congregation in this country, we look forward to working with all the people around us. Even different religions, different faiths, different cultures, different language. We can work with everybody, and we look forward to having our own church.

This desire seems linked to a desire to find ways of maintaining their Karen identity and for educating others about their community.

> It's a big issue for us, because we come from a small place and [Americans] don't know who is "Karen." So when they ask me, where are you from? I say I'm from Burma. But the thing is that I'm not Burmese, and I don't even speak Burmese... So, yes, I say I am from Burma because I can't say I'm from Karen. Karen is not a country, but there's still Karen state in Burma. And they have their own culture, government, different language, you know. ... And I have to explain it, and I was really happy to explain, to let them know, to talk about it.

The shift in populations at Tabernacle Baptist is featured in the film, *In God's House*. Established in 1864, Tabernacle has a long history of welcoming immigrants, including post-World War II refugees from Europe. Prior to the 1999 arrival of the first Burmese refugees to Utica, the congregation was "aging, greying, and dwindling." Today, on any given Sunday, Pastor Mark Caruana estimates that 20 percent of congregants are

Euro-American and 80 percent are Karen. He explained:

> We were inundated with this wave of newcomers… This certainly wasn't the ministry I was anticipating when I arrived here. Nor was it a ministry I think my master of divinity training really prepared me for. Before going to seminary, I worked for four years as a social worker so some of that training has proven to be invaluable.

Burmese Buddhists. Burmese Buddhists in Utica have had less success forging relationships with their co-religionists hailing from places other than Burma. Through an interpreter, one respondent explained why the Burmese temple did not have stronger ties to the local Cambodian and Vietnamese temples:

> At the beginning we had the connection but in later times there's kind of language barrier, we speak different languages. Different countries: Burmese and Cambodia. That's the reason so later on we don't much see each other.
>
> When we have some time we call, connect with each other. Same thing with the Vietnamese. They call us when they need something to do.

The respondent saw his community's lack of knowledge about their Burmese Buddhist tradition and the Burmese language as direct results of their displacement. He explained that Burmese Buddhists who lived in refugee camps in Thailand "have very poor knowledge of their Buddhism" since they "borrow[ed]" from their host country. Similarly, those who grew up in the United States "don't speak much in the Burmese so it's very difficult to teach."

One respondent noted that Buddhist monks face a particular hardship in getting settled since, as monks, their tradition does not permit them to earn money from working a job. Thus, they must rely on the generosity of the Buddhist community for sustenance after the initial social assistance is discontinued. This is difficult given the reality that many within the resettled community themselves have limited means. Despite this, a monastery was founded in an old house big enough to accommodate meditation sessions, ceremonies, and classes (currently Burmese language and *dhamma* classes on the Buddhist teachings are offered) and three monks reside on the premises.

Nepali Bhutanese refugees in Utica

In 2014, over 800 Bhutanese refugees were resettled in the state of New York. The vast majority of all refugees coming to the state (95 percent) were resettled upstate, including in Oneida county, of which Utica is a part.[4]

Photos by S. Brent Plate

Left, in front of the Santisukha Vikara Monastery, Utica, with one of the monks in residence. Right, teaching class for local children inside the Santisukha Vikara Monastery, Utica.

Nepali Bhutanese Hindus. Much like the Burmese Muslim and Buddhist communities, Nepali Bhutanese Hindu refugees from Bhutan have also established religious and cultural institutions to help anchor their community in Utica. One such organization is the Association of Hindu Society of Utica, New York, which maintains a website that serves as "a medium to get people to interact in the community," and to bring together Hindus from different regions.

One respondent described his arrival in Utica—and his fear about what his new home meant for his religion—in this way:

> My mind didn't get a chance to think about religion when I first got here because neither [did] there seem to be an environment conducive to practice religion nor there was any place to practice it. There were no people around. Initially, I wondered and felt as if my religion was going to disappear after coming to America. But in reality, as time passed, that was not the case. More people started to come; more people were added. Then there was no discomfort of any sort.

Some modifications in religious practice have taken place since, for instance, in the absence of huge fire pits for ritual fires, small steel containers are used. Another respondent recalled how, in the past, she would bring religious items from New York City and Syracuse because she was unable to find them in Utica. Now times have changed.

> [The] Burmese [shop owners] have understood our needs. If we request them to bring things, show them images of it, show them the actual things, they will... For instance, sesame, barley, gangaajal [water from the Ganges], is what they have... also, if we give them the names of the books we need, they bring it for us.

Caste distinctions have at times prevented interaction and shared religious practice within Utica's Nepali Bhutanese Hindu community. Some are now working to overcome this particular legacy.

Nepali Bhutanese Christians. Some Bhutanese families are grappling with challenges brought about when family members convert from Hinduism to Christianity. A Bhutanese Hindu recalled the death of a person from a household where the parents were Hindu but the children were Christian. The family chose to hold the funeral rites at another Hindu relative's home because "Christian[s] say if a household has Christians in [it], then none of the Hindu rites should be performed. According to our values, too, Hindus say the same. If a household has Christians, then no Hindu rite will be performed there."

Photo courtesy of Snapshots of Resettlement

The women's festival Teej is celebrated by Bhutanese-Nepali women who pray for the wellbeing of their husbands and themselves.

For some, conversion to Christianity happened while they were still in the refugee camps; others converted once they arrived in Utica. Members of the Nepali Bhutanese Hindu community recalled being visited by members of local churches who, in addition to bringing clothes and other household goods, sought to introduce them to Christianity. Some Hindus declined and the visits stopped. Others, when invited to church, accepted the invitations while maintaining their Hindu faith. One respondent, who estimated there is a 50-50 split between Christian and Hindu Nepali Bhutanese in Utica, remembered his experiences going to church:

> We went; we had fun. We have left families behind and there is a sense of placelessness. In addition, we don't have any friends. At times like that we went to the church. But if one wants to keep practicing their own religion, then there is no problem in doing that... Before, they may not have known my background and what faith I believe in. They would say, "Let's go to church, it will be fun." ... Instead of staying home, it was fun to hang out with friends there...

After the formation of Redeemer International Church for Nepalis, both Hindu and Christian Nepali Bhutanese came together to discuss how to celebrate Dasain, Tihar, and Christmas together.

> Since we are a small community, we decided to celebrate different holidays as a community. There is an increase in feelings of solidarity and brotherhood when people celebrate together. In addition, we have our culture. We should teach our children our culture. Nepali culture and religion are two different things. We discussed how we'd celebrate *Dasain* in a common place.

Others have found Christians and members of the wider Utica community are interested in the differences between their practices. In some cases, these interactions have brought about shifts in existing institutions that serve a wider public, such as local funeral homes. As one respondent explained:

> ...[T]hey want to know how we perform our funeral rites. We have had several interactions with pastors and directors of funeral homes. The outcome of those interactions was that we need a separate funeral home where we perform the rituals in our religious way. We discussed how we can have funerals by bringing together the requirements of the funeral home and our requirements.

The Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees is the hub for refugee resettlement in Utica. Here, refugees from many countries and religious backgrounds interface with each other and with the broader Utica community in a myriad of ways. Founded in 1981, the Center has resettled over 15,000 refugees in Utica and serves these individuals through assistance with immigration and citizenship, translation and interpretation, adult learning, job placement, and community programs.[5] Although not a FIO, the MVRC is a site where interfaith encounters can—and do—take place. Further, MVRC is also a place where individual can find a space to process some of the trauma of being a refugee. One Nepali Bhutanese Hindu respondent described the way in which the Center encouraged his interaction with other groups:

> I went to a lecture series of Somali Bantu community. I was able to understand the suffering they have been through in Africa. Also, I could share my own suffering. In addition, I was able to interact with Burmese Karen community through the lecture series. It was really helpful to be able to share these similar experiences of suffering and pain.

Photo courtesy of Snapshots of Resettlement

Photograph taken at the Redeemer Cup, a yearly soccer tournament put on by the Redeemer Church, which serves refugees from many cultures.

The Midtown Utica Community Center has meeting spaces that groups can reserve as well as classes and activities for young people. MUCC aims to provide "an environmentally sound facility for arts, recreation, celebration, and locally based human services."[6] The Center is also home to Refugee Arts of Utica, an organization that presents "traditional and cultural dances, songs, and other forms of art at cultural and music festivals."[7]

In 2010, Redeemer Church, a non-denominational Christian church with weekly services in Burmese and Nepali, hosted the first Redeemer Cup to coincide with the FIFA World Cup.[8] Sixteen teams, each with members from immigrant or refugee groups, participated.[9] Redeemer opened its International Campus in 2011 in order to cater specifically to the Burmese and Nepali Bhutanese communities. Each weekend there are services in Burmese and Nepali language.

Notes

1. Robert Knight and S. Brent Plate. *In God's House: Religious Diversity of Utica, NY*. 2014. Documentary. http://robertknight.com/igh.html.
2. Bureau of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance. "BRIA Population Data for FFY 2014." https://otda.ny.gov/programs/bria/documents/population-report.pdf.
3. Ibid.
4. Bureau of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance. "BRIA Population Data for FFY 2014." https://otda.ny.gov/programs/bria/documents/population-report.pdf.
5. Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees. "About." https://www.mvrcr.org/about/.
6. Midtown Utica Community Center. "About." http://www.midtownutica.org/about/.
7. Refugee Artists of Utica. "About Us." http://refugeeartistsutica.com/about-us/.
8. Redeemer Church. "International Campus. http://www.redeemer.tv/international/.
9. Ibid. "Redeemer Cup." http://www.redeemer.tv/redeemer-cup/.

Common Challenges and Themes

Several themes emerged when respondents were asked about their current religious practice and connections to other religious and/or ethnic groups. These themes include: the desire to establish a center for their particular community; forging and maintaining relationships with co-religionists (those who share a faith but are not of the same cultural or ethnic background); and navigating diverse kinds of interfaith encounters, which can include educating a wider public about the conflict that made them refugees in the first place.

Respondents who were refugees almost universally articulated a desire to establish a religious center (mosque, temple, or church) that would specifically serve their ethnic group.[1] In some instances, this goal has already been accomplished; in other cases, a process of procuring a space is currently underway. Confirming a significant theme in the literature among immigrant communities,[2] these spaces are envisioned as serving more than just the religious needs of the community but reproducing ethnic identity and providing space for social and cultural needs. Such a space is seen as an investment that will serve as an anchor for the community and as a place where younger generations can learn about their religious and cultural traditions, including language. As seen in the Bhutanese Hindu community, practices have been altered based on regulation of buildings, such as fire regulations. The newly arrived Rohingya Muslims in Nashua are few in number and according to them, are not yet established enough to have the resources to purchase a physical space.

Integrating into existing religious communities can create conflict or result in segregation in multiethnic congregations. However, this study did not encounter such phenomena; even taking note of differences in practice, relationships with co-religionists seemed generally positive or neutral. In Utica, the Bosnian Islamic Association serves as a kind of "mother mosque" for Muslims in the city. The Burmese community originally used this space, along with two other preexisting mosques in Utica, but chose to found their own mosques after gathering enough resources. Burmese have since collaborated with their co-religionists to establish a Muslim cemetery to serve the entire community. On occasion, members of Sri Lakshmi temple in Ashland, Massachusetts helped to organize buses to transport Bhutanese Hindus from New Hampshire to the temple for large festivals. Consistent with the literature,[3] language can create parallel congregations such as a number of Christian congregations serving Bhutanese or Burmese groups "nested" within churches that are home to older, mostly Euro-American congregations.

Third, beyond interacting with the mostly Christian resettlement agencies, refugees also report interfaith encounters within the civic, cultural, and familial spheres. Examples of interfaith interaction in the civic realm include an interfaith vigil that was organized to support earthquake victims in Nepal, bringing together Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists.[4] After an incident during the Purana celebration in Concord, a coalition of local non-Bhutanese residents, concerned about the tenor of online conversations, contacted elected officials to host an event to promote dialogue. In Utica, Hindu and Christian Nepali Bhutanese have met together to discuss celebrations of Dasain and Christmas. Whether initiated or approached by others, these interfaith encounters demonstrate how social capital, bridging and linking relationships, can connect refugee groups with other organizations and groups in their new community.

Fourth, once an initial group of refugees has established themselves, they will often offer assistance to others within their community who arrive later. Many also offer assistance to other refugees who do not share their particular ethnic or faith background, creating de facto interfaith organizations and/or encounters.

Some interviews revealed that New Hampshire's Bhutanese community does not receive much help from others at the early stages:

> Where to go to school, how to fill out the application, what needs to be filled out? Finding jobs, everything.

> It was pretty tough in the beginning. No cars. Nobody there to teach driving classes. The other thing is there used to be a culture shock. Back when we started coming to the US, we never thought of doing a Purana, like in Concord. We were completely hopeless. For the first two years we had the same feeling because we could not find the resources around.

Perhaps because of this experience, the Bhutanse were inspired to set up BCNH, which now shares office space with the Somali Development Center and the Organization of Refugee and Immigrant Success (ORIS), all groups that offer services to the refugee community at large, not just to their own group.

Further areas of study

The goal of this study was to learn more about the multi-religious encounters of refugees as they are resettled in the United States, as well as how religion shapes adaptation and if religion links to civic engagement, especially regarding conflict and peace efforts in one's home country. Focusing on two cities and refugees from two countries, themes emerged that aligned with existing research; with study limitations, they could not be were fully explored. The following areas warrant further research.

The role of religion in civic engagement. Members of the Bhutanese and Burmese communities have reached out to elected officials with specific concerns. These communities and other newly arrived refugees would benefit from a clearer understanding of options generated by further analysis of how civic connections are forged and the ways in which more recently arrived refugees are engaging in the public sphere. Additionally, what role does religion—not only ethnicity or nationality—play in motivating, facilitating, or diminishing such engagement domestically and transnationally? One such example is the June 2015 resolution passed by the New Hampshire General Court calling on the United States government to end the Bhutanese refugee crisis and "promote human rights and democracy in Bhutan."[5] In 2013, Representative James McGovern (D-MA) whose district includes Worcester, introduced Congressional Resolution 418 asking the United States government to urge Burmese political leaders to "end the persecution of the Rohingya people and respect internationally recognized human rights for all ethnic and religious minority groups within Burma."[6] In addition, members of the Bhutanese community in Manchester organized a voter registration drive and info session led by the city clerk in September 2015.

Refugees interactions with co-religionists. Even when refugees are able to find co-religionists in their new communities in the United States, various factors can complicate relationships within a religious community. While language and cultural differences are predictable challenges, other factors can create division. In the case of the American Hindu community, refugees often have lower socio-economic status and greater diversity of caste representation than older, more established immigrant communities. The study found positive interaction with co-religionists, yet further research focused on the diversity within multi-ethnic faith communities could benefit refugees and host communities. Analysis of the social, economic, political, and cultural differences within a community that segregates into parallel congregations, for example, may reveal elements or perceptions of exclusion or discrimination. Where multiple refugee groups or waves of immigrants gather within a religious community, further research on knowledge transfer, including links with diaspora networks and resources, could highlight significant implications for how this affects acclimation to life in the U.S.

Forging cross-refugee connections. Refugees from different places of origin or different waves may meet in religious communities if they are co-religionists, but other community resources can also facilitate cross-refugee encounters. Further research might explore cross-refugee connections and the extent to which they, intentionally or unintentionally, promote greater cultural literacy, foster interfaith relations or knowledge, or create space for connection through shared experiences among refugees across ethnic, religious, and cultural divides. In both Manchester and Utica, refugees from different places of origin and diverse religious traditions come together under the umbrella of non-profit organizations to share resources and experiences. In New Hampshire, the Bhutanese Community of New Hampshire works with refugees from Africa and Asia. A respondent from Bhutan sought out the contact information for newly-arrived Burmese Muslims because both groups were religious minorities and had lived in camps and experienced violence under majority Buddhist

governments. In Utica, connections are made through the close proximity of groups that pass through the Mohawk Valley Resource Center and the Midtown Community Center. Organized events such as soccer tournaments and conversations where people can share with each other the trauma they have experienced also intentionally bring groups together. Lessons could also be learned from asking support organizations, faith-inspired or not, how they view their role in regards to the religion of the refugee groups they encounter.

Women's perspectives. Our research focused on interviews with community leaders in Bhutanese and Burmese religious and cultural communities. These leaders were overwhelmingly male, and although we sought out opportunities to interview women leaders, we were only able to interview one woman for the pilot phase of the project in New Hampshire and very few in Utica. In order to include women's experiences and perspectives in future research, the methodology could be adapted to identify alternative forms of leadership such as women's leaders and youth leaders or shifting the focus beyond leaders to ensure representation of women. One respondent, when asked if women's roles had changed since coming to the U.S. reported seeing "many differences" from the camp since, once they arrived, they saw more women going to work, having a bank account, and owning a car, for instance. She also noted that those who had received "leadership training" in the refugee camps tended to continue in leadership roles once in the U.S.; those who had "stayed home back in the refugee camp or in their country, they stayed like that. So they didn't change the leadership but they changed their lifestyle." The study found that women's groups are finding creative ways to respond to the circumstances of their resettlement, for example the Women's Council of the Bhutanese Community organized a Teej Festival at the Currier Museum of Art and a Rohingya women's group founded Woven Thread LLC, a jewelry cooperative that uses recycled saris to make necklaces for sale.

Issues related to conversion. The study found that conversion is a contentious issue, particularly in the Nepali Bhutanese community. Future research about conversion trends and struggles of refugees from given camps or countries would be useful in understanding the role of religion in the lives of refugees and its dynamics. There are perceptions among Nepali Bhutanese Hindus that Christian groups involved in refugee resettlement target vulnerable people for conversion. At the same time, caste divisions and limitations placed on low caste Hindus to participate in religious life also may motivate conversion to other faith traditions. Tensions over conversions exacerbate existing divides in the Bhutanese community. These play out on a family level and are seen as a threat to cohesion across generations. Evangelical activities also encourage social interactions and for some, open an avenue into community, which includes a sense of belonging or being cared for. The role Christian missionary organizations play in this dynamic, whether in the U.S. or in the refugee camps, is also an important area for further research. While P. Pratap Kumar's book *Contemporary Hinduism* (2014) notes that most of the conversions take place in the refugee camps and "only a small number have been converted in the USA,"[7] our respondents reported conversions taking place both in the camps and once resettled in the U.S., along with cases where some converted to Christianity and then returned to Hinduism. Future research could also explore the appeal of evangelical Christianity in the United States for refugees and how experiences with evangelism in home countries may influence their perceptions.

The lack of religious diversity among faith-inspired organizations in refugee resettlement. At present, six of the nine voluntary agencies partner with the federal government on refugee resettlement are faith-inspired, of which five are Christian organizations.[8] In addition to the local branches of these FIOs, numerous Christian congregations and organizations interface with refugee communities in their city in some capacity, whether through welcome visits or the sharing or renting of space, while many incoming refugees do not identify as Christian. Further research could explore how or if shared and differing religious affiliation between support organization and refugees affect service provision. Specifically for non-Christian organizations of the same faith as refugees, it would be useful to understand how they see their work intersecting with, differing from, and/or responding to the work of Christian organizations. Our research in Manchester also identified at least three Hindu FIOs that seek to serve the resettled Bhutanese populations in the area. One such organization is Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHP-America). The VHP-America has long had a presence on U.S. college

campuses through the Hindu Students Council, although students at many universities have opted to develop independent organizations in part because of the political agenda of the VHP in India, which is linked to Hindu nationalist aims.[9] Other organizations that have provided support, either financial or programmatic, include the Hindu American Foundation and Sewa International USA. At a national level, HAF has expressed concern over what is described as "aggressive, evangelizing churches" that seek out refugees.[10]

Caste system and changing values. Discussion of caste came up during interviews with both Bhutanese Hindus as well as Indian Hindus in Manchester. Further research is needed to better understand how views of caste differ across generations and what impact this has on relationships within the Bhutanese community, as well as the larger Hindu community. Existing research on caste within Indian communities in the U.S. may prove helpful, but research specific to Hindu refugees would be valuable.[11] One respondent commented on how the Bhutanese community maintained caste distinctions whereas the Indian community was changing in this regard. When asked whether caste was different here than in Nepal, one Bhutanese Hindu responded:

> A little bit. When we were in our country, back in Bhutan, we are taught that there is a casteism [sic] in our country. So when we came to Nepal, our parents practice still but we don't practice because we think it is the same for all. We do not change our elders, because they practiced for so many years that we cannot change them. So maybe we will change and our kids won't have to, they'll change by themselves.

One respondent reasoned that some Bhutanese Hindu households will not request the services of a *pandit* because they know that, even if he wanted to perform rites within their home, he would be ostracized by others if he did so. Another thought that perhaps this might vary from city to city within the diaspora.

Notes

1. "Refugee" is used in this report to refer to any who has experienced the process of resettlement. Researchers are cognizant of the fact that some people prefer to shed that term, especially once resettlement has happened and/or U.S. citizenship has been acquired. The term is used here simply for clarity.
2. Ebaugh and Chafetz 2002.
3. Numrich 1996.
4. For coverage of the vigil, see: "Nepali community in Hooksett holds prayer vigil," WMUR 9ABC, April 30, 2015. http://www.wmur.com/news/nepali-community-in-hooksett-holds-prayer-vigil/32653950.
5. New Hampshire Senate Concurrent Resolution 1, June 11, 2015. http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/legislation/2015/SCR0001.html.
6. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, H. Res. 418, "Urging the Government of Burma to end the persecution of the Rohingya people and respect internationally recognized human rights for all ethnic and religious minority groups within Burma," March 25, 2014. https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/bill/h-res-418-urging-government-burma-end-persecution-rohingya-people-and-respect-internationally.
7. P. Pratap Kumar. *Contemporary Hinduism*, Religions in Focus, (New York: Routledge), 2014, p. 43.
8. Office of Refugee Resettlement. "Voluntary Agencies." http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/resource/voluntary-agencies. NB Among the nine organizations, one is Jewish, bringing the total number of FIOs to six.
9. See: "Hindu Revival on Campus," in *On Common Ground: World Religions in America*. http://www.pluralism.org/religion/hinduism/issues/campus.
10. Hindu American Foundation. "The Bhutanese American Project: Helping Rebuild Lives," http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/bhutanese-american-project-helping-rebuild-lives.
11. Benson et al. at Arizona State University began research on the role of religion among Bhutanese Hindus but additional studies focused on the caste system would be useful. See Benson et al. Religious coping and acculturation stress among Hindu Bhutanese: A study of newly-resettled refugees in the United States. *International Social Work. 2011.* 55 (4) p. 538–553.

Conclusion

In light of the current debate over the resettlement of refugees from Syria within the United States, and the role of the religious identity of the refugees in that debate, this pilot study is timely. In addition to the challenges of securing basic necessities, refugee communities are navigating unfamiliar territory when it comes to finding ways of expressing and maintaining their religious identity in their new home. In some cases, this search leads to relationships with other communities that might not otherwise have developed had the new community not needed to rent space, for instance. In other cases, public religious expression that is unfamiliar and challenging to established sets of norms (sound, times of gathering, etc.) can bring broader concerns about changing demographics to light, either through direct confrontation or through social media.

This study and its findings have implications for policymakers, resettlement agencies, and communities receiving refugees. First, interfaith cooperation (and occasionally non-cooperation) within and between refugee groups and their larger community is a significant part of the refugee resettlement experience and can facilitate integration and minimize tensions. Much can be learned comparing circumstances where interfaith cooperation works as a facilitator for integration and when there is lack of cooperation. Resettlement actors would benefit from better understanding of when and how prior waves of refugees, now settled and established, might be linked with newer refugees so that lessons learned can be shared. Religious engagement can in some circumstances provide an important vehicle at the intersections. The study found that newer refugees, unable to find existing religious centers, wished to establish their own, however they encountered a gap of knowledge on how religion is regulated in public spaces in the United States. Learning from prior refugees or immigrants proved helpful but was not consistently feasible. Policymakers and communities would benefit from research exploring how education systems in the U.S. have dealt with the religious needs of refugee children and families.

Beyond the scope of this study, there is need for research on the role that religious beliefs and institutions play for the resettlement system within the United States. Since 1980, the system has been designed to include support from within communities, through mutual assistance associations, and not only government and voluntary agencies. Given different waves of refugees and their unique needs, including religious, how have these mechanisms adapted? Open dialogue exploring how secular agencies and faith-inspired organizations view their role in regard to religion, often implicit, would provide clarification and bring religion into debates on the most effective mechanisms for mutual assistance.

As refugees settle and become established, they add to American pluralism, often by seeking to preserve their culture, language, and religious practices. Newer refugee communities often learn from, and are often assisted by, earlier waves of immigrants or refugees. This study found a common desire to establish a religious center that can not only meet the religious and cultural needs of their community, but also provide support to newer waves of refugees or potentially address issues back home. This evolution is tied to the demographic growth and economic stability of the community.

Another priority for many is raising awareness locally and globally about the plight of refugees and of those still living in their home country, a commitment that adds further dimensions to the civic connections of many communities. Such interactions, as with those between refugees and the non-refugee host religious communities, could lead to a broader understanding of global interconnectedness, the implications of which remain to be seen.

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