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# Resettled: A Portrait of Bhutanese Refugees in Dayton, Ohio

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**A Portrait of Bhutanese Refugees**  
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Honors Thesis

Molly R. Winslow

Department: Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work

Advisor: Theo Majka, Ph.D.

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## **Abstract**

75 Bhutanese refugees have been resettled in Dayton, Ohio. Through an intensive case study with one Bhutanese refugee family and interviews with local refugee service providers the topics of English language acquisition, issues surrounding the job search and religion as both a community builder and insulator are examined.

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost I wish to thank my Bhutanese family here in Dayton for welcoming me into their lives. They have allowed me to become a part of their world and use their stories as the basis for my research. Without their participation I would have nothing. It is their voices I wish to speak the loudest.

Thank you to Theo Majka for his endless support and guidance. He introduced me to refugees and immigration studies over two years ago and has dramatically altered and improved the course of my undergraduate education.

Lastly, many thanks and love for my family and friends. Thank you to my parents for allowing me to travel and pushing me as a human being. Thank you to my best editor, who also happens to be my lovely sister. Thank you to my friends and loves at UD and at home, you have kept my life light and sane.



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“The losses a person experiences when leaving her home behind are many. They range from losing meaningful relationships to loss of social and material status, employment and relevant qualifications...The losses are highly disorientating for the individual, leaving her confused and in a state of grief” (Hardi, 2005).

## Introduction

Over two years ago I was brought on as an interviewer for a research project undertaken by the Ethnic and Cultural Diversity Caucus in conjunction with the Welcome Dayton Initiative that examined the structural barriers to integration facing six refugee populations living in Dayton, Ohio. During this time many refugees from the small Asian nation of Bhutan were being resettled in Dayton. They were omitted from the study as their resettlement was too recent. I then had the opportunity to live and study in Nepal and Bhutan in the spring of 2012 where I examined the Bhutanese refugees’ representation in the media as well as the response of organizations such as the United Nations. During my research in Nepal I was granted an interview with Bhutanese refugee, activist, and author Tek Nath Rizal who expressed discontent with the large numbers of Bhutanese being resettled in third countries like the United States. One question he posed during the interview has always stuck out, “What [do] the Bhutanese have? They are not scientist, they are not doctor, they are not engineer, just you are taking from them just simple labor, or what?” This encompasses so much of what I believe to be missing from many of the refugee narratives in regards to resettlement. Removal from the camps and resettlement in a third country, as opposed to repatriation or local integration, is seen by many as a success. Who wouldn’t want to come to America? Many struggles come with placement in a country where one doesn’t speak the language, understand the customs, or have skill sets that are recognized and employable. The goal of this study is to fill the gap in the research undertaken by the Ethnic and Cultural Diversity Caucus as well as attempt to gain an understanding of the struggles of resettlement from the perspective of the refugees themselves. This research asks several specific questions. To what degree have the Bhutanese refugees adjusted to life in the United States? Have there been barriers to their adjustment? How has the Bhutanese

refugee experience differed from that of other refugee groups in Dayton? It is my hope that the findings will be utilized by the City of Dayton and the Welcome Dayton Initiative to improve the services provided to refugees.

## **Bhutanese Refugee History**

“Both Dagana and Tsirang have a large population of Lhotsampas who migrated to these parts from their original homes in Nepal and the Darjeeling hills of India. They are hard-working and skilled cultivators, whose fields and orange groves are beautifully tended” (Wangchuck, 2006). This is one of the only sentences written about the Lhotshampa people in *Treasures of the Thunder Dragon: A Portrait of Bhutan*. This book written by Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, a former queen of Bhutan, fails to mention the over 95,000 people who poured into Nepal in the early 1990s claiming to be Bhutanese citizens and victims of wrongful eviction (Hutt, 2003). The issue of Lhotshampa citizenship and their mass exodus from Bhutan is complex and filled with contradictions and vague histories. In this section I will attempt to lay out the chain of events that led to the Lhotshampa exodus and what has happened since their arrival in Nepal.

From the accounts of British travelers it is estimated that somewhere around 1860-1870 Nepali migrants began to settle in the Samchi and Sibus districts in Southern Bhutan. It is then estimated that by 1933 there were nearly 60,000 Nepali migrants living in the Chirang district alone (Hutt, 2003). Since this time the Lhotshampas have typically worked as farmers or migrant laborers building roads all along the Southern border with India, in the Tarai. They are described as “peasants of Nepalese origin—high caste people and tribal populations who continued to immigrate from the end of the 19th century until about 1950. They are full Bhutanese citizens.” (Pommaret, 2006). Other reports have described a second wave of immigrants that came and permanently settled in southern Bhutan during the 1950s and 1960s (Whitecross, 2009).

There were several acts of legislation and events that took place over the course of several decades that are seen by many as leading to the migration in the early 1990s. The Citizenship Act of 1958 played an integral role in the chain of events leading up to this mass exodus. It granted citizenship to someone whose father is a Bhutanese National,

regardless of nation of birth. It states that a foreigner may petition the king for citizenship. A foreign wife of a Bhutanese national may become a citizen if they take an oath of loyalty that is 'to the satisfaction of the official concern'. It outlines that a person may lose their citizenship if they become a national of another country, have obtained their citizenship through providing false information, or engaged in activities against the king as well as several other offenses (Hutt, 2003). A census was conducted in 1969 and identification cards handed out. By 1980 all citizens were supposed to possess an identification card. During the 1980s the government began to encourage a national identity which resulted in the ratification of a much stricter citizenship law in 1985. The 1985 Act made it a requirement for people to be able to speak the Dzongkha<sup>1</sup> language and it was much more difficult for non-Bhutanese women to gain citizenship through their marriages to Bhutanese men, this meant their children were no longer entitled to citizenship (Hutt, 2006). The 1988 census created even more controversy. Lhotshampas were expected to produce tax receipts from 1958 or prior, or proof of their parents' citizenship. Many of the land deeds or tax receipts were in the names of their grandfathers or great-grandfathers. Many people had to convince census officers of their familial relations. They were then categorized by their level of citizenship, many appear to be arbitrary assignments, but there was no talk of what would happen to those classified as illegal, non-nationals (Hutt, 2003). The census showed a surprisingly large population increase in the South. The Bhutanese government made the claim that since the Citizenship Act of 1958 Nepalis had been flooding the South in order to take advantage of the economic prosperity of the country. It has also been suspected that the Bhutan government feared the Lhotshampas becoming an ethnic majority and beginning a violent uprising similar to the recent Gorkhaland movement in India (Hutt, 2003). These uprisings brought up old fears of a plot to create a 'Greater Nepal' in South Asia (Evans, 2010). Through negative portrayals in the media the, "Bhutanese authorities have promoted a particular vision of Bhutanese identity while creating a visible, and apparently alien, Lhotshampa minority" (Evans, 2010). Many Lhotshampas became fearful as reports of the numbers of "arbitrary decisions regarding various individuals'

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<sup>1</sup> Dzongkha translates to "national language" though it is only one of many languages spoken throughout Bhutan

citizenship, the arrest and harassment of suspected activists, the abuse of police power in the imposition of dress code, the burning of Nepali books” spread throughout the South (Evans, 2010). There began to be Lhotshampa demonstrations. The Bhutanese government and the Lhotshampas have very different accounts of the events that unfolded. Many scholars, such as Rosalind Evans, suggest that “they are both partial versions each containing and excluding important elements...there are indeed ‘two sides to the river’” (Evans, 2010). The government presented them as a violent, armed, ethnic mob even presenting false stories of massacres and attacks while the Lhotshampas presented themselves as innocents, pushed over the edge. There was significant police brutality and many accounts of torture and rape, but there was also violence from the Lhotshampas. Small uprisings as well as the beheading of a census officer and his companion did take place. After the demonstrations in September and October of 1990 the Bhutanese army and police began to attempt to identify both the participants and supporters of the demonstrations. Many were arrested, and almost without exception those who were released left Bhutan. Others were told that if they did not leave immediately then they would be forcibly evicted. Many out of fear, or to follow family members, began to leave Bhutan (Hutt, 2003).

In late 1990 the first Lhotshampas began pouring into Southeastern Nepal claiming to be refugees from Bhutan. They began to set up bamboo huts in the Southeastern district of Jhapa. They lived in horrible conditions with incredibly high rates of disease and infant mortality. In the summer of 1992 it was reported that there were up to 30 child deaths a day. This was also when the number of new arrivals peaked at nearly 600 people arriving each day (Hutt, 2003). In 1993 the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), by formal request of the Government of Nepal, stepped in and with the help of local NGOs started an emergency response program for the refugees. At that time they began to establish camps with the assistance of the Nepal government. Seven camps were established. Six camps are in the Jhapa district and one in Morang in Southeastern Nepal. UNHCR provides basic assistance within the camps such as free education, free health care, food, vocational training and some income generating activities. They run programs for women, children and the disabled as well as many other activities (Hutt, 2003). By January 2000 there were 97,750 people registered

in the camps. During this time the government of Bhutan argued that none of the people in the refugee camps were actually from Bhutan. It said the camps contained, Illegal Nepali residents in Bhutan; imported Nepali labourers who were claiming to be Bhutanese nationals by virtue of having worked in Bhutan; dissidents, many of whom had committed criminal and terrorist offences in Bhutan; Bhutanese nationals who had emigrated legally after renouncing their citizenship and selling all their properties; and people from other parts of the region, including Nepal itself, who had never even set foot in Bhutan (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1993).

In 1993 the governments of Nepal and Bhutan formed the Joint Ministerial Committee in order to work towards a solution for the refugee problem (Hutt, 2003). There were many disagreements and delays. After fifteen rounds of bilateral discussions between the two governments all discussion stopped in October of 2003. Since then there have been no official discussions about the issue.

In the last several years the biggest issue has been that of resettlement. The UNHCR began the process of resettlement in late 2007 (Gurung, 2013). Since they began in 2007 over 63,000 refugees have been resettled in third countries, making it UNHCR's largest resettlement project worldwide in 2010. The largest group of Bhutanese has gone to the United States but other countries include Canada, Australia, Denmark and The Netherlands (Gurung and Baidya, 2010). As of April 26, 2013, 100,000 Bhutanese refugees have been referred for resettlement in third countries, 80,000 of whom had already begun their new lives. The UNHCR sees this as an "incredible achievement" (Gurung, 2013).



## Resettlement

The process of resettling refugees in the United States is divided into two distinct parts. The first portion of the process, admission, is a responsibility of the U.S. State Department. Refugees who are applying for refugee status must have their application approved by the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security. After the federal process the refugees are placed in American cities where responsibility is handed over to local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) (Nawyn, 2006).

When refugees arrive in Dayton, Ohio (or any U.S. city) they are then under the responsibility of the local refugee resettlement agency, in this case a religiously affiliated NGO. Between the years of 2010 and 2012, 75 Bhutanese refugees were placed in Dayton, Ohio by the U.S. State Department (Majka & Majka, 2012). The refugees are then assigned a case manager, assisted in finding a place to live, and are given help with writing a resume and taking English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes<sup>2</sup>. These are called Reception and Placement (R & P) services. They are given \$1,800 from the U.S. Department of State. Of that sum, \$700 goes toward administrative costs and the other \$1,100 is then to go to food, rent, start-up costs and savings until they are able to find a job (Balser, 2011). These services officially last for 120 days (Nawyn, 2006). For the American system integration and refugee resettlement ‘success’ is primarily measured by the level of economic self-sufficiency achieved (Ives, 2007; Nawyn, 2010). This approach is often criticized among some refugee researchers. In Ives’ 2007 research with Bosnian refugees this intense focus on self-sufficiency meant that for many of her respondents “Their experiences were marked by confusion, poverty, exhaustion and regret”. She pushes for a more holistic approach where integration is defined as a “refugee’s social, economic, cultural, and political participation in a host country while maintaining a relationship with the country of origin” (Ives, 2007). While self-sufficiency is important (as it is required past 120 days) this research will attempt to take on a more holistic approach to categorize ‘success’.

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<sup>2</sup> I have chosen to use the term ‘English as a *Foreign Language*’ rather than ‘English as a Second Language’ as for many refugees English is not their second language but perhaps their third, fourth or fifth. Much of the literature uses the terminology of ESL, but they are referring to the same types of programs. Many of the interview respondents also use the term ESL.

The available literature has suggested that “Bhutanese refugees have suffered many health and mental health consequences of their mistreatment, and that they will experience significant challenges resettling in, and acculturating to, the host culture of western nations” (Benson et al, 2012). With this in mind, some studies have showed that traumas and stresses that occur during the process of resettlement may have longer lasting damage on the long-term wellbeing of the refugee than PTSD or other past traumas. Beiser’s study of Vietnamese refugees in Canada showed this. He asserts that it is not the trauma of torture, war or expulsion from one’s country but rather the struggles and prejudices faced upon resettlement are what hinder their wellbeing most significantly (Beiser, 2009). He puts forth that we, as Westerners, almost romanticize refugee trauma in a way. We are attracted to the story of the war torn refugee, damaged by years of torture and fleeing their homeland and we focus too heavily on this rather than the stresses and traumas that come from resettlement. He asserts that if refugees are exposed to persistent poverty, discrimination and alienation then this is where long lasting damage is done. It was months and years after a less successful resettlement where rates of anxiety and depression were shown to rise (Beiser, 2009).

These next sections will focus on three areas that studies have shown to have a serious effect on the well-being refugees living in the United States. These are English language skills, job availability and qualification, and community building.

## **English as a Foreign Language Literature**

Language shapes our interactions and for many refugees learning English is a major hurdle. In Ives’ 2007 study with Bosnian refugees every participant agreed that knowing English was a necessity for long-term economic and social well-being. English proficiency has been shown to have a significant association with acculturation stress. Higher levels of English proficiency and education were associated with lower levels of acculturation stress with Bhutanese refugees living in the Southwestern US (Benson et.al, 2012). Some refugees expressed feelings of social isolation from Americans because of their limited English speaking abilities (Ives, 2007). A study focusing on refugees living in Dayton, Ohio showed that for many families language was central to their ability to

find employment and provide for their family. Low levels of English proficiency were shown to funnel refugees into minimum wage and low paying jobs (Majka & Majka, 2012). Another study which focused on refugee job searches among Dayton refugees had respondents say that it was their high English fluency that facilitated their ability to get a job as well as broadening their scope of employment opportunities (Gahimer, 2013). It also became a hindrance during 'high risk' situations such as interactions with the police or emergency medical situations where there was no access to an interpreter (Majka & Majka, 2012).

The process of learning English is complex for both students and teachers. English learners are the fastest growing portion of adult education in the United States and refugees often have needs that differ from those of other adult learners (Perry & Hart, 2012). Perry and Hart's 2012 study of adult EFL teachers and learners showed that immigrants and refugees are taught by a wide variety of educators, some of whom are trained and some of whom are not. Regardless of training their study showed that both certified and uncertified felt unprepared to teach adult English learners. This was especially true when the learners were refugees with little prior education or limited literacy skills. In order to improve the process of learning English researchers have suggested making connections between texts and their real lives outside of school and learning (Sarroub et al, 2007; Baynham, 2006). It has been proposed that a move away from the typical authoritative teacher and traditional classroom setting may be of benefit to adult refugee learners. EFL learners should be given agency over their own learning process and that allowing students to have some control over the classroom dialogue will help foster confidence and bring the relevant outside world into the classroom (Baynham, 2006). This would involve allowing the students to ask questions, initiate topics of discussion and the teacher would respond to these asides and run with them rather than trying to adhere to a strict and predetermined curriculum (Baynham, 2006). These suggestions may help foster more efficient and successful language acquisition.

## **Employment Literature**

For most NGO's which handle refugee resettlement the services that go beyond the initial reception and placement services are focused on finding and keeping a job (Nawyn, 2010). Even with this focus many refugees are not satisfied with their current job situations. In Ives' 2007 study of Bosnian refugees many felt trapped in lower level manufacturing jobs with little opportunity for advancement or pay raises. Because of the previously mentioned focus on gaining economic self-sufficiency as quickly as possible some service agencies have been criticized for trying to find refugees jobs quickly and efficiently rather than taking the time to find meaningful jobs with opportunities for advancement (Nawyn, 2010; Majka & Majka, 2012). Even refugees who have advanced degrees or are highly trained often have trouble getting their educational credentials recognized in the United States and are often funneled into low paying jobs outside of their field (Ager & Strang, 2008; Nawyn, 2010; Majka & Majka, 2012). Refugees are also often encouraged to forego long-term educational opportunities that could eventually lead to better job opportunities for low-skill entry level positions (Nawyn, 2010). In Dayton specifically it was shown that part-time jobs are more readily available than full-time positions. While this may be helpful in allowing for family time part-time positions do not provide enough income to support a family (Gahimer, 2013). One provider in the local refugee resettlement agency in Dayton said, "Opportunities are limited in this economy, and more limited for those who expect to start above an entry-level position. Refugees need to adjust expectations" (Gahmier, 2013). This supports the assertion that the focus is mainly on getting refugees employed quickly, regardless of the quality of said employment and refugees in Dayton should not expect more.

## **Community Building Literature**

Integrating refugees into their new community, while still maintaining their own cultural ties is crucial to their success. Portes and Rumbaut (2006) use the term "context of reception" to describe how host communities are capable of both facilitating and inhibiting the successful integration of both immigrants and refugees. They describe how individuals with "similar skills may be channeled toward very different positions in the

labor market and the stratification system, depending on the type of community in which they become incorporated” (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006). Ethnic communities can also be systems of support for refugees. They provide help as well as strengthening refugee’s sense of cultural identity and belonging (Benson et al, 2012; Nawyn, 2006). Some studies have shown that when refugees interact a lot with their own ethnic communities that this can have an “insulating or cocooning effect” that can be a problem for incorporation (Beiser, 2006; Benson et al., 2012). A study of Bhutanese refugees living in the Southwestern U.S. showed that as the refugees seek support from their family members and Hindu religious leaders they “may be less willing to use resources and services from the host community” and that this could hinder their success. These respondents who relied heavily on their Hindu religion as a coping mechanism were experiencing higher levels of acculturation stress (Benson et al., 2012). Nawyn’s 2006 research on religion and refugee resettlement showed that many religiously affiliated NGO’s (like the resettlement agency in Dayton) held religiously affiliated community building events—not in an attempt to convert refugees, but rather to foster a sense of community. Benson and his colleagues assert that a balanced social support system comprised of host communities, ethnic communities and social services may facilitate better long-term adjustment for refugees (2012).

Past research has shown that many factors contribute to the “success” of refugee populations after resettlement. The research conducted here attempts to unpack the elements that impact the Dayton Bhutanese community through several different methodological approaches.

## **Methods**

This study contains two different methods of data collection in order to create a well-rounded view the lives of Dayton’s Bhutanese population. The first approach involved a series of semi-formal interviews with those who work with and for the Bhutanese refugee population. This portion of the research was to focus on the structural barriers to the Bhutanese refugee’s success as seen by those who work with them. My respondents included one local resettlement agency employee, one resettlement agency

intern, two conversation group volunteers and one mentor volunteer. I found participants through the snowball method where I would ask the current participant if they knew of anyone else that works with the Bhutanese who would be willing to be interviewed. They were asked a series of questions regarding the context within which they work with the Bhutanese refugee population, obstacles they see for the Bhutanese, and ways their organizations could improve. These were completely open ended. Additional follow up questions were asked when needed. Some questions were omitted if they were not applicable. The questionnaire also included a series of questions where the interviewee was asked to rate different social services on a scale of 1 (very adequate/very accessible) to 4 (very inadequate/inaccessible). They were then encouraged to elaborate upon these ratings. Each interview was audio recorded and then transcribed.

The second method of data collection took on a more anthropological and ethnographic approach. I wanted to be able to attach an identity and a voice to the more cut and dry interview data. The interviews alone would not necessarily paint a complete portrait of the lives of refugees living in Dayton. I believe strongly in the agency of individuals and the importance of allowing the subjects of research to be able to speak for themselves. The idea of finding a family or individual to act as a case study was proposed and seemed like the perfect opportunity to put faces and individual experiences on the project. It also had the potential to allow an understanding of how acculturated the Bhutanese are from *their* point of view and allow for a comparison between the perceptions of those working with refugees and the refugees themselves. The refugee resettlement agency in Dayton has a mentorship program where they match refugee families with a local volunteer who acts as a cultural liaison and provide additional assistance that the agency cannot provide. It was through this program that I found my case study family. This technique has been used before. Mary Pipher in her ethnographic style book, *The Middle of Everywhere*, which centers around her work with refugees resettled in Nebraska, discusses the idea of acting as a ‘cultural broker’ for refugees. This is a similar concept to the resettlement agency’s mentorship program. Her book includes many narrative style anecdotes taken from her time as a mentor, or cultural broker, with different refugees that illustrate many of the barriers facing refugees in her area. This is

similar to the approach I took, with the addition of more structured, sociological interviews.

In the September of 2013 I began working with one Bhutanese family. They consisted of three generations living in two separate apartments within the same apartment complex. The patriarch of the family, Prachanda<sup>3</sup>, and his wife Sabina and their sixteen year old son, Sandip, live in one apartment together. The eldest daughter, Aarati and her husband, Siddant, and their two young daughters Devi (four) and Daya (an infant) live in the other apartment where we would meet at least one evening a week. They would tell me their story and I would help them with their English. This went on for almost seven months. Other members from the community, outside of the immediate family structure, would also often join us. I attended several family birthday parties, events and religious services as well. These interactions were recorded through detailed field notes. Themes were pulled from the field notes and then compared to themes that arose from the interviews.

## Meeting My Case Study

After months of emails, phone calls, and meetings, the local refugee resettlement agency had placed me with a Bhutanese family living in the area. Ana<sup>4</sup>—an intern at the resettlement agency who works specifically with the Bhutanese, had sent me an email suggesting that I come with her on a visit with the family that Thursday.

When I arrived at the apartment I was immediately introduced to a flurry of people and struggled to keep track of names and relationships. The family was very proud to introduce me to Daya, the 8 month old who had been born in the United States. They were eager to let me know that she was an American citizen. The apartment was very clean and organized and contained an interesting mixture of nick-knacks and decorations. Children's toys were put away neatly on the shelves. Seventies style beads hung in the doorway. There were large paintings of Jesus and other Christian iconography on the walls. I had expected the family to be Hindu, so this was a surprise. They had a massive flat-screen television that seemed to be hooked up to a computer.

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<sup>3</sup> All names have been changed for confidentiality purposes.

<sup>4</sup> Ana is also an interview respondent and a pseudonym.

Ana began to explain to them what my research was about and how I was going to be coming over every week and asking them questions. Siddant, the 25 year old man who lived in the apartment, seemed to understand and speak reasonably good English. He translated for the rest of the group and they all nodded and smiled. Although I was still unsure about their level of enthusiasm Siddant said they would be happy to help and share their story. He assured me that his father-in-law, Prachanda, would know more about what happened in Bhutan and would be better at explaining it to me. Siddant went on to tell me that he left Bhutan and went to a refugee camp in Nepal when he was only 4 years old so he does not remember much about living in Bhutan. He told me that the Nepali people in Bhutan needed freedom to follow their own culture. He emphasized that Nepali culture and Bhutanese culture were very different but that the Bhutanese government said, “You are in Bhutan” and must adhere to the national culture. Siddant explained that the Bhutanese had wanted the Nepali to conform to their culture, to eat beef, for women to cut their hair a certain way, to speak the Bhutanese language and practice Bhutanese culture.

“We are Nepali”, he said, “We want to follow our culture”. He said that many of the Nepali who didn’t obey the Bhutanese rules were sent to prison, killed, or raped and often had their livestock killed.

In December of 2011 Siddant, his wife Aarati, and their young daughter Devi (who was four when I began) were resettled in Dayton. They came to join Aarati’s father and mother, Prachanda and Sabina, who had moved to the U.S. in January of 2010 with their other teenage son, Sandip. They remember the exact date of their arrival in the U.S. Devi, the four year-old, kept handing me items from around the apartment. A baby doll and a small wire Christmas tree were handed over all while chattering to me in Nepali, which my limited language skills don’t allow me to understand. The only functional Nepali that I have left from my four months spent living there is the ability to negotiate the price of a taxi ride (which is not proving helpful in this situation).

Siddant began to tell me how he had been warned in Nepal before being resettled about “black people” in the United States.

“The black people, they are dangerous. I am so afraid. I have kids and a young wife. I am so scared, I have to go to work and leave her at home...they say they rape

them!” He then assured me that, “Here everything is good”. In later interviews with a representative from the local resettlement agency I was told that Siddant was not the only Bhutanese refugee here to have this impression. One interviewee when asked if the Bhutanese had experienced discrimination here laughed and said,

“I’ve seen a lot of discrimination from them about where they want to live and who they want to live next to because of preconceived notions about what ethnic groups in this country are like” (Interview, 10/16/13).

When asked about his job Siddant told me he worked in dining services for a local university.

“I only work” he said, “It is difficult to lead a house, there is not enough money”. At this point the patriarch of the family, Prachanda, came in and shook my hand. He called me ma’am, which I attempted to convince him he need not do. Prachanda has since stopped but Siddant still does it on occasion, though I remind him every time not to. Prachanda and Siddant spoke to Ana about a niece who is still in Bhutan who they would like to help come here. Ana gave them a card for a lawyer who she says would probably do the work pro-bono. They didn’t seem to fully understand her but she kept telling them to go talk to the lawyer.

Prachanda dove right into telling me his story. He had worked in Thimpu, the capital of Bhutan, for a governmental department. He had some formal education. When Nepalis began to flee the country his employer tried to convince him to stay. His family was fleeing so he left his job and went to Nepal where he lived in a refugee camp in the Morang district of South Eastern Nepal for 19 years.

Ana informed me that the men were doing very well with English but the women needed some help—they had been quiet most of the evening. It was decided that I would come once a week to interview them and hold an English conversation group for anyone that wanted to come. There were several other Nepali families living in this same apartment complex. Prachanda, his wife Sabina and their son Sandip live in on the other side of the apartment complex as well.

The men continued ask Ana different questions. They talked about problems that had at the job center. Prachanda asked Ana about a possible job opportunity with a company that builds roofs. He wanted to know if the work was seasonal and if they liked

Nepalis. She assured him they did. They asked me about my time spent in Nepal and Bhutan—though they were much more interested in my experiences in Nepal than Bhutan. I tried to explain how little of the language I could speak and they promised that Nepali was incredibly easy to learn. They consistently refer to themselves as Nepali, I rarely ever hear them call themselves Bhutanese or hear Bhutan mentioned. When they do they use a strongly ‘us and them’ rhetoric when discussing the Nepali and the Bhutanese. This is a different concept of identity than was presented by Tek Nath Rizal, the Bhutanese refugee and activist I had interviewed in Nepal. When asked whether he considered himself to be Bhutanese he laughed and answered, “Oh yeah” (Rizal, 2012). Considering both Rizal and the patriarch of this family, Prachanda, both worked for the government, the differences in their self-identification is worth noting. Rizal has worked as an advocate for the Bhutanese refugee cause where Bhutanese identity may have been more of a necessity. In the case of my case study family most of them were born in the refugee camps in Nepal. Only Prachanda and Sabina have adult memories of living in Bhutan.

When I came the next week 16 year old Sandip was riding his bike in the parking lot as four year old Devi ran around him laughing and screeching. I got out of my car and Devi ran and hugged my legs and led me inside. The door to Aarati and Siddant’s apartment was cracked open so I hesitantly knocked and the door opened. Aarati was lying face down on the couch and Sabina, her mother, was holding the 8 month old, Daya. They seemed surprised to see me and didn’t appear to be overly thrilled that I had walked in their front door. Not that they were unpleasant or inhospitable at all, but I felt I had caught them off guard.

The room was uncomfortable, I could not tell if they wanted me there and they seemed tired and preoccupied. I worried that they felt obligated or pressured to have me in their home. I am aware that I am in a position of power in this relationship. The structure of our relationship is as a mentor and mentees but I do not want anyone to feel pressured to participate or that they would be negatively affected if they said they didn’t want to be involved with the project or if they said something they thought I didn’t want to hear. Ana and I had tried our best to explain this the week before. It has been important to me to gain their trust and build a friendship with them—though I am aware that I have

a certain power in the relationship. I am representing them through my writing. That in itself is power in my hands and I am doing my best to portray them as accurately as possible—though it is of course from my perspective.

Sabina and Aarati were the only ones home at the time and they don't speak very much English making holding a conversation difficult. I am not a trained ESL teacher so I was hesitant and unsure of where to begin with practicing English. I had tried to research teaching techniques on line but could only really find suggestions for holding formal classes. This unfortunately repeated what I had found in the literature. Many EFL instructors, such as myself, receive little to no formal training and feel they are underprepared to teach English (Perry & Hart, 2012). I was relieved when Devi pulled me back outside to play with her. Sandip was back on his bike. I asked him if he remembered that I was coming that evening, and he assured me he had. I inquired about school, a local public high school. He claimed to like it. He had been there for about one and a half years and described it as, "sometimes good and sometimes hard". Prachanda then came striding around the corner. He ushered me back inside so I could "write things down". I asked him how work was, he seemed very tired. He said it was good. He has worked at a car wash for about two and a half years. When I asked if it had been difficult to find a job here and he told me that he went four months without one. He then found a job as a janitor for a local baseball team but he had to work odd hours, which he didn't like. He had found the job through the local resettlement agency but begged the question, "Why come here Dayton, Ohio? There no jobs." He then began working two days a week at the car wash and his boss just kept adding days until he quit his job for the baseball team and began working full time at the car wash. He described himself as, "hard worker man, me". While Prachanda and I were talking the rest of the family watched a video of helicopters flying around a field. Devi kept pointing and repeating "helicopter, helicopter" over and over again. When I left that evening Prachanda revealed to me that they had in fact forgotten that I was coming.

Since these early meetings our relationship has gotten much more comfortable. The next week the neighbors came and picture dictionaries were brought out which made English practice much easier. They feed me Nepali food and laugh at me when things are too spicy. They laugh at me a lot. They let me hold and play with baby Daya. Sabina

brushes my hair. I have been invited to birthday parties—some of which I have been able to attend. I have met others in the community and gone to their homes. My visits have become more frequent, sometimes I am there up to four times a week.

## **Struggles with Employment**

Employment is a constant topic of discussion in the household. Complaints that Dayton doesn't have enough jobs are frequent. The men in the family have jobs but the women are having a harder time—it seems due to their lack of English skills. Sabina, the matriarch, has lost jobs in the past because she couldn't speak enough English. The following experience shows some of the struggles that come with the job search for limited English speakers.

One night Sabina asked me if I would help her apply for a job. After a few minutes of struggling to understand each other we decided that on the following Monday afternoon I would drive her to go and fill out the application. When I came to the apartment only Aarati, Chandni (the neighbor), and their children were there. They told me Sabina wouldn't be back for another hour. I had forgotten that the Nepali concept of time is very different. So I played with the babies and drank milk tea until Sabina finally arrived. She said we needed to go and get her friend from school who already had a job with the company. We walked across the parking lot to another apartment and got Darla, an African refugee. I asked if anyone knew where we were going and Darla told me it was a temp agency near a local hospital but she didn't know the name of the agency or the address. I entered the name of the hospital into my GPS and hoped for the best. After turning around a few times Darla did get us to the temp agency. It was a run-down building in a rough part of town with a large group of men smoking cigarettes outside. Darla signed in and sat down to wait. I walked up to the high counter to talk to the woman working when I noticed Sabina lingering hesitantly in the doorway. I waved her over and asked the woman working if we could fill out an application. She told me that you could only fill out applications until noon; at this point it was almost 2pm. It then took me a few minutes to try to explain to Sabina why we couldn't fill out an application that day. When she finally understood we agreed to come back another day.

When I got to Sabina's apartment later that week she had tea waiting for me. Before we left she told me it was hot in the apartment and pointed to the thermostat. I showed her how to turn it down. It is small things like this are reminders of how much there is to learn even months and years after resettlement. Has she lived here two years without ever adjusting her thermostat? When we got in the car instead of going straight to the temp agency she led me to three separate houses and apartments. At the first apartment no one answered so she incessantly rang the doorbell and knocked insisting that the mystery girl inside was sleeping. I worried a neighbor would come out to complain about the noise. We then went to an apartment next door where she walked in, said a few words to the tiny old Nepali woman there and we left. I reminded her that we needed to be at the agency before noon and she seemed to understand. She then directed me to a house across town, luckily she has a good grasp of 'right' and 'left' and 'straight' and knows where she is going because at this point I didn't even know where we were. When we got to the house she ran inside and told me she would be right back. After a few minutes she and a small man came out of the house. I got out of the car to shake his hand and introduce myself, and then without understanding what was happening he got into the back seat of my car. I guess he was coming with us to the temp agency.

When we arrived the same woman was working as before. She was very kind and got the applications for us. The man we had picked up—whose name I never learned, had not brought two forms of identification with him so he could not apply that day. Once Sabina gave a urine sample we sat down to fill out the application. She cannot read or write, but can only sign her name in shaky cursive. I had trouble making her understand what the forms were asking though I tried to explain to her what I was filling out. She had brought her learner's permit, green card, social security card, and a paper with her address written on it. Part of the application had a skills test with some arithmetic problems, spelling and word problems. She was able to get a few of the addition problems if I read them aloud to her very slowly but most of it I had to leave blank. When we were about half way through the application an employee called me up to the counter.

He began with, "Now, I think that you helping these people is really great", and I knew where the conversation was going, "but how are they going to be able to work, to

take instructions? I am genuinely asking for your advice, what am I supposed to tell our employers?" He was very kind, and honestly I didn't know exactly what to tell him. Sabina's English is extremely limited. It is very difficult and time consuming to get her to understand a simple phrase in English. I told him that she was a hard worker who would show up on time and it just took patience. I asked if we could still continue to fill out the application and he said of course and reiterated that he thought helping them was "really great". There was no overt discrimination, he never asked us to leave or tried to dissuade me from filling out the application but he expressed a common concern, how can someone maintain a job—especially a potentially dangerous position in a factory if they cannot understand instructions and safety rules. One resettlement agency employee expressed this,

There are lots of employers out there who will employ people with limited English but they have to at least be able to understand instructions. Safety things like if they are cleaning...they need to understand that this particular chemical can't be mixed with this one or you know you have to wear gloves with this one very simple things but they need to be able to understand those things to be safe (Interview 10/16/2013)

Ana the resettlement agency intern told me that companies in the area that are willing to employ limited English speakers, and she was specifically discussing Sabina's situation, want to first employ someone from the Bhutanese community who speaks enough English to understand instructions and safety regulations. That person then becomes a go between and translates to other more limited English speakers from their community who could then be hired (Interview 10/30/13). This has happened with one member of the family. Aarati in the time I have been working with the family has been hired by the same university her husband works for. He was instrumental in getting her the position. Siddant had been working for dining services but now they both are a part of the custodial staff on campus.

When I returned to Sabina and her friend to continue the application she looked very worried. She asked what he had said and I told her that everything was fine he was just worried about her English. She wanted to make sure that I had told him that she was a very hard worker. I assured her that I had.

We turned in the application and the woman told me to bring her back at 4:30 the next morning wearing jeans, a t-shirt and steel toed boots. When I explained all of this her eyes grew wide when she understood that she needed to come at 4:30am. She told me that she had boots and jeans so I took her back home. Her husband would drive her back to the agency the next morning.

When I came to the apartment the next evening for our normal Thursday meetings Sabina and Prachanda were not happy. Prachanda explained that they went to the agency that morning at 4:30 and the doors weren't even open yet. They were let in at around 5:00 am and signed in. They then waited there for about six hours when an employee finally told them there was no work that day and to come back the next day at 4:30. Prachanda was confused and angry. I realized that they didn't seem to have an understanding of what a temp agency was. I began to try to explain. When I felt they understood I said they could try to go back tomorrow if they really needed the money but that there was never any guarantee of work there, and it's not meant to be a long-term job. I told Sabina we could try to apply for other, more permanent jobs. At that point Siddant said, "This is not a very good job, I think. She should not go back". And she didn't. The struggle to find work is a constant conversation during my visits with them. We are still working to find Sabina a job, but her English is so limited that it is a huge barrier. We have filled out applications for manufacturing jobs but she has not heard back. Some of these positions she has applied for as many as four times.

A lack of English proficiency is not always a barrier for employment among immigrant communities. A recent study focused on the effects of linguistic factors on the socioeconomic status of Hispanic immigrants in Dayton showed that there are individuals who had been living in Dayton for over twenty years and had never needed to learn English (VanLoon, 2014). This is possible because of extensive Hispanic employment networks which allow for employment without English fluency being a necessity. These job networks that exist in Dayton for the Hispanic community are virtually non-existent among the Bhutanese. As previously mentioned, in the case of Sandip and his wife, they do help each other gain employment but it is on an individual basis rather than a true network. The most obvious explanation for this lack in the Bhutanese community would be the massive difference in population size. There are just not enough Bhutanese English

speakers to build the foundation for an employment network. There are over 17,600 Hispanics/Latinos living in the Dayton Metro area (VanLoon, 2014) while the Bhutanese population hovers between 75 and 100. This shows the importance of a critical mass in resettlement. This is the main reason many of the Bhutanese in Dayton have moved to Columbus, Ohio where there is a larger population which is able to garner more attention and more specific services. Employment networks are only one benefit of a large population of one specific ethnic group.

The work the Bhutanese have ended up with is often low-wage, unskilled labor positions. Many of them don't have education or specific job training, every person I interviewed said this. One man who was a volunteer for a weekly conversation group that had been held at a local library for about 9 months but has since stopped meeting touched on this.

[They've] never had any training or education so what is it that they can do besides be a laborer? Besides work in a sweat shop...and there aren't really any of those in Dayton...and that's deadening work...to have some of these folks get jobs that are respectful and provide enough for them, that's the challenge. And in theory immigrants create their own jobs and the Bhutanese aren't doing that, that I know of. And we talked about opening a restaurant, a truck restaurant, and that was a possibility but I didn't see the capacity (Interview, 10/24/13).

Rhetoric of "self-sufficiency" was present through the interviews. Every respondent at one point or another stated that getting the Bhutanese to a point of self-sufficiency was the goal. As previously mentioned refugees across the nation are often encouraged to forgo long term education and job training for low-skill entry level positions (Nawyn, 2010). One of the two refugee resettlement agency employees that I interviewed showed a similar attitude. "Some of them come in and the first thing they want to do is go to school. It's like you need to pay your rent, you need to eat, you need to get a job, once you get that taken care of then you can look into going to school" (Interview, 10/16/13). What I have found with this population also supports the work that has been done that shows that refugees are funneled into low paying jobs and that service providers promote speedy economic 'success' and encourage refugees to adjust their job expectations (Nawyn, 2010; Majka & Majka, 2012; Gahmier, 2013). A respondent who ran the conversation group at a local library said, "There was a level of frustration. There were people who really had tremendous skills from Nepal, teaching and math and all kinds of

things, but were working in janitorial jobs way below their actual skill level” (Interview, 10/27/13). Prachanda, the patriarch, had worked for the Bhutanese government and now is employed at a car wash.

The presence and assessment of job skills in the community has stuck out. One mentor volunteer said that people in the Bhutanese community in Dayton who were educated and employable were, “few and far between” (Interview 10/28/13). It should be noted that this volunteer worked with two families who were suffering from both mental and physical disabilities as well as substance abuse and have both since moved out of the Dayton area. One of the volunteers from the library conversation group brought up the topic of skills.

One man talked about their ability to make baby cradles out of bamboo, ok, there is a skill but other than that, one person had construction skills in his own country and that was it. No one had any mention of other skills. But when I went to their home...they wanted us to see a video on YouTube of them leaving the refugee camps...and he fiddled with the internet and had it connected up to his TV and this guy had no problem accessing the technology to show us (Interview, 10/24/13).

He said that after dinner someone pulled out a guitar and began to play and, “they all had stories to tell and they had no problem interpreting...I saw the capacity in their home...younger people had technological capacity” (Interview, 10/24/13). One of the resettlement agency interns who works most closely with the Bhutanese population told me that she thought they were more technologically savvy than herself but that they didn’t necessarily perceive this as an employable skill (Interview, 10/30/13). Siddant, Prachanda and Sandip make music videos for various Nepali Christian songs. They film and edit them and then upload them onto YouTube. They show me new videos almost every time I come over. Even Aarati who has limited English uses the computer often checking social networking sites and pulling up videos to show me. Many of the family members have iPhones and the four year old takes pictures of me on the camera phone. Prachanda comes home from work wearing a Bluetooth. They should not be thought of as out of touch, mountain farmers who possess none of the skills necessary for life in a modern urban setting. They have many skills but it is turning those skills into employable ones that is the difficulty.

## English as a Foreign Language

The language barrier was cited as the largest challenge for service providers who work with the Bhutanese. All five of those I interviewed stated that it was their most significant obstacle. During our interview Ana told me how earlier that evening Sabina had been trying to communicate something to her. “I saw that she needs help but I couldn’t figure out specifically what she needed help with” (Interview, 10/30/13). This is an example of services being inaccessible because the service providers are unable to understand the needs of some members of the community. This is not necessarily a criticism of the service providers or those they are serving but the disconnect should be acknowledged. The lack of interpreters also poses a problem for the service providers I spoke with. The resettlement agency employee stated, “Nepali isn’t the most widely used second language. You can find interpretation pretty easy for Spanish and Arabic and those languages...but sometimes they have trouble getting interpreters that speak those languages that are not common” (Interview, 10/16/13). Frustration with interpreters, or specifically a lack of interpreters, was a common thread during the interviews. The inadequacy of interpretation services in private medical practices was specifically brought up during the interviews with the resettlement agency employee and the mentor volunteer. Obviously the language barrier is not only a problem for service providers but for the refugees themselves.

The structure of the EFL courses that are currently in place in Dayton does not seem to be conducive to learning for this particular population. Many of the Bhutanese struggled with the current EFL courses. One respondent described some of the issues,

I guess I'm a little surprised because Dayton is blessed with a huge ESL community. There are multiple, and almost over lapping areas of ESL teaching in different localities and different groups. But a lot of them are very structured and again we heard from some of the Bhutanese that they were told to come but they were the only Bhutanese in their group. The teacher didn't speak any Bhutanese, they were there hearing English words for 40 minutes and they went because their stipend depended on it but they didn't get anything out of it so they didn't go back (Interview, 10/27/13).

Ana, the resettlement agency intern who works very closely with the population said in her interview that they are not attending the EFL classes anymore. She told me that she encourages them to attend regularly but they have not been. She believed that outside of work, for those who had jobs, I was the only English practice they were getting.

While I did frequently work on English vocabulary with the adults in the family a significant portion of my time was spent with a young Bhutanese boy, Alok, whose family lived in the same apartment complex and were often present during my visits. Alok was a second grader enrolled in a local elementary school but he was struggling with English and his mother asked if I would help him. Many studies have shown that children tend to acquire language much faster and with more ease than their parents (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Alok did not necessarily fit this mold. He usually brought books with him to practice reading but he struggled to sound out words and only showed comprehension when we spent considerable time working it out. He knew the alphabet and what sound each letter made but struggled to put them together. His mother spoke the best English of all the women I encountered. Though Ana once remarked that her English skills had begun to backslide, apparently at one point she had been much better. Some studies have noted that immigrant children do better in school when their parents are also learning English (Slavin & Cheung, 2005). Alok's case is an interesting one when viewed within this framework. He both fits the pattern and breaks it. His mother was no longer actively learning and practicing English, as shown by her apparent decline in fluency, and if she was not then Alok and his younger brother were not—fitting the pattern. But the fact that Alok's mother was the most fluent woman I met from the community that I met seemed out of place with the fact that her child was severely struggling. She had been told by teachers that Alok did not speak in class and did not seem to understand most of what was spoken to him. When I worked with him he would often nod his head, implying that he understood, but when I would try to get him to repeat the skill he claimed to understand he would not be able to. An example being when learning the concept that if one combines the letters 't' and 'h' it will create a 'thhh' sound. He could sound out the word 'the' correctly once, but had no retention. One sentence later he would have to sound it out again from scratch. My lack of ability to speak Nepali became more and more of an issue as the extent of Alok's knowledge became clear.

The lack of Bhutanese specific language classes and conversation groups led to the development of a conversation group that was held at a local library near the apartment complex where many of the Bhutanese community were living. The group met to work on learning English as well as bring in speakers from the community to discuss, with the help of some of the better English speakers in the community, topics such as housing rights and legal aid. The group was started by Ana in conjunction with the local library by going door to door and encouraging the Bhutanese community to come. Four of the five respondents I interviewed had been involved with the conversation group in some capacity and all of my respondents spoke highly of it. Those involved with the project directly seemed to think it was beneficial both for the Bhutanese and the volunteers. “It was one of the most fun things I've ever done, the group is so warm and so inclusive, it got, after the third week you began and ended with hugs, and Namaste... it became a very personal interest for those of us who were volunteering”, said a library employee instrumental and conversation group volunteer in an October 27<sup>th</sup> interview. All of the respondents praised the program but the library employee was wary of how much English was actually being learned. “We weren't making a whole lot of progress from week to week, maybe with the colors and I thought that we needed to try to proceed to some basic level of language acquisition”. She went on to say that others put more focus on the social services aspect of the program. While the conversation group was a good forum for passing information about services to the group the program started to fade after less than a year. “We'd reached about the level of success that we could, given what their needs were. Their needs were becoming more profound than we could address with a weekly conversation table” (Interview, 10/27/13). The conversation group ended at the request of the Bhutanese population. They felt they had gotten all they could from the meetings.

While this program may have run its course there is still a need in the community for both Bhutanese specific language classes as well as community outreach projects. While other immigrant populations in Dayton, such as the Hispanic/Latino community, have been able to manage without learning English this doesn't seem to be the case for the Bhutanese. Without a critical mass to provide support and create an employment network English language and working with the local community are the primary tools

for success. Ana has made this her mission for the rest of her internship with the resettlement agency. She worked to develop a community garden program and connect the Bhutanese with other farmers in Ohio. It is unclear from my time with my case study if this program is still active. My family does not seem to have been very involved with this project, if at all. Her plan is to develop another dialogue group that is specifically tailored to their current needs. Ana mentioned that they were reading a children's book about monkeys, what she considered to be an impractical educational tool. "If they are interested in hotel work then we study words used in a hotel, not monkeys....if you're going to work somewhere else let's work with words you're going to need for your job" (Interview, 10/30/13). Along with a conversation group that focuses on areas of interest and necessity Ana aims to start to get the Bhutanese to interact with the local community outside of their own ethnic group. Currently she believes they are too internally focused.

### **Religious Affiliations: An Integration Facilitator or Insulator?**

The internal emphasis seems to be rooted in religion. My case study family practices a unique form of evangelical Baptist Christianity. It is an extremely significant facet of their daily lives. They spend several hours every day participating in fellowship of some kind. Sandip and Siddant make Nepali Christian music videos. During several of my visits Aarati has shown me videos of people being healed in front of massive congregations. On several different occasions I have attended their worship services. They are held in one of their homes, as they have no physical church, and they take turns hosting. One member of the group will lead the service reciting from a Nepali Bible. Prachanda usually has a guitar though it is horribly out of tune and missing several strings. He rhythmically strums seemingly random chords while the rest of the small congregation sings and claps. Once they have sung several hymns they transition into prayer. This portion of the service usually lasts at least 20 to 30 minutes. It involves individual, vocalized prayer in rapid Nepali. They become completely immersed in the prayer session. Eyes are closed and hands are usually raised. They talk over each other and it gets quite loud. During our interview Ana expressed concern that the neighbors might call the police with a noise complaint. She worried that they might not understand what they are doing and become unnerved. While the rest of their family prays, four year

old Devi and baby Daya roam the room. Devi dances and sometimes sneaks food from the kitchen.

According to Ana most of the Bhutanese that have stayed in Dayton are Christian and have formed a strong internal community that is centered around their small, informal church. She asserted that, “they have their church and they connect with their church and that may make them feel more welcome”. Studies have shown that ethnic religious services such as these can provide spaces where the members feel safe and can work through and process their acculturation stresses (Kamya, 2009). With that being said there is also the risk that such an intense focus on the internal community can create a cocooning or insulating effect (Beiser, 2006; Benson et al, 2012). A pattern of community insulation is one that I have seen both through my work with the case study and in interviews. Their fellowship activities take up a huge amount of time. When they are not at work it is likely that they are engaging in some kind of worship. It keeps them very busy. Prachanda has mentioned saving money to be able to attend Christian conferences, many of which are quite far away. There is one in Nepal that he talks about quite a bit. Ana spoke extensively in her interview about her desire to get the Bhutanese out into the local community.

They are still enclosed in their community... [I am] trying to see if we can bridge them with other people in the community. Like we had a world refugee day and we invited them to come but they did not participate. I would like them to, even to share their culture, their values. That’s the challenge. People do not know or understand who they are. It’s good that they support each other. They have a very good support system inside the community, the Bhutanese, but not outside...I’m trying to move them to a different stage where they think about not only their own community but about the whole society. And the impact society has on them and the impact they can have on the society too. (Interview, 10/30/13).

We discussed the possibility of connecting the informal Nepali Baptist church with an American Baptist church in the area. Shared faith would be a way to begin to build meaningful relationships outside of their own ethnic group. When Benson and his colleagues examined the relationship between religious coping and acculturation stress among Bhutanese refugees in 2012 they found that heavy reliance on religion, specifically Hinduism, as a coping mechanism led to higher levels of acculturation stress. They assert that a balance should be struck between internal and external support systems

in order to cope with the acculturation process. This is what Ana is attempting to do, though there seems to be some resistance coming from within the community. Her goal, and mine, is to encourage them to build a strong leadership within their own population as well as reach out to other refugee communities, churches and Dayton community members to ease the transition.

In Portes and Rumbaut's *Immigrant America* they assert that churches established by pre-existing co-ethnic communities can facilitate, "the integration of immigrants and protect... them from the worse consequences of discrimination". The Bhutanese in Dayton have this to a certain extent. Their religious community does serve as a rallying point to bring the community together and does seem to provide comfort to the group. The difference here is that there was no first-wave of Bhutanese to come and establish this religious community that would then act as an agent of integration. Instead it is being established currently, after the entire community arrived. Perhaps it is a reaction to a lack of social connections. Rather than the religious congregation as a structure that is already in place that can be used as an integration tool, it is being formed without local connections which has led to the development of an isolated community. This is where the Bhutanese are diverging from other groups and it is working to their disadvantage. In the study done with the Hispanic/Latino population in Dayton religious organizations were the highest rated institutions in terms of helpfulness (VanLoon, 2014). The previous study conducted by the Ethnic and Cultural Diversity Caucus showed that many of the other refugee populations in Dayton saw some churches and mosques as "a primary source of assistance, community, and integration for many refugees as well as other immigrants. They offer opportunities for group cohesiveness, maintenance of their cultural traits, and a well-paced assimilation into the broader society" (Housel, Majka et.al, 2012). This is where we have seen the greatest departure from the existing literature and previous research done in Dayton. This particular case study appears to be the exception to the rule. At this point the question to be asked is whether this development of an isolated community is a product of a lack of access to local institutions or of their own making. They express a desire for better jobs, better English language fluency but spend their time only with their own Nepali speaking community and are hesitant to participate in community outreach programs.

This particular religious group, mainly comprised of my case family, seems to be converting other members of the community. One of the other Bhutanese who lives in the same apartment complex told me that he used to be Hindu but now that he is in America and with this community he has chosen to become a Christian. That evening they were filming what they called his testimonial during which he gave his life story and committed to his new church. One of the oldest members of the community is a very tiny old woman who lives in a different apartment complex. I am unsure of her religious affiliation as she speaks little to no English. We were at her apartment for a birthday party once and she sat on the floor wearing her traditional Bhutanese kira<sup>5</sup> and traditional Hindu piercings while listening to Sabina read the Bible in Nepali. It was an interesting mixture of three very different, and seemingly conflicting, cultural and religious practices.

## **Additional Elements**

During the interviews there were several topics of interest that came up but did not fit into any of the larger themes discussed previously. The first is an issue I was hearing about even before I began my field research. There was talk that many of the Bhutanese who had originally been resettled in Dayton were relocating to Columbus, Ohio where there is a larger and more active Bhutanese community. When I asked the resettlement agency worker about what I had heard she told me that there had been talk but she believed that after the conversation group had started they had become more comfortable and decided to stay. She said, “At one point there was talk that they were all going to move and like I said that initial wave of Bhutanese that came, that was from the city, that was educated, that had English that was you know was much easier to resettle, resettled in Columbus” (Interview 10/16/13). Other respondents, such as the library employee, reported that people had actually left and moved to Columbus. The mentor volunteer I interviewed worked with two different Bhutanese families and both have since relocated to Columbus in search of better job opportunities. This phenomena is concerning for the community left in Dayton. As they lose population the possibilities of building a strong

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<sup>5</sup> The Bhutanese national dress for women. This is not a Nepali or Lhotshampa garment, but rather a ‘culturally Bhutanese’ practice.

internal support system dwindles as well. With the well-connected and well-adapted Bhutanese living in Columbus it leaves the Dayton residents to fend for themselves. Previous refugee research has shown that a strong community among specific refugee groups provides a support system that can help with language acquisition and employment as well as provide a sense of cultural identity (Benson et al, 2012; Nawyn, 2006). This well connected group seems to be lacking in Dayton due to such small numbers, while the same community is thriving less than a two hour drive away.

Mental health services was another subject brought up in several of the interviews though I was not able to ask the refugees directly about anything related to mental illness or past traumas<sup>6</sup>. I did ask the service providers the following question, “How important do you feel that mental health services are important for this refugee population?” Two of the respondents said they had not heard of any problems with this community. Two of the respondents had heard of specific cases within the Bhutanese community. This difference may be attributed to the context in which the respondents worked with the population. The two who had not seen evidence of mental health issues only were involved with the conversation group whereas the other two worked more closely with individuals in the community. The mentor volunteer, who had worked closely with two different families in the community, as well as several African refugee families, saw mental illness and physical disabilities as some of the largest problems facing the Bhutanese refugees. He told me the following,

I’m in medical school so I of course have to comment on this, they are one of the most, as a population, they are more affected by more mental problems than other groups tend to be. Especially when you compare them to refugees from Africa, other parts of Asia, South America whatever it may be, they’re much more likely to have dependence issues on substances and from what I’ve noticed are more prone to schizophrenia (Interview, 10/28/13).

Both of the families he worked with struggled with mental health issues in some capacity. The first had an alcoholic father who had the police called for abusing his wife and the respondent thought he also abused his children though they were never able to get definitive proof. He thought this was also an explanation for the children of this family struggling in school. He explained that the eldest daughter in the family, “had to come

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<sup>6</sup> I did not have approval from Institutional Review Board to ask my case study about mental health issues, as it has the potential to cause distress, nor do I consider myself qualified to do so.

home from school to basically make sure that her father wouldn't terrorize the rest of the family and to balance that with high school and all the other things that go with it especially when you're not up to that grade level from the camps...It was really hard for her to fit in at school" (Interview, 10/28/13). This respondent asserted that the greater number of mental health issues and substance abuse problems that the Bhutanese were facing were due to the extended time spent in the refugee camps without treatment or care. During the interview he told me that,

In addition to all the other stressors they have when they get here, it makes assimilating that much harder. It's just another obstacle they have to face. None of them are really treated. There are no doctors over there [in the refugee camps] to do that and just having a mental problem in general is very taboo. Nobody wants to; at least for the chemical and substance abuse problems, they don't acknowledge that they have them. And so if they are not going to acknowledge that they have them there is not really anything that we can do (Interview, 10/28/13).

He described many of the difficulties with cross cultural mental health treatment such as cultural taboos and stigmas that are attached to mental illness as well as the language barrier. Finding the right words to explain thoughts and feelings to a doctor in a foreign language is extremely difficult. Past research on refugee mental health has shown that in some cases community members may have concerns that if a person seeks out mental health care that the stigma and backlash from the community may be more harmful to the patient than not receiving any care at all (Ellis et al, 2011). The issue of cultural relativism is an important and delicate one when it comes to dealing with mental health on a global scale. In Western medicine we have certain conceptualizations and cultural practices that surround the discussion and treatment of mental health issues in the United States. These will most certainly not be the same across the globe. Morten Beiser has an interesting approach to the discussion of cultural relativity as it applies to refugee mental health. In his work with Vietnamese refugees living in British Columbia, Beiser says that, "Culture creates or shapes unique modes of suffering, unique forms in which suffering is expressed and unique cultural constructions of illness that give rise to culturally unique categories" (2009). While precautions should be taken, relativism should not be allowed to make service providers stagnant, frozen in fear of our differences. Beiser asserts that the idea of suffering itself is more universal, that we know suffering when we see it. It is

just the manner in which we codify that suffering, how we categorize and presume to treat suffering that is so heavily influenced by our culture (Beiser, 2009). These concepts should be taken into account when working with the delicate issue of mental health. It is an issue that according to this particular respondent is going unaddressed in the Dayton Bhutanese population. These are just two of the many additional themes that arose.

## **Conclusion**

Transitioning into a new life after resettlement is an incredibly complex and lengthy process one that this case study has only been navigating for about three years. It varies between ethnic groups, families, and individuals. This study only begins to scratch the surface of identifying the barriers and patterns present within one specific population in one city which happens to emphasize immigrant and refugee services. The results of this study suggest that there are still major barriers to the acculturation process including difficulty with employment and harnessing skills, learning English and becoming an active contributor to the local community. These findings show that this population is different from others that have come before them. They spent close to twenty years living in refugee camps where there was little opportunity for education, healthcare and skill development. This is not the case for many other refugee groups. In Dayton there was no first wave of educated and skilled people to come and establish connections with the local community. Where structures that are already in place have been shown to help new refugee and immigrant communities, such as EFL classes and religious groups, they are obstacles for this population. The lack of Bhutanese specific language classes, specifically one with a Nepali speaking instructor, is preventing them from learning English at the same rate as other populations. The self-created church is providing good internal support and building a strong community but rather than helping integrate them into the city of Dayton it is keeping them both physically and linguistically isolated, showing a drastic departure from most existing literature. The Bhutanese are a small group in Dayton. Is there enough critical mass to justify the money that would need to be spent to develop programs and pay translators and EFL instructors that are necessary for the Bhutanese to overcome barriers? These obstacles are still affecting the community several years after they have been resettled. It is not just the immediate necessities that

come with moving to an unknown place that need to be addressed. Service providers must extend their work with refugee populations outside of the initial government support. There also needs to be culturally specific assistance. Without continual support from the community these populations will fall through the cracks in the system.

## **Suggestions for Further Research**

Several issues arose during the research which I believe warrant deeper investigation. This short study could not fully address many aspects of the Bhutanese experience. The first was the presence of mental illness in the Bhutanese community which was brought up by one of the respondents. The parameters of the study did not allow for questions regarding mental health to be asked of the refugees themselves. Further research on the effects of long term stay in refugee camps is necessary as many individuals from this community may have lived in the camps for over twenty years.

Another area I found to be especially interesting was the rise of Christianity within this population. Where did that arise from? Is this common among the Bhutanese or is this case study an isolated event? The patterns seen in this population differ from those presented in other immigrant studies. How do the different modes of developing churches/religious communities affect their ability to act as integration facilitators? Does the comfort that their religiosity provides lead to contentment with their situation? Does it prevent them from striving for more? A further examination of the mixing of cultural practices, especially seen in the older members of the community, could provide insight into methods of cultural adaptation. As my research continues into my thesis this topic will take a more central role.

Lastly, there is a need to address the refugees who refused resettlement and chose to stay in the camps in hopes of repatriation to Bhutan. This is a study I have seen a need for since my time spent in Nepal. There are people still living in the camps and there are people living in Nepal who are against resettlement, such as Tek Nath Rizal. The intense focus on refugee resettlement in the media and by the United Nations has ignored those who do not choose that option. Their voices are rarely heard.

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## **Interviews (By Date Conducted)**

Dorothy Balsler, December 1, 2011. Dayton, Ohio. (Interview).

Tek Nath Rizal. April 23, 2012. Kathmandu, Nepal. (Interview).

Local Resettlement Agency Employee. October 16, 2013. Dayton, Ohio. (Interview).

Conversation Group Volunteer. October 24, 2013. Dayton, Ohio. (Interview).

Library Employee and Conversation Group Volunteer. October 27, 2013. Dayton, Ohio. (Interview).

Mentor Volunteer. October 28, 2013. Dayton, Ohio. (Interview).

Ana (Local Resettlement Agency Intern). October 30, 2013. Dayton, Ohio. (Interview)