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# ADAPTABILITY IN A BHUTANESE REFUGEE COMMUNITY: NAVIGATING INTEGRATION AND THE IMPACTS ON NUTRITIONAL HEALTH AFTER U.S. RESETTLEMENT

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ADAPTABILITY IN A BHUTANESE  
REFUGEE COMMUNITY: NAVIGATING INTEGRATION  
AND THE IMPACTS ON NUTRITIONAL HEALTH  
AFTER U.S. RESETTLEMENT

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By

Christopher Grosh

Lexington Kentucky

Advisor: Dr. Deborah Crooks, Associate Professor Emerita of Anthropology

2016

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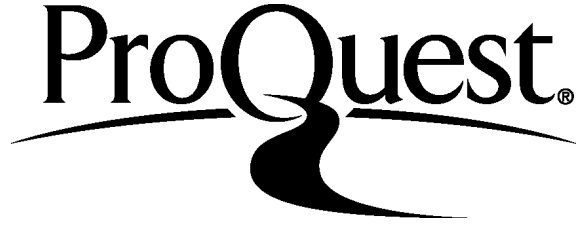
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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### ADAPTABILITY IN A BHUTANESE REFUGEE COMMUNITY: NAVIGATING INTEGRATION AND THE IMPACTS ON NUTRITIONAL HEALTH AFTER U.S. RESETTLEMENT

Increasing rates of overweight, obesity, and related metabolic diseases documented among refugee communities across the United States necessitate greater attention to how processes of integration impact refugee health. These nutritional health trends (e.g., increasing rates of obesity) suggest potential disconnects between refugees' past environments and their conditions after resettlement, which may contribute to adverse changes in energy balance (diet and exercise). While Bhutanese refugees were among the largest refugee groups entering the US during the five years leading up to this research, very few studies have examined how they have responded to integration and the impact of this transition on their health. Grounded in human adaptability and political economic theories, and adopting a biocultural approach, this dissertation investigates how Bhutanese refugees in "Prospect City" (pseudonym) negotiate changing and unfamiliar structural and sociocultural conditions after resettlement and the consequences for energy balance and nutritional status. The results reveal high rates of overweight and obesity compared to US averages. Age and caste related differences in nutritional status were also found. High rates of overweight and obesity corresponded with an energy imbalance due to overconsumption of energy dense traditional foods and limited understanding of the importance of regular exercise. Overconsumption of energy dense traditional foods stemmed from several interrelated factors: the abundance of foods in the US, prior experiences with food deprivation, a history of political exile that reinforced desires to preserve cultural food preferences, and joint family efforts to accommodate work-related time constraints by increasing food production and availability. Decreases in exercise appeared to stem from more sedentary lifestyles in the US as a result of work environments and available transportation, coupled with a lack of health knowledge regarding health benefits of physical activity. This dissertation's findings are being reported to Prospect City's Bhutanese Community Organization to help develop strategies for improving nutritional health in the community.

**KEYWORDS:** Integration, Adaptability, Bhutanese Refugees, Nutritional Status, Dietary Health

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## **Chapter 1: Adaptability in a Bhutanese Refugee Community: Navigating Integration and the Impacts on Nutritional Health after U.S. Resettlement**

Before we come to U.S., we never travel on the plane, and when we arrive everything still smells like a plane...everywhere you go smells like plane cause we travel so long! So once we came moving into the new apartment, everything still smells like the plane, everything smells old. And we don't like, you know? Everybody in the house complain about...but once you start cooking your own food, all those spices gonna change, all those feelings gonna go away. The smell gonna slowly gradually just change, you know, make things better for us. (Bishnu male age 25)

### **Introduction**

Food is a powerful substance through which important social, cultural, and economic meanings are constructed and performed in day to day life, but is also a nutritional resource with biological implications (Counihan 1999). For this reason, the pathways linking a person's access to dietary resources, food ideologies, and nutritional status outcomes have long been recognized as a useful lens for exploring ways in which humans, as cultural and biological beings, interact with their social environments (Messer 1984; Jerome et al. 1980). For refugees in the U.S. understanding these linkages has never been more important. Increasing rates of overweight, obesity, and related metabolic diseases documented among refugee communities across the United States necessitate greater attention to how processes of integration impact refugee health (Franzen et al. 2009a; Himmelgreen et al. 2007; Patil et al. 2009). These nutritional health trends suggest potential disconnects between refugees and the conditions they encounter after resettlement, which contribute to less than optimal changes in energy balance (e.g. Bogin 1997; Himmelgreen et al. 2014; Patil et al. 2009). Deteriorations in refugee health are also concerning because they may compound the challenges refugees already face and further limit their ability to become successfully established in their new context (Carballo et al. 2001).

During the five year period leading up to my dissertation fieldwork, the number of Bhutanese refugee arrivals ranked among the highest of any refugee group entering the U.S. (ORR 2015). As of 2016, 75,000 Bhutanese individuals relocated to the U.S. (USDOS 2015). Yet, because they are a new population in the U.S., very little research has examined how Bhutanese refugees respond to integration in general or the impact of this transition on their health. This dissertation will address both of these understudied issues.

Grounded in human adaptability and political economic theories, and adopting a biocultural approach, this dissertation investigates how Bhutanese refugees in Prospect City, Western State (a pseudonym), draw on their histories and backgrounds to negotiate changing and unfamiliar *structural* and *sociocultural* conditions after resettlement as they engage institutional and social contexts, and considers the consequences these multiple and interacting factors have on energy balance (diet and exercise) and nutritional status. Naturally, in order to understand how post-resettlement conditions articulate with the behaviors and health outcomes of Bhutanese refugees, it is important to investigate the culture, beliefs, and histories of Bhutanese refugees themselves, as well as the national and local policies, protocols, and historically contingent social and cultural contexts guiding their resettlement in the U.S. and Prospect City. In so doing, I aim to elucidate important relationships that link refugee nutritional health to processes of integration, meanwhile speaking to broader anthropological questions about the ways that people as cultural and biological beings engage with and adapt to contexts characterized by rapid change.

### **Theoretical Framing of Dissertation**

Research has shown that processes of integration are largely mediated by the social interactions refugees have with friends, family, community, colleagues (e.g. Eby et al. 2011; Potocky-

Tripodi 2007; Haines 1996; Berry et al. 2003; Santisteban et al. 2003; Patil et al. 2009; Finnan 1982) and through their participation in institutional contexts such as school, work, community organizations, resettlement agencies, or the U.S. resettlement program (e.g. Shrestha 2011; Haines 1996; Patil 2010; Bogin et al. 1997; Howell 1982; Ong 1995). For the sake of clarity, throughout this dissertation I will refer to conditions as “sociocultural” or “structural” depending on whether they derive, respectively, from social interactions or institutional contexts. But a larger premise of this dissertation is that refugees have their own histories and experiences which orient how they interpret and negotiate these conditions. To foreground the agency Bhutanese refugees exercise, I will use the terms “strategy” or “response,” but I will situate the response within the appropriate social, cultural, and historical context in order to demonstrate why this behavior makes sense to Bhutanese refugees. In so doing, I hope to show that integration is not a linear process, but is representative of *multiple* possible processes, whose outcomes are dependent on the unique interactions that transpire between refugees and their environments.

In this dissertation I tie together theory from anthropology and concepts from refugee studies and nutritional sciences that frame my research and lead to a new conceptualization of the relationships between Bhutanese refugees and conditions in their resettlement environment that have implications for how we interpret integration and understand their nutritional health. Respectively, these include: the synthesis of *political economic* and *adaptability theories* within a broader biocultural anthropological framework; the concept of *integration* as a means of understanding the experience of resettlement; and, finally, the concept of *energy balance* and its relationship to nutritional health. In the paragraphs that follow, I provide a brief explanation of each and how it relates to this research overall while including some reference to the existing refugee literature. I continue to expand on my use of these theories/concepts throughout the dissertation as a means of framing the research and interpretation of results for each specific chapter. With this being said, the following descriptions serve as a foundation for explaining why and how I initially conceptualized the research aims for the current project.

***Adaptability and political economy:*** The first and overarching framework guiding this research is *human adaptability theory*. Under its broader interest in understanding the human-environment interaction, this approach interprets health as an outcome of the individual’s ability to effectively cope with natural and human built circumstances given the available opportunities and constraints (Crooks et al. 2007; Wiley 2004). While adaptability theory derives from Darwinian “adaptation”—or the “beneficial” biological traits that arise in greater frequency in a population through processes of natural selection (Mazess 1978; Thomas 1998; Wiley 1992, 2004)—it departs from this traditional definition by emphasizing that adaptation is both an *outcome* and an actively negotiated *process*. Moreover, it also recognizes that adaptation(s) is/are not “cost-free” but often involve a tradeoff between health and survival (Wiley 1992, 2004). For instance, research on the process of adaptation in recent decades has illustrated the important role of short-term physiological and behavioral adjustments that occur within the lifetime of an organism in promoting survival and fitness, but, that also seem to come at the expense of individual biological well-being (Wiley 2004). Rather than being confined to interpret biological variation under the rubric of evolutionary *benefit*, adaptability theory asks us to view biological differences, including health, as potential signs of varying individual abilities to negotiate—as agents—constraints within the realm of what is possible in order to reduce the impact of environmental stress (Thomas 1998; Wiley 2004).

The expansion of adaptability theory beyond Darwinian “adaptation” has had important implications for how we interpret human biological variation and has come at an ideal time in the field of anthropology as interests turn to the critique of power and its role in the social production of health disparity (e.g. Crooks et al. 2007; Schell 1997; Dressler 2005; Messer 1986). Since the 1990’s, biocultural anthropologists have combined political economic and adaptability theories to help locate human biological outcomes within their social contexts (e.g. Schell 1997; Ulijaszek et al. 1997; Crooks et al. 2007; Peterson et al. 2008; Kuzawa 2007). This approach foregrounds both

human agency and social structure. While adaptability theory facilitates exploration into the myriad ways that people engage conditions in order to survive, political economic theory helps to acknowledge more explicitly that people live within social contexts where their ability to exercise agency and to access resources is unevenly shaped by their positions within broader, historically contingent relations of power. The synthesis of the two theories provides an ideal optic with which to critically examine the pathways linking individuals to their complex, historically rooted circumstances, while also considering how these pathways—mediated by power—variably impact individuals' abilities to establish livelihoods, health, and wellbeing (Brewis 2011; Patil et al. 2009; Crooks et al. 2007; Leatherman 2005). In this way, biological outcomes can be interpreted as plastic, temporally contingent indicators of people's abilities to successfully navigate conditions they encounter in day-to-day life (Crooks et al. 2007).

However, because we are assuming that biological outcomes arise through historically specific social contexts, we must be explicit about how we conceptualize these interactions including the actors and conditions they involve. The focus of this dissertation is the interaction between refugees and resettlement contexts, which, I argue, are oriented by social, cultural, political and economic forces from the refugees histories and the relations of power within the environments they enter. Historically, research examining this type of interaction has done so under the rubric of "acculturation" (e.g. Thurnwald 1932; Herskovits 1937; Teske 1974). It is worth noting here that acculturation models bear striking resemblance to the biological concept of "acclimation" (or acclimatization) which Mazess (1975; 1978) used to describe how an organism's phenotype becomes conditioned by local environmental pressures to promote short term survival. I mention this because, as researchers, it helps to clarify how the relationships between refugees and post-resettlement conditions are being conceptualized and operationalized. The root of "acculturation" is "culture" meaning that the socially constructed environment replaces the natural environment as the primary conditioning force driving changes among refugees (e.g. culture, behavior, health).

Initial uses of the term "acculturation" by social scientists in the 1930's was an early nod towards the role social ecologies play in shaping human circumstances. In anthropology, the concept was used to develop a clearer understanding of the changes in belief, behavior, and social status that migrants undergo as they join larger social bodies (e.g. Thurnwald 1932; Herskovits 1937). This stands as a milestone in a science that now aims to understand how conditions that are humanly constructed can produce social disparities. However, the theoretical similarity it shares to acclimation reveals an underlying assumption about the directionality and complexity of these influences. Acculturation models have received critique for assuming a *unidirectional, linear, and passive* rather than interactive process by which refugees become conditioned to their new social contexts (Abraído-Lanza 2006; Phinney 2003; Patil et al. 2009; Salant et al. 2003; Hunt et al. 2004; Ianni 1958). Of course, viewed under the broader dimensions of adaptability and political economic theories that I outlined above, this says nothing about the agency migrants exercise when negotiating these contexts, and subsequently how these bidirectional interactions reshape the new context or contribute to variable resettlement outcomes.

Despite these obvious theoretical deficiencies, there has been a proliferation of health studies that attempt to make "acculturation" statistically tractable to examine how processes of change impact refugee health. An example of this can be found in the wide use of psychosocial instruments that measure refugees' "levels" of acculturation based on the assumption that cultural change can be illustrated by quantifying the rate at which they adopt a small selection of beliefs and behaviors (e.g. Dharod et al. 2010; Franzen et al. 2009a; Unger 2004; Smith et al. 2012). The replacement of pre-existing beliefs/behaviors with those found in the U.S. environment is often referred to as "Americanization" (Shrestha 2011; Franzen et al. 2009b; Story et al. 1989). By quantifying this process, researchers can then easily compare the relationships between cultural change and a range of post-resettlement outcomes, including educational and employment status, economic stability, and even health. While there is no doubt that cultural changes do occur and have im-



portant impacts on these outcomes, some scholars in anthropology and refugee studies have argued that defining culture is itself a problematic and controversial endeavor, and the ability to capture the complexity of these changes using a linear scale is questionable at best (Patil et al. 2009). Moreover, the use of these scales tends to treat refugees as if they are blank canvases upon which the culture and behavioral patterns of their host country are written (Phinney 2003; Salant et al. 2003; Hunt et al. 2004).

What acculturation research has demonstrated is that there is clearly something about the transition into a new society that results in changes in belief, behavior, lifestyle, and even health for many refugees. But because acculturation models have been unable to escape examining change as a passive, unidirectional, and linear process, very little is understood about how refugees and migrants exercise agency as they negotiate conditions that challenge their preexisting beliefs and practices, and how these negotiations mediate the changes we are seeing in lifestyle and health. This dissertation is grounded on the premise that refugees do not simply absorb culture but are actively involved in shaping their own resettlement outcomes as they reconcile their unique backgrounds against variable social, cultural, political and economic conditions. This allows me to ask how differences in background may differentially influence ways that refugees respond to post-resettlement conditions, and what implications these responses have for their livelihoods and health and wellbeing in the short and long-terms. Therefore, an alternative to acculturation is needed to better conceptualize the interactions between refugees and their new environments.

**Integration:** For the second line of theory I borrow the idea of *integration* from international policy as an alternative to acculturation that allows us to better conceptualize how refugees interact with post-resettlement environments within a wider political economic context. The United Nations (UN-ESCWA 2015) defines integration as the “equal inclusion” of refugees in a host society. But it views integration as a *goal* and a *process* that “requires a preparedness [among refugees] to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society without having to lose one’s own cultural identity” and “a willingness for [host] communities to be welcoming and responsive to refugees and for public institutions to meet the needs of a diverse population” (UN-ESCWA 2015). As such, integration is *context specific* and *interactive*. This aligns well with adaptability and political economic theories because the outcomes of integration are contingent on the relationship established between refugees and their new social environments which is further structured around the mutual articulation of the unique social, cultural, political, and economic histories that are involved in these interactions.

When viewed as a policy goal, the concept of integration gains new meaning and becomes its own important post-resettlement condition that can have important impacts on what opportunities and constraints refugees experience. This allows us to outline more specifically what conditions mediate refugee outcomes. For instance, drawing on the 1951 convention for refugees, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2015b) refined its definition of integration as “full and equal membership in the host society” which it suggests comes from the “freedom of movement, access to education and jobs, access to public relief, the possibility of acquiring property, and the possibility of citizenship.” Because each of these domains represents a right, freedom, or opportunity that is deficient in contexts of exile, the UNHCR (2015b) requires host countries to pledge their assistance to refugees in these areas in order to ensure their long-term viability in their new context. As a result, this definition has become an important standard by which host countries like the U.S. frame their integration policies, distribute resources, and interpret the successes or failures of those who enter their resettlement programs.

Nonetheless, host societies are diverse in their organization, politics, and beliefs and the implementation of these standards in their refugee policies often reflect deeper national ideologies. Careful analysis of the historical conditions through which these policies have developed is necessary to fully understand how they shape the process of refugee integration in the current re-

settlement climate. In the U.S., “economic independence” has long been the cornerstone of the refugee resettlement program (USRAP) (Holman 1996; Howell 1982). Holman (1996) has illustrated how this priority emerged out of underlying neoliberal ideologies that were threatened by high numbers of Cuban and Vietnamese refugees that overwhelmed the underdeveloped U.S. resettlement program in the 1970s and 80s. The result was overburdened local economies, poor employment outcomes, and an overdependence on U.S. welfare.

Since the 1980’s, U.S. refugee policies have incentivized rapid employment over other aspects of integration (e.g. education, citizenship) by offering refugees short term financial aid that is heavily contingent on the pursuit of employment. These policies are explicit in their effort to limit welfare dependency while ensuring that refugees are quickly incorporated into the workforce (Holman 1996; Howell 1982). By foregrounding refugees’ agency this dissertation joins the work of other researchers in countering the predominate assumption about their “dependency” in post-resettlement contexts (Williams 2006; Tomlinson 2010).

Naturally, U.S. refugee policies operate under the assumption that other aspects of integration will improve as refugees find jobs and become economically self sufficient. However, when we look at the academic literature on refugee resettlement and broaden the dimensions of integration to also encompass common social, cultural, and health related outcomes in addition to economic standards, we find that emphasis on financial stability alone does not correspond with overall improvements to refugees’ livelihoods or wellbeing. When refugees arrive in the U.S., they often have few relevant skills and credentials, limiting them to low-skill jobs that offer low wages, few benefits, and little opportunity to advance in career or socioeconomic status (Feeny 2000; Holman 1996). Compounding these challenges, refugees also encounter numerous social and cultural challenges that they must overcome as they attempt to reestablish social connections and a sense of identity in an unfamiliar environment (Berry 2003; Chun et al. 2003). And they do this while drawing on their own prior experiences, beliefs, and histories which articulate in unique and unpredictable ways with their new contexts (Howell 1982; Berry 2003; Chun et al. 2003).

When viewed from this perspective, U.S. resettlement and the ensuing process of integration are disruptive periods for refugees as they are pressured into the lowest tier of the U.S. economy and are required to make adjustments to the way they live and think. Not surprisingly, studies that investigate integration and acculturation document high rates of poverty, depression, feelings of isolation, and concerns about cultural loss among many U.S. refugee communities stemming from these transitional conditions (Chun et al. 2003). A substantial literature has also begun to foreground high rates of overweight, obesity and related metabolic diseases in refugee populations, potentially due to the lifestyle transitions required during integration (Himmelgreen et al. 2007; Clarkin 2008; Franzen et al. 2009; Smith et al. 2012). Yet, it is important to note that establishing health and wellbeing do not appear in any of the UNHCR or U.S. standards for integration. This is particularly alarming given that poor health can impact refugees’ resilience against other resettlement challenges and limit their ability to find employment and become financially self sufficient (Rumbaut et al. 1991).

Seeing these outcomes, it is clear that refugees have complex social, cultural, and biological needs, as do all humans, that far exceed the more politically and economically oriented provisions outlined by the UNHCR and U.S. refugee policies (Hadley et al. 2006). Some have called for a “wider range of measures” for conceptualizing and determining refugees’ success in these regards (Hadley et al. 2006; Strang et al. 2010). Thus, for the purposes of this dissertation, I suggest that the standards for a “successful” integration be defined more holistically as the ability to access resources, develop/maintain meaningful social connections, achieve financial stability, cultural/political citizenship, and establish health and wellbeing. Each of these is necessary for refugees to establish meaningful and sustainable lives in the short and long terms. Using these standards as a starting point, one goal of this dissertation is to identify the conditions which facili-

tate and/or impede refugees' abilities to build sustainable lives in American society which I can then use to explore the factors shaping energy balance and nutritional health more specifically.

**Energy Balance:** While identification of the conditions and strategies driving overall integration outcomes for Bhutanese refugees is an important goal of this dissertation, my ultimate goal is to explore how these interactions may explain trends in nutritional health in the community. The third and final line of theory relates to this goal – it employs the concept of *energy balance* from nutritional sciences in order to operationalize the relationships between refugee nutritional health and processes of integration which mediate diet and exercise. Ultimately, these processes may explain subsequent nutritional status trends in the community. Energy balance is a biological concept that views nutritional status as a metabolic outcome of the balance between energy intake and expenditure (i.e. diet and exercise) (Spiegelman et al. 2001). An optimal energy balance promotes proper growth, development, and general health, and requires adequate and equivalent amounts of nutrition and exercise (Spiegelman et al. 2001). An imbalance in energy intake and expenditure in either direction produces suboptimal health outcomes causing growth stunting and underweight or overweight and obesity, all of which have been linked with increased rates of mortality (e.g. Hallin et al. 2006; Lamon-Fava et al. 1996; Kokkinos et al. 2011).

As I suggested in the opening paragraph, nutrition already holds an important place in biocultural research, because food is as much a fundamental biological need as it is imbued with cultural meanings that shape how it is distributed in society and consumed (Counihan 1999). Naturally, exploring how these cultural meanings shape access to nutritional resources is a useful means to understanding variations in nutritional status within human populations (Messer 1986). Opportunities for exercise are similarly constructed by social and cultural meanings and are therefore also useful for linking human biology to a person's circumstances. Because both sides of the energy balance equation can be manipulated by lived contexts, exploration into the myriad circumstances that moderate access to nutrition and/or physical activity allows more complex questions to be asked about how differential interactions between humans and their environments contribute to health, and shape health related disparities (Popkin et al. 2005; Drewnowski et al. 2010; French et al. 2001). The circumstances shaping nutritional patterns are the emphasis of this dissertation, but ethnographic attention is also given to the changes Bhutanese refugees experience in physical activity following resettlement which speak to energy balance.

An extensive literature in anthropology and public health is investigating the health consequences associated with refugee integration in the United States (e.g., Satia 2010; Smith et al. 2012). Many of these studies are looking at nutritional status changes among refugees and examining the conditions that interfere with diet and/or exercise and contribute to unhealthy energy balance (e.g. Himmelgreen et al. 2014; Himmelgreen et al. 2007; Patil et al. 2009; Satia 2010; Smith et al. 2012). These studies demonstrate that refugee diet and exercise patterns are often closely tied to broader sociocultural and structural challenges they face after resettlement, meaning those that derive respectively from social vs. institutional interactions. For instance, structural influences, like low-wages and high costs of specialty foods, may cause refugees to prioritize accessibility, affordability, convenience, and/or longevity over nutritional quality or cultural preference in their food choices (e.g. Dubowitz et al. 2007; Sussner et al. 2008; Gordon-Larson et al. 2003). Meanwhile time constraints, access to transportation, and dangerous neighborhoods where refugees can afford to live interfere with regular exercise (Guerin et al. 2003; Weiland et al. 2012; Caperchione et al. 2009). Together, these conditions contribute to overweight and obesity resulting from greater consumption of low cost, convenient, but energy dense foods and a transition to more sedentary lifestyles (Himmelgreen et al. 2014; Gordon-Larson et al. 2003).

But there are also a variety of sociocultural factors stemming from the resettlement environment and the refugees themselves which mediate structural conditions and shape post-resettlement nutritional health. For instance, the availability of food may arise from the built environment as much as it is shaped by cultural and personal food preferences of the refugees them-

selves (Benari et al. 2007; Jacobus et al. 2011; Burns 2004). Meat avoidance, as one example, is a dietary restriction common in some refugee populations, including Bhutanese refugees, that can place added constraints around already limited post-resettlement food options as refugees encounter difficulties finding more specialized and costly vegetarian food items (Jacobus et al. 2011; Burns 2004). Interactions that involve food with friends and colleagues at work and school add complexity to these influences, sometimes pressuring refugees to embrace new foods and food ideas (Kiptiness et al. 2011; Colby et al. 2009; Patil et al. 2009). In turn these influences make their way into the household and force families to renegotiate former food ideologies (Unger et al. 2004; Smith et al. 2012; Patil et al. 2009). Over time and across subsequent generations these pressures can result in dietary and nutritional status changes, some of which are unhealthy (Unger et al. 2004; Gordon-Larson et al. 2003).

It would be inaccurate to assume, however, that these pressures fall evenly across refugee communities, or that individual refugees respond to them similarly. For instance, several studies have reported that some refugees experience periods of *weight loss* or periods of *hunger* following resettlement (Benari et al. 2007; Hadley et al. 2006; Dharod et al. 2010), while others illustrate how prior experiences with food deprivation cause refugees to binge eat and gain weight (Rondinelli et al. 2011; Petermen et al. 2010; Franzen et al. 2009b). In addition, Dahrod et al. (2011) and Patil et al. (2009) have shown that refugees receiving federal assistance often experience monthly fluctuations in food access as supplemental income is received and exhausted, resulting in periods of high consumption followed by low consumption. What emerges from such studies are variable patterns in access to nutritional resources and nutritional status outcomes during resettlement that require greater attention (Hadley et al. 2006; Benari et al. 2007; Patil et al. 2009). This dissertation maps nutritional status trends in a cross-section of Bhutanese refugees, and ethnographically considers the food strategies, and, the exercise patterns that Bhutanese refugees develop as they balance these structural and sociocultural influences in their daily lives. From this, I locate aspects of the resettlement experience where they are most vulnerable to energy imbalances that contribute to unhealthy nutritional status trends.

## **Bhutanese Resettlement and the Research Setting**

The Bhutanese refugees resettling in the U.S. are of ethnic Nepali descent. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, they began to migrate to southern Bhutan seeking new economic opportunities. While there is controversy over what exact conditions triggered their migration out of Nepal and into Bhutan, their continued migration over the next century appears to have been sustained by British Colonial efforts to establish political and economic control over the region surrounding India's northern borders (Dhakal et al. 1994; Hutt 2004; Evans 2010). Nonetheless, as a Hindu population in a predominately Buddhist country, the increasing Nepali presence received escalating opposition from the Bhutanese elite (Dhakal et al. 1994). Xenophobic tensions mounted in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Royal Government of Bhutan began to pass harsh, discriminatory laws banning Hindu practices, dress, and the Nepali language. In 1991, as a result of these policies, over 100,000 Nepali-speaking Bhutanese fled southern Bhutan back to Nepal hoping to preserve their traditions and ways of living (Muggah 2005).

Despite sharing a cultural heritage and geographical origins with the people of Nepal, Bhutanese refugees were barred from citizenship and prohibited from integrating with the local Nepali populations. Meanwhile, the UNHCR was called upon to organize negotiations for repatriation between Nepal and Bhutan and to assist in the construction of temporary camps to house the swelling numbers of Bhutanese exiles along Nepal's eastern border. Unfortunately, negotiations for repatriation continued to fail over the next two decades, and in 2008, the UNHCR petitioned the U.S., alongside seven other nations, for the option of third country resettlement. The U.S. accepted 80,000 out of the 100,000 Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees, and in the five years following 2008, Bhutanese refugees were the largest group admitted to the

U.S., constituting 19 % of all arrivals during that period (ORR 2014; USDOS 2015).

Reports from the Nepali camps illustrate that Bhutanese refugees endured a range of poor living conditions prior to U.S. resettlement (HRW 2003, 2007). Among these, they had no electricity, lived in plastic shelters with little privacy, had very limited economic opportunities, and, for the most part were heavily dependent on meager food rations provided by the UNHCR (HRW 2003, 2007). Based on a CDC (2014) report, we know that before their arrival to the U.S., overweight, obesity, and diabetes were very low, and nutritional deficiencies were high in refugee camps. Unfortunately, the few nutritional health studies that have been conducted in the short time since their arrival are already reporting high rates of overweight, obesity and diabetes in some U.S. Bhutanese refugee communities (Kumar et al. 2014; Bhatta et al. 2014; Bhatta et al. 2015). The rapid increase in overweight and obesity within 5 years of living in the U.S. is concerning, but because there have been few studies on Bhutanese refugees, the mechanisms behind these outcomes are not well understood.

Among other U.S. refugees who have had similar experiences with resource deprivation, the rapid transition from food scarcity to abundance can cause unhealthy increases in food consumption that can lead to overweight and obesity (Rondinelli et al. 2011; Petermen et al. 2010). This provides one possible pathway by which nutritional status transitions occur among Bhutanese refugees. Aside from the direct impacts on health, prolonged confinement in refugee camps can also have broader economic implications for refugee's access to resources, employment, and financial stability during integration (Haines 1996). The inability to work while in refugee camps prevents refugees from developing important skills and credentials that employers look for when hiring, and studies consistently show that refugees who lack skills and prior work experience have great difficulty finding employment and have limited opportunities for career advancement (Feeny 2000; Finnan 1982; Chan 1994). Unfortunately, low wage, low benefit employment, often coincides with heavy time and financial constraints that impinge on refugees ability to maintain healthy diets and receive regular exercise, which contribute to unhealthy increases in nutritional status (Himmelgreen et al. 2007).

Interestingly, the UNHCR is aware of the connection between the skills refugees are able to build while in refugee camps and their post-resettlement employment opportunities (UNHCR 2011). The refugee camps in Nepal were developed to provide Bhutanese refugees with Western education for this reason and to teach English more specifically because this skill, in particular, is believed to improve refugees economic "portability" in situations where third country resettlement is the only option (UNHCR 2001). As a consequence, the majority of younger Bhutanese refugees who attended middle and high school while in refugee camps in Nepal are now able to speak English, but at the same time, their economic confinement in Nepal prevented them from gaining any relevant work experience that would prepare them for the types of jobs available to refugees in the United States. How these mixed experiences and skills mediate Bhutanese refugees educational and employment opportunities in Prospect City is something I touch on in this dissertation. I do this because it has implications for their integration in general, but more specifically, the types of educational and employment opportunities they have mediates their exposure to dietary influences as well as opportunities for physical activity.

It is also important to note that the religious freedoms afforded to people in the U.S. contrasts with the religious intolerance that initiated the exodus of Bhutanese refugees from Bhutan in the 1990s. As I have already stated, the majority of Bhutanese refugees are Hindu. It is likely that maintaining this religious identity, given this recent history, is an important sociocultural factor guiding how community members approach U.S. integration. However, there are important caste related social status and dietary differences that exist within Hinduism that may further mediate these outcomes (COR 2007). For instance, higher castes are predominantly vegetarian for religious reasons (Dumont 1980). But vegetarian foods are often more expensive per calorie in the U.S. (Drewnowski 2010; Darmon et al. 2005), and can be too time consuming given busy

work schedules (Barr et al. 2002; Ulijaszek 2007; Colby et al. 2009). It is possible that this dietary preference may interfere with high caste Bhutanese refugees' access to foods and impact their ability to establish healthy lifestyles. Alternatively, vegetarian, and non-beef food preferences may buffer Bhutanese refugees from making unhealthy food choices that are commonly found among other non-vegetarian refugee communities, particularly with regards to the adoption of fast food (e.g. Popkin et al. 2005; Unger et al. 2004; Colby et al 2009).

There are aspects of Bhutanese caste related social organization that may also mediate other integration outcomes. The hierarchical structure of the Hindu caste system is divided along the idiom of "purity." To prevent "contamination" in a spiritual and material sense, interactions between castes are structured around strong social and dietary proscriptions (Mines 2005; Daniel 1984; Appaduri 1981). Prior studies have shown that the social networks refugees develop after resettlement are critical to accessing resources, finding jobs, and for developing a sense of community and identity (Strang et al. 2010; Sargent et al.1999; Howell 1982). It is possible that adherence to caste divisions in resettlement contexts will interfere with the development of important social connections for Bhutanese refugees which could limit access to resources as well as support that may be protective to their health in the long term. It is also possible that caste will be reinterpreted in order to satisfy the new social norms that violate these restrictions. Either way, the decisions that Bhutanese refugees make regarding caste will likely impact the types of social connections they make, their sense of cultural citizenship/belonging, and the foods they consume.

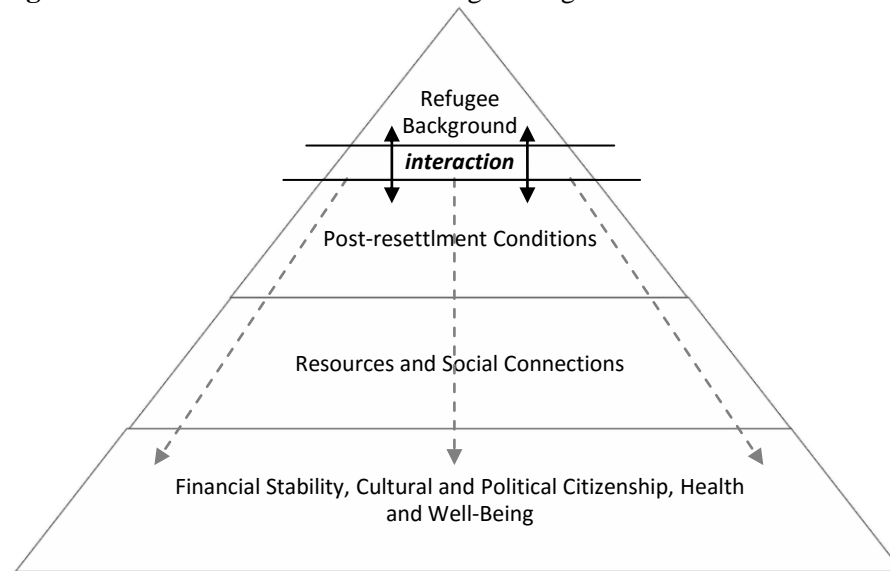
Despite the possible differences in caste that may emerge as a result of resettlement, the Bhutanese community in Prospect City has made efforts to remain cohesive. At the community level, there is a strong, well structured Bhutanese Community Organization (BCO) that meets on a regular basis to discuss community trends and to offer community members financial, social, and cultural assistance when needed. At the prompting of the BCO, many families chose to live in a cluster of neighborhoods and apartment buildings south of downtown within walking distance of schools, public transportation, and countless ethnic food stores. This increases access to cultural foods and improves overall mobility, but staying within close social proximity appears to be an important strategy for families and the community as a whole to maintain control over cultural decay and establish a strong support network. Prior studies have shown that ethnic enclaves can function in this way (Chan 1994; Howell 1982). One of the topics this dissertation covers is how these social ties help to buffer individuals from isolation, and counter the pressures some members feel to change their caste-related beliefs.

Joint families are also a common living arrangement among Bhutanese refugees that support solidarity and stem from deeper Hindu traditions found across South Asia (Chadda 2013; Chekki 1996; Mulatti 1995; Mandelbaum 1948; Seymour 2002; Wadley 2010). In joint families, multiple generations share shelter, resources, and living expenses (Wadley 2010), but as Chadda (2013) has pointed out, they also serve as an important foundation for cultural identity. Prior studies have shown that this type of living arrangement can be a useful resettlement strategy that improves refugees' access to resources and employment opportunities and contributes to greater financial stability (Potocky-Tripodi 2003; Kibria 1994). However, other studies have shown that differences in age demographics within refugee households can cause intergenerational conflicts between members who are unevenly exposed to and adopt external post-resettlement pressures (Trapp 2010; Birman 2006; Choi et al. 2008). Because joint families are culturally significant to the Bhutanese refugees interviewed in the current study, the role these living arrangements are playing in buffering/augmenting the economic and dietary challenges of resettlement Bhutanese refugees of different ages are experiencing is one of the sociocultural dimensions from within the Bhutanese community that is explored in this dissertation.

The offer of U.S. resettlement concluded 20 years of social and economic confinement for Bhutanese refugees, but it also alleviated a longer history of political exclusion on the basis of their religious identity. It is a major premise of this dissertation that these histories shape how Bhutanese refugees interpret and respond to conditions they encounter after resettlement (see

Figure 1.1). Drawing on political economic and adaptability theories, I suggest that the ways that Bhutanese refugees negotiate post-resettlement conditions, impacts the types of resources (including dietary resources) and social connections they are able to access and develop. Subsequently, this has implications for their success at establishing financial stability, cultural and political citizenship, and health and wellbeing. While I have already identified a few of the sociocultural and structural factors that stand out from the cultural patterns and histories of Bhutanese refugees themselves and from the U.S. resettlement environment that may be guiding these negotiations, I leave the doors open in my research for the possibility of factors that could not be foreseen. This is the strength of ethnographic research.

**Figure 1.1.** Model for Process of Refugee Integration



This model depicts a process of integration where the outcomes (the two base rows of the pyramid) are predicated on the interactions that develop between refugees and conditions they encounter in the resettlement environment. Importantly, this interaction is contingent upon how the unique historical backgrounds between refugees and their environment articulate.

### Project Aims

Clearly, integration can be a difficult period of adjustment and uncertainty for refugees, as they are displaced from family and friends and relocated to unfamiliar environments where they exhaust their federal and private funding and are, for the most part, pressured into the lower tier of the U.S. workforce. Often, these broader sociocultural and structural experiences only exaggerate more abstract struggles associated with reestablishing identities and social connections and achieving general wellbeing. But refugees also bring their own backgrounds to the table, which differentially shape their responses to these conditions and moderate access to the resources and opportunities necessary for establishing financial stability, cultural citizenship/belonging, and healthy lifestyles. It is important to recognize how these histories impact the ways that refugees respond to challenges. Bhutanese refugees have been in the U.S. for less than seven years and few studies have explored how they navigate their new environment and how their health has been impacted by this transition. The aim of this dissertation is to examine where the threads of history and agency intersect with post-resettlement conditions in shaping nutritional health in a community of Bhutanese refugees living in Prospect City.

Three lines of inquiry frame my research and the chapters that follow:

- 1) First, I seek to understand Bhutanese refugees themselves, including their diverse experiences and cultural backgrounds, but also the historical and political economic processes that have contributed to their displacement from Bhutan, confinement in Nepal, and resettlement in the U.S. This will help to clarify what experiences are shaping how Bhutanese refugees interpret and respond to their new environments.
- 2) Second, I attempt to identify the sociocultural and structural conditions Bhutanese refugees perceive to facilitate or interfere with the process of U.S. integration in general, and, subsequently, what historical experiences and sociodemographic characteristics are most important in guiding the strategies they develop to negotiate these conditions.
- 3) Third, I focus on elucidating ethnographically how Bhutanese refugees' responses to conditions that facilitate or interfere with integration translate into food related strategies and physical activity patterns, and I consider their implications for optimal energy balance (energy intake/output) and subsequent trends in nutritional health (overweight, obesity, and diabetes) which I will compare against the U.S. general population and other U.S.-based refugees.

## Dissertation Organization

The Bhutanese refugee story does not begin in the U.S., and, as I have already alluded, it is not the intention of this dissertation to treat it as doing so. As Sherry Ortner (1984:143) has famously argued, history is not “something that arrives like a ship, from outside the society in question,” nor is any society or culture an island or ideal type. While refugees in the U.S. are often treated as representatives or isolates of foreign cultures, the reality of being politically recognized as a “refugee” only exemplifies ways that local histories are embedded in broader flows of power that are simultaneously shaping and being shaped by even larger political and economic processes that occur on a global scale. As Michael Hutt (2004; 2005) has illustrated well in his analyses of Bhutanese political and cultural history, the Bhutanese refugee crisis is clouded by confusing statistics, narratives, and political propaganda that have been disseminated by the governments of Nepal, Bhutan, and the refugees themselves to serve different purposes. This goes without a mention of the influences of international powers like the UNHCR, International Office of Migration (IOM),<sup>1</sup> and the U.S. among other countries in shaping the Bhutanese story.

Throughout this dissertation, I emphasize these varied sources of information on the Bhutanese crisis to highlight a set of histories and influences that Bhutanese refugees carry with them, along with their traditions, beliefs, and personal experiences, as the standards by which they perceive and navigate their new environments. Aside from chapter two which reviews my research methodology, the remaining chapters of this dissertation are structured in chronological order of Bhutanese resettlement, walking through the history of the Bhutanese crisis and process of resettlement and then narrowing focus on the challenges of U.S. integration and what this has meant for food strategies, diets, and physical activity patterns. And finally, I outline what all of this means for energy balance and nutritional health as illustrated by patterns of overweight, obesity, and diabetes that are emerging within the Prospect City Bhutanese community.

In chapter three “*Narratives of Displacement: Historical Context on the Bhutanese Refugee Crisis and Resettlement Experiences in Prospect City*” I outline the chronological process of Bhutanese resettlement in the U.S. from a political economic standpoint. I begin with the existing literature on the origins of the Bhutanese Refugee Crisis to build historical context and review the literature on U.S. resettlement examining the policies and politics that shape refugee placement

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<sup>1</sup> The Inter-Governmental organization is in charge of helping countries develop migration strategies, which it then facilitates and manages to ensure humane treatment and basic rights are upheld.



and funding procedures which have relevance to the Bhutanese community in Prospect City. Meanwhile, I punctuate this analysis with case examples drawn from members of the Prospect City community as a means of illustrating how the history of displacement, experiences in the camps, and the political economy of U.S. refugee policies are shaping the opportunities and constraints that Bhutanese refugees are facing today, and what agendas they themselves carry into this new environment.

During this analysis, I begin to examine important similarities and differences within the community in terms of how life in the refugee camps was perceived and how current aspects of resettlement are being experienced based on differences in age, gender, caste position, and timing of U.S. arrival. Throughout this dissertation I hope to demonstrate ways that post-resettlement pressures are differentially experienced across the Bhutanese community in Prospect City (a pseudonym), and that differing strategies employed by individuals, families, and the community to accommodate these varying pressures can have direct and indirect consequences for food choice and nutritional health—both positive and negative. This chapter builds the important background context for understanding the resettlement experience as a particular kind of “environment” shaped by wider histories and pathways of power. Hopefully, I demonstrate that this experience is not homogenous, but has different meanings and consequences for people within the Bhutanese community holding different backgrounds as well as social positions.

In chapter four “*U.S.A. Stands for U Start Again*”: *The Strategies Bhutanese Refugees in Prospect City are using to Navigate Integration*,” I combine adaptability and political economic frameworks as a means of highlighting the complex interplay between “structure” and “agency” in understanding refugee outcomes in resettlement contexts. I begin by identifying the sociocultural and structural conditions which Bhutanese refugees perceive to facilitate or impede their abilities to access resources, find employment, develop social connections, and/or establish cultural citizenship, health and wellbeing following resettlement in Prospect City. Then using ethnographic examples, I explore the range of strategies exhibited at the individual, family, and the community levels that are being/have been developed to take advantage of or ameliorate these conditions that arise at the intersections of new and old beliefs, practices, and daily needs.

In chapter five “*Continuity and Change: Diet, Food Related Strategies, and Physical Activity Patterns among Bhutanese Refugees Following U.S. Resettlement—the Influences and Implications for Energy Balance and the High Rates of Overweight, Obesity, and Diabetes in the Community*,” I revisit adaptability and political economic theories to foreground the relevance of a biocultural approach for interpreting refugee nutritional health outcomes. From this standpoint, I focus more specifically on the relationship between energy balance and nutritional status within the community, considering areas in daily life where diet and exercise have remained the same or changed, and I attempt to demonstrate why these patterns are occurring by looking at the many factors influencing household food choices and how members in households respond to these influences. I also look at mediating factors such as age, gender, education, work, and caste and their relationship to food choice and exercise as a means of further understanding the dietary similarities and differences I observed within and between families across the community. Finally, I examine the overall nutritional quality of salient food choice trends that I documented within the community and compare these findings with nutritional status data I collected demonstrating high rates of overweight, obesity, and diabetes in the community.

In Chapter six “*Adaptability as a Guide for Moving Forward: Making Sense of Post-resettlement Nutritional Status Outcomes in the Prospect City Bhutanese Community*,” I revisit the theoretical stance that I took in former chapters as a means of illustrating more clearly the larger forces shaping nutritional statuses within the community during the processes of U.S. integration. I also draw conclusions based on my dissertation work within the context of the project’s limitations. I attempt to position my findings within the context of existing academic literature regarding refugee health and resettlement outcomes as a means of confirming trends that have been well documented, while challenging others, and adding complexity to the ways that we in-

interpret integration processes. I conclude the chapter by discussing practical and culturally appropriate ways in which the community could make substantive improvements to nutritional health among its members, and offer directions for future research in refugee nutritional health.

## Chapter 2: Project Design, Specific Aims, Methodology, and Analyses

### Study Design

This dissertation is grounded in a biocultural anthropological approach. Mixed methods, including the collection of ethnographic and anthropometric data, were used to explore how history and human agency intersect in shaping Bhutanese refugee's responses to post-resettlement conditions and to consider how these conditions and responses may impact optimal energy balance (diet and activity) and nutritional health (overweight, obesity, diabetes). By "conditions" I am referring to the sociocultural and structural influences that impact refugee's abilities to successfully integrate following resettlement (i.e. the ability to access resources, find employment, develop social connections, and establish cultural citizenship, health and wellbeing). Sociocultural influences are the ideas, messages, and pressures which come from social interactions with Bhutanese and non-Bhutanese family, friends, peers, and colleagues. Structural influences are pressures coming from refugee's participation in institutions and broader political economic processes. Table 2.1 outlines the methodologies and associated sample sizes for each of the three lines of research inquiry described in chapter one. Each objective corresponds with a remaining chapter in this dissertation (chapters 3-5). All research and recruitment protocols used during this project were approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Kentucky.

**Table 2.1. Main Objectives, Methods, Sample, and Specific Aims of Data Collection**

Research Objectives	Methods, (n=), and Specific Aims of Data Collection
<i>1. Provide overview to the history and culture of Bhutanese refugees, including their experiences and backgrounds and processes that contributed to their displacement from Bhutan, confinement in Nepal, and eventual resettlement in the U.S. (Chapter 3)</i>	Methods Used: 1. Literature review 2. Semi-structured interviews (n=21) Specific Aims: a) Establish a historical context for understanding the Bhutanese refugee crisis and process of U.S. resettlement, which shaped the experiences of participants in this study
<i>2. Identify what sociocultural and structural conditions Bhutanese refugees perceive to facilitate or interfere with the process of U.S. integration, and, subsequently, what historical experiences and sociodemographic characteristics participants perceive to be important in guiding the types of strategies being used to negotiate these conditions (Chapter 4).</i>	Methods Used: 1. Semi-structured interviews (n=21) 2. Participant observation (200+ hours) Specific Aims: a) Identify the sociocultural and political economic facilitators/ challenges to a successful integration (i.e. accessing resources, employment, social connections, and/or establishing cultural citizenship and health and wellbeing) b) Identify individual, family, and community level responses to these facilitators/challenges, and consider how different responses may be shaped by socio-demographic differences
<i>3. Elucidate ethnographically how refugees' responses to conditions that facilitate or interfere with integration translate into food-related strategies and physical activity patterns and consider their implications for optimal energy balance (energy intake/output) and subsequent trends in nutritional health (overweight, obesity, and diabetes). Compare overall nutritional health trends in the sample against the U.S. and other U.S. refugees. (Chapter 5)</i>	Methods Used: 1. Semi-structured interviews (n=21) 2. Participant observation (200+ hours) 3. Food quality inventory (compiled from interviews and observations) 4. Anthropometrics (n=104) Specific Aims: a) Identify facilitators/ challenges to integration which relate to diet and/or exercise beliefs and behaviors b) Identify individual, family, and community level responses to these facilitators/challenges which impact diet and exercise beliefs and behaviors, and consider how different responses may be shaped by socio-demographic differences c) Identify common foods in Bhutanese refugees' post-resettlement diets, including their nutritional quality, and consumption patterns d) Identify trends in nutritional status (normal, overweight, obesity) and diabetes in the overall community and based on socio-demographic differences. Examine these trends in light of refugees' dietary and physical activity patterns. e) Compare overall trends in overweight, obesity, and diabetes in sample against U.S. and other U.S. refugees.

**Research Site:** The research for this dissertation was conducted in Prospect City, Western State<sup>2</sup> U.S., a large and growing urban area in western U.S. with a long history of absorbing immigrants and refugees from around the world. The city itself has a population of just over 100,000 but the surrounding area is approaching 2.5 million. The city is sprawling and sits relatively flat along a valley floor, but is surrounded by high mountains that receive significant snowfall in the winter. Summers in the city are dry and hot, with temperatures reaching above 100 degrees Fahrenheit for several weeks. Compared to other large U.S. cities, the orientation of the streets and buildings follows a grid system, making navigation relatively straightforward. Sky rises and tall condominiums mark the city center, which rise up in the northernmost part of a dense but outward stretching network of roads, houses, and buildings. Meanwhile the mountains run north to south along the east side of the city, and serve as a visual handrail for navigating the surrounding suburbs. They also mark the socioeconomic topography of the city. Large expensive modern homes peer down over lower income neighborhoods, strip malls, industrial parks, chemical plants, and warehouses which spread across the valley toward the southern and western horizons.

Compared to other U.S. cities, cost of living in Prospect City is lower and employment rates are higher. In part this is the result of a booming tech industry which, since the mid 2000s, has bought up inexpensive land on the south end of the valley to build headquarters and warehouses. The presence of these modern business moguls has had a profound effect on the local economy, pulling in young professionals from around the country and world, while bolstering local businesses and breathing new life into some of more impoverished parks and neighborhoods that sit just beyond the city limits. In turn, there has been a steady climb in the number of low, medium, and high skill-level jobs, making Prospect City one of the best employment areas in the country. Even in the height of the most recent economic recession, unemployment was among the lowest in the country. Land surrounding Prospect City remains open and generally unencumbered for development, which is occurring at a rapid pace, and affordable housing remains in a surplus across the city despite these broader economic changes. Combined with improvements in public transportation and an abundance of affordable housing, the availability of low-skill, entry level jobs in Prospect City compared to other U.S. cities has made it an ideal location for refugee resettlement by Federal standards.<sup>3</sup>

Bhutanese refugees began arriving to Prospect City in 2008 under the direction of the two resettlement agencies that serve the region. During my fieldwork in 2014, approximately 2,000 Bhutanese refugees had resettled in Prospect City or moved to the area through secondary migrations for social and/or economic reasons. Many live in “joint families” with parents, siblings, spouses, and children in lower-income neighborhoods just outside the Prospect City limits. As a result of these living arrangements, there is a noticeable Bhutanese presence on the south end of town within close walking distance of numerous ethnic grocery stores and public transportation, where the majority of community members reside. When they first arrived, most Bhutanese refugees found employment working as custodians and housekeepers at the airport, hospitals, malls, and city parks. Many of the older employed community members who don’t speak English remain in these jobs, but younger community members with more education have since begun to seek out higher paying jobs with more benefits. Some have even opened their own convenience stores and franchises. Alongside these economic improvements has been a trend in ownership of personal vehicles and homes.

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<sup>2</sup> pseudonyms for city and state of the research location

<sup>3</sup> This is relative to other U.S. cities. This does not mean that refugees still do not experience challenges when looking for employment. As an ideal location for low-skill work, Prospect City draws in many economic migrants that compete for jobs with refugees.

**Sample:** A total of 104 male and female members from the Prospect City Bhutanese community (ages 6-82) participated in the anthropometric component of this project. Meanwhile 21 male and female representatives (ages 18-60) from separate households participated in the semi-structured interviews.<sup>4</sup> Observational data were collected while conducting interviews and anthropometrics in participant households and on a more ongoing basis with four families who agreed to meet with me weekly at their households. Children over the age of five and adults were included for anthropometric assessment to capture variability (e.g., age, gender, caste position, employment / education status) in nutritional status in the community (Gittelsohn et al. 1997; Coates et al. 2010). Chronically ill individuals and women who were pregnant or who had been pregnant within the past 6 months were excluded because of the potential influence of these conditions on the interpretation of body composition. Participant eligibility for interviews was intentionally left open to anyone 18 years of age or older in order to capture a diversity of resettlement experiences by age and gender.

All participants were recruited using a chain referral (snow-ball) sampling strategy. Each participant was asked to identify other potential participants who could be contacted about the project at a later time. While this sampling strategy limits generalizability of the findings across the community as a whole and is a study limitation, it is an accepted approach for recruiting from populations that are difficult to contact for research (Bernard 2006:192). Chain referral recruiting is particularly suitable for refugees who are hard to contact through normal channels as a result of secondary migrations and changes of address. Moreover, refugee communities sometimes mistrust non-members who don't speak their language or who may misunderstand their way of living (UNHCR 2003b). The chain referral method helped to circumvent these fears by networking off of initial trust relationships established between the researcher and members of the community.

The first participants were introduced to me through contacts I made within the community while conducting preparatory fieldwork in the summer of 2012. I then asked for a referral to other Bhutanese friends or family whom I could contact about the project. I allowed each former participant a few days to contact the family member or friend in advance to alert them and get their permission for my more formal visit. This removed the element of surprise when I approached potential participants about my project and it gave me advance notice about whether interpretation may be required.

I met participants at their households to explain the project objectives and obtain consent. For each visit I brought consent forms written in English and Nepali, and if necessary a skilled local Nepali interpreter hired from the Prospect City Bhutanese community. Many of the participants in the study were comfortable with both written and spoken English and elected to use the English consent forms without translation or interpretation. However, particularly for older individuals who never received an education and have a lower level of literacy, the assistance of the Nepali-speaking interpreter was useful for ensuring that the meaning of the consent process and interviews was accurately conveyed. It was common for multiple family members to be present at the time of my anthropometric visits. In these cases, project information was provided to all who were present with the assistance of an interpreter when requested. Participants were informed of the project goals and that any information I collected that could be traced back to them would be de-identified and kept confidential to the limits of the law. I obtained written consent from all adults and written parental permission and assent for the inclusion of children in the study. Ver-

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<sup>4</sup> There was incomplete overlap between these samples. Sixteen household representatives who were interviewed also participated in the anthropometric component of the project, but five did not. This is a consequence of unexpected changes I had to make to my project in its early stages in response to a decline in the number of newly resettled families in the region. My initial research proposal outlined a *prospective* analysis of dietary changes among *incoming* Bhutanese refugee households in Prospect City. I had intended to gain some foundational understanding about Bhutanese resettlement in Prospect City by doing 10 to 15 preliminary interviews with members of the existing community. However, new Bhutanese arrivals to Prospect City slowed rapidly and unexpectedly at the outset of my fieldwork making the recruitment of incoming families for prospective analysis infeasible. As a result, I began conducting a cross-sectional analysis of the existing community.

bal assent was obtained from children between 6 and 11 years of age, and written assent for children between 12 and 17 years of age. Children were always assented and consented in the presence of a parent after parents had provided permission.

## Data Collection

In the following paragraphs, I discuss in detail the methodologies outlined in Table 2.1 and elucidate how they relate to the overall objectives of the project. Data collection occurred from January 2014 through November 2014. Interviews, anthropometrics, and participant observations were conducted concurrently during this period. All interactions with participants during interviews and anthropometric visits took place in the living rooms and kitchens of their apartments and houses. The majority of these visits occurred midday as many participants worked multiple jobs at odd hours, making daytime the most opportune time to meet. Although I was given the addresses for their houses and the meetings were expected, I could often confirm that the door that I was about to knock on was a Bhutanese household based on a ubiquitous pile of shoes at the front stoop, a pot of marigolds for their religious celebrations, a poster from the most recent *Nag Panchami*<sup>5</sup> festival in the window, and the distinctive smell of curry coming through the cracks around the front door and windows.

Several meetings had to be rescheduled because people forgot that I was coming and were not at home when I arrived. Only one pre-scheduled interview meeting was cancelled outright by a potential participant, but no reason was specified. Eight older individuals declined to participate in the anthropometric component of my project as a result of being recently diagnosed with diabetes and already being aware of their body composition. More often, however, the households were lively with the daytime activities of older women cooking and other adults looking after children too young for school. Upon entering these living spaces it was common for several adults to be resting between work shifts, sitting on couches and playing on Smart phones and laughing at Nepali sitcoms on YouTube or napping on day beds that surrounded the rooms. My arrival was always greeted warmly. Very frequently I was offered *tsia* (chai) tea or soda and, sometimes, curry, which were consumed during or after the research activities. Although awkward at times, these moments of being observed eating provided me with useful opportunities to talk about ingredients and other aspects of participant's diets.

**Literature Review:** To establish an historical context for interpreting Bhutanese refugee responses to U.S. post-resettlement conditions, I conducted an historically focused literature review on the cultural and political economic processes behind their displacement from Bhutan, life in Nepali refugee camps, and eventual resettlement in the United States. Academic and political sources served as the foundation for this review. Academic sources and historical British colonial documents were used to develop a general chronology of the salient events leading up to the refugee crisis in Bhutan. These sources were also useful in elucidating the competing regional histories and geopolitical relationships which mediated these events.

To understand the conditions in Nepal, I reviewed policy documents, mission statements, progress reports, refugee backgrounders, and geopolitical summaries published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Office of Migration (IOM), Cultural Orientation Resource Center (COR) that described the structure and organization of the Nepali refugee camps and the types of opportunities and challenges this living arrangement afforded them. These documents also offered useful insights into the educational, economic, and political instruction Bhutanese refugees were provided to prepare them for third country resettlement.

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<sup>5</sup> Nag Panchami is a Hindu celebration of the serpent that occurs throughout Nepal. This celebration occurs in July/August during which images or sculptures of serpents are offered milk which participants explained provided welfare and good fortune to the family. Most often Bhutanese households made elaborate drawings of intertwined snakes on notebook and computer paper and hung them on their front doors and inner walls to signify *Nag Panchami*. These were replaced once a year.

Finally, I examined political economic and cultural influences which guided UNHCR and U.S. policies in the decision making process behind the selection and placement of Bhutanese refugees in the U.S. This was done to illustrate why Bhutanese refugees ended up in U.S. cities like Prospect City and what this means for the resources and employment opportunities that they have received.

***Semi-Structured Interviews:*** An important goal of this project was to identify the salient sociocultural and structural conditions impacting the lives and dietary and physical activity patterns of Bhutanese refugees in Prospect City, and to ground these findings in the appropriate cultural and historical contexts. To do this, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 21 representatives from different households (ages 18 – 60) from the community. Semi-structured interviews address a core set of research questions by using a flexible interview guide that encourages open-ended responses from participants and frees the interviewer to follow new leads in the conversation (Bernard 2006). I organized my interviews chronologically around participants' life histories to draw greater perspective on the important experiences, events, and beliefs that have shaped their lives and that may provide greater insight to their current attitudes and behaviors, including those which relate to diet (Counihan 2009) and exercise. Interviews ranged in length between 1.5 and 2 hours and covered five main topics: demographics, life in Bhutan, Nepal, and the U.S., and dietary/activity patterns. All interviews were audio recorded and later uploaded into NVIVO 10™ ethnographic software (QSR 2010) to be transcribed and coded for themes related to the research objectives.

At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked to supply basic socio-demographic information about themselves and their households (e.g., age, sex, caste position, employment and educational background, financial aid history, diabetes diagnoses, and household size). Regarding employment, participants were asked if they were currently employed, and if so, to identify their employer. Participants were also asked if they had received an education, and where they received their highest degree (Bhutan, Nepal, or the U.S.).

Following the demographic component, I asked participants to talk about their lives from their earliest memories of Bhutan, through their time in Nepal, and up to their current lives in the U.S. to build a narrative of their experiences as refugees overall. Throughout this process, I encouraged participants to speak openly about these experiences as well as their culture and beliefs. However, prompts were used when necessary to guide the interview and elicit responses related more directly to my overarching research questions. When talking about Bhutan, participants were asked to talk about how their family provided for themselves, what the environment looked and felt like, their relationships with their neighbors and community, and to describe any experiences they had with the political crisis that led to their evacuation. Moving chronologically through their lives, participants were asked to talk about their time in Nepal, including how they left Bhutan, the layout of the camps, living conditions, camp economy, education system, food acquisition, and the beginning processes of resettlement, including how their family made the decision to come to the U.S.

Greatest emphasis was placed on the post-resettlement components of the interview, including the sociocultural and structural challenges they encountered after arriving in the U.S. In this stage of the interview, participants provided detailed stories about their first weeks in the U.S., first time grocery shopping, how they found employment, how they gained familiarity with public transportation, dealing with finances, and their thoughts on the culture and lifestyle in Prospect City. These topics provided a general sociocultural understanding of the participant's life and family and the changes they perceived to have happened in these domains since resettling. It also provided information on the structural circumstances shaping their employment opportunities, access to dietary resources, and types of activity they engaged in following resettlement. To identify the types of strategies being employed within the community, when specific challenges were mentioned (i.e. difficulties with transportation, food access, financial aid, language, and

etc.), I asked participants to describe if and how they adjusted their behaviors, ways of thinking, or lifestyles to accommodate.

Open-ended questions were also asked about diet, covering common food items and practices in their households, as well as their food preferences, choices, and acquisition patterns in a range of contexts (i.e. meals, celebrations, rituals, religion, caste, farming, and food exchanges) to elicit food-related narratives and to gain more insight into specific ways that sociocultural and material challenges are shaping food patterns in the community. Food choices were addressed directly by asking participants to identify what food characteristics were most important to them in a food item when making a food choice or shopping (i.e. cost, availability, familiarity, cultural/religious importance, novelty, etc.). To determine what sociocultural and structural pressures were most relevant in these food related strategies (i.e. food choices and shopping patterns), participants were asked if they ever had to make compromises in the types of foods they buy as a result of cost, availability, or cultural/religious beliefs in their community. Finally, I concluded the interviews by asking participants to describe their food and activities the day prior. This was used to compile an inventory of common foods being consumed within the community and gain context insight into the consumption patterns surrounding these foods as well as information on physical activity.

**Participant Observation:** In anthropology, participant observation is a common qualitative research method used to gain familiarity with a community, its environment, and its behaviors through close observation and involvement in their activities (Bernard 2006). But it is also a valuable way to confirm what people say during interviews and fill in the gaps about information that is forgotten or ignored (Bernard 2006). Observational data are typically recorded in field notes and then analyzed for common patterns of behavior, attitude, and activity that speak to broader research questions. For this project, observations were used to gather information about participants' living environments, daily activities and diets, and food acquisition patterns/strategies. But observations also allowed me to witness interactions between people of different ages, genders, and cultural backgrounds, and to observe social organization at different socio-ecological levels (i.e. family and community).

The majority of observations were conducted in the households of four interview participants while I tutored ESL and civics for their upcoming citizenship exams. I met at their houses for several hours twice a week from January 2014 to November 2014. Meeting times varied depending on work schedules and allowed for observation of their lives at different times of day. In total, I logged 200<sup>+</sup> hours in the homes of these four refugees and their families, which produced rich information about how they spent their time and what they ate. As a result of these friendships, I also had the opportunity to attend several family gatherings to celebrate weddings, baby naming ceremonies, *Dashain* (a multiday celebration of good over evil), and *Nag Panchami* (a family celebration of the snake), and witnessed the week long preparations for these events.

Observational data were also collected during each interview and anthropometric visits and while I attended larger community events.<sup>6</sup> All observations were recorded as field notes, uploaded into ethnographic software NVIVO 10<sup>TM</sup> (QSR 2010), and coded for important themes related to the research objectives. Coding focused on the salient sociocultural and structural challenges associated with life in the U.S. (i.e. transportation, living expenses, language barriers, employment challenges, food access, and etc.), strategies community members used to accommodate these pressures, as well as diet and physical activity related behaviors. During observations, any food items that I saw in households or during community events I recorded and used to update an ongoing inventory of foods being consumed within the community.

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<sup>6</sup> During the research period I attended three larger community events: *Teej* (a women's festival), the Nepali New Year's Festival, and *Holi* (the festival of color and love)



**Food inventory:** An inventory of all foods observed in households or at community events or mentioned by participants during interviews as part of their diet or their family's diet was compiled. The inventory included the frequency that each item was "observed" by the researcher or "endorsed" by participants, in order to assess the type and nutritional quality of foods consumed by community members and the relative importance of these foods in the diet in comparison to each other. For instance, does spinach appear more or less frequently than mustard green? Each time a new food item was observed or mentioned by participants, it was added to the inventory. A food item received additional "observed" tallies for each time it was observed in a new household or being consumed by a different person during community events. A food item received an additional "endorsed" tally per interview participant and/or member of their household if it was described by the participant as part of their normal diet. Follow-up questions were asked about food items that were mentioned by participants during interviews in terms of who in the household eats or does not eat the item (i.e. relation to participant, age, gender, caste position), how often, why or why not, and if they were common/uncommon foods across their community. These data were collected to get a general understanding of breadth, relative importance, and overall nutritional quality of diet in the community.

**Anthropometric assessment of body composition:** Body Mass Index (BMI) and Percent Body Fatness (%BF) values were calculated to evaluate nutritional status within the community. BMI (weight/height<sup>2</sup>) is considered a reliable indicator of body composition (i.e., underweight, normal weight, overweight, obesity) for most people (CDC 2016). As an approximation of body fatness based on height and weight, BMI places minimal burden on participants compared to other methods and is recognized as a powerful tool for predicting morbidity and mortality (Flegal et al. 2009; Gibson 2005). For these reasons BMI is used internationally for conducting health research and assessments (WHO 2004). Among Asian populations, however, standard WHO cut-offs for BMI have been shown to underestimate overweight and obesity based on actual % body fatness and to substantially under predict risk for metabolic and cardiovascular diseases (Clarkin 2008; Pan et al. 2004; Chang et al. 2003; Deurenberg et al. 2002). WHO currently acknowledges that risk for these diseases is significantly higher for Asian populations at BMIs lower than 25 (current cutoff for overweight), but the data are unclear as to what cutoffs are appropriate for Asian populations and the current WHO cutoff remain in effect (WHO 2004).

BMI is only an approximation of %BF (NIH 2015). Percent Body Fatness is more directly linked to cardiovascular and metabolic diseases, making %BF cutoffs better benchmarks for classifying overweight and obesity than BMI, particularly in cases where BMI has been shown to under predict these statuses. Many researchers working with Asian populations have begun to use %BF, among other body composition measurement and classification methods, as alternatives to WHO BMI overweight/obesity cutoffs to better capture disease risk in these groups (e.g. Deurenberg-Yap et al. 2003; Wen et al. 2009). For the current sample of Bhutanese refugees, I calculated BMI and %BF data to facilitate comparison against WHO and non-WHO literature on nutritional status among other refugees, and to provide a more accurate assessment of body fatness in the Bhutanese community and for comparison with BMI data. To collect %BF data I used a portable foot-to-foot Tanita BF 350 bioelectrical impedance analyzer (BIA). BIA technology measures fat content by measuring the level of resistance to a low-frequency current sent through the body and is considered a reliable and convenient method for assessing %BF and body composition (Clarkin 2005; Baumgartner, 1998). These data were then grouped according to nutritional status cutoffs (underweight, normal, overweight, and obese) for adults and children established by Gallagher et al. (2000) and McCarthy et al. (2006) based on chronic disease risk.

A total of 104 Bhutanese adults and children (ages 6 – 82) participated in the anthropometric component of this study (sample description can be found on page 95). All anthropometric data collection took place in the living rooms and kitchens of participant's apartments and houses. A brief survey of household composition (size, age, gender, number of employed members, and

self-reported diabetes diagnoses) was taken at the beginning of each assessment. In order to calculate BMI, height and weight values were collected following the protocol outlined by Lohman et al. (1988). Height was measured to the nearest .01 centimeter using a professional grade SECA 217 stadiometer. Weight and %BF values were measured simultaneously using a Tanita digital scale equipped with BIA technology. Participant's height, age and sex data were typed into the scale. Participants were then instructed to stand barefoot for several seconds on the scale to maximize contact with the electrodes while the instrument measured weight and calculated their %BF values. Weight was measured to the nearest .1 kilograms. Percent body fatness was determined on location by an internally programmed regression equation based on a multi-ethnic sample that accounts for age, sex, height, and weight (Nunez et al. 1997).

BMI was then calculated using height and weight data. Both BMI and %BF were grouped by age and sex into the appropriate nutritional status categories. For adults [age 20 and above], BMI values are age-independent and the same for both sexes (WHO 2016). Adult participants were grouped into BMI categories according to WHO (2016) nutrition status cutoffs for underweight (BMI < 18.5), normal weight (BMI 18.5 ≤ 24.9), overweight (BMI 25 ≤ 29.9), and obese (BMI ≥ 30). Body compositions for children and adolescents [age 5 to 19 years] vary by age and sex as a consequence of normal patterns of growth and development, and are converted to percentiles and/or z-scores for easier comparison (de Onis et al. 2008). Child and adolescent BMIs were converted to z-scores and percentiles using WHO Anthro Plus and grouped into nutrition status categories for underweight (<5<sup>th</sup> percentile), normal weight (5<sup>th</sup> to < 85<sup>th</sup> percentile), overweight (85<sup>th</sup> to < 95<sup>th</sup> percentile), and obese (≥ 95<sup>th</sup> percentile). Meanwhile for %BF all adult participants were grouped into nutrition status categories (underweight, normal, overweight, obese) based on recommended age/sex ranges for body fatness outlined by Gallagher et al. (2000). Child and adolescent participants were similarly grouped according to nutritional status categories based on recommended age/sex ranges for body fatness outlined by McCarthy et al. (2006).

## Data Analysis

Analytical techniques for each research objectives are outlined in Table 2.2. More thorough descriptions of each analytical technique are provided in the paragraphs that follow.

**Table 2.2.** Main Objectives and Analytical Techniques

Research Objective	Analytical Techniques
Specific Aims of Objective (1)	
a) Establish a historical context for understanding the Bhutanese refugee crisis and process of U.S. resettlement, which shaped the experiences of participants in this study	- <i>Literature review</i> - <i>Thematic coding in NVIVO 10<sup>TM</sup> of interview data for common experiences in community that relate to historical events behind the Bhutanese refugee crisis</i>
Specific Aims of Objective (2)	
a) Identify the sociocultural and structural conditions that facilitate /challenge integration (i.e. influences which participants perceive to moderate access to resources, social connections, financial stability, cultural citizenship, and health and wellbeing)	- <i>Thematic coding of sociocultural and structural facilitators/challenges to integration</i> - <i>Thematic coding of individual, family, and community level responses to facilitators/challenges.</i>
b) Identify individual, family, and community level responses to these facilitators/challenges, and consider how different responses may be shaped by socio-demographic differences	- <i>Thematic coding of the sociodemographic differences (e.g. age, gender, caste position, employment/education background) that participants used to explain why community/family members responded differently to post-resettlement conditions.</i>

**Table 2.2 Continued**

Research Objective	Analytical Techniques
<i>Specific Aims of Objective (3)</i>	
a) Identify facilitators/ challenges to integration which relate to diet and/or exercise beliefs and behaviors	- <i>Thematic Coding of sociocultural and structural facilitators/challenges which impact diet and activity related beliefs and behaviors</i>
b) Identify individual, family, and community level responses to these facilitators/challenges which impact diet and exercise beliefs and behaviors, and consider how different responses may be shaped by socio-demographic differences	- <i>Thematic coding of individual, family, and community level responses to facilitators/challenges which impact diet and activity.</i>
c) Identify common foods in Bhutanese refugees' post-resettlement diets, including their nutritional quality, and consumption patterns	- <i>Thematic coding of the sociodemographic differences (e.g. age, gender, caste position, employment/education background) that interview participants used to explain why community/family members responded differently to post-resettlement conditions.</i>
d) Identify trends in nutritional status (normal, overweight, obesity) and diabetes in the overall community and based on socio-demographic differences. Examine these trends in light of refugees' dietary and physical activity patterns.	- <i>Food inventory items summarized in frequency table demonstrating the relative proportion of each food, and grouped according to Traffic Light food quality diet categories (Red, Yellow, Green) with ethnographic description of food and related consumption patterns</i>
e) For perspective, compare overall nutritional health trends in sample against U.S. and other U.S. refugees.	- <i>Descriptive statistics for height, weight, BMI and %BF, and diabetes for sample as whole, age, and sex</i> - <i>Chi-square analyses of BMI and %BF nutritional status categories (normal, overweight, obese) based on demographic characteristics from anthropometric sample</i> - <i>Z-test of proportions comparing overweight/ obesity, and diabetes in current sample against U.S. population and other U.S. refugees from recent literature (2008-2015)</i>

***Analysis of Objective 1: Provide an overview to the history and culture of Bhutanese refugees, including their experiences and backgrounds and the political economic processes that contributed to their displacement from Bhutan, confinement in Nepal, and eventual resettlement in the U.S. (Chapter 3)***

Analysis for Objective 1 was based on a literature review of the history and culture of ethnic Nepalis from Bhutan who are currently known as Bhutanese refugees and from life history data collected during semi structured interviews which were used to provide *lived* perspectives on important events in their broader historical narrative. Significant historical events related to the existence of ethnic Nepalis in Bhutan and their displacement were drawn from academic sources and from political policy documents and served as the foundation for the historical narrative represented in chapter 3 of this dissertation. In the research and writing process, I divided this narrative into four stages for clarity: the refugee crisis in Bhutan, life in Nepali refugee camps, preparing for third country resettlement, and the process of U.S. resettlement.

Thematic coding of semi structured interviews was conducted using NVIVO 10™ (QSR 2010) to identify common experiences across the sample that related to significant historical events/conditions that emerged during the literature review to provide perspectives on these events from the Bhutanese refugees in Prospect City, and to illustrate how these events impacted access to resources, social connections, financial stability, cultural citizenship/belonging, and health and wellbeing. Quotes were selected to be included in the ethnographic analysis that best exemplified common experiences within the sample; however in cases where participants provided a competing or unique perspective, these ethnographic examples were also included in the text to demonstrate that diverse opinions/experiences exist in the community.

The goal of Objective one is to provide a contextual understanding, in narrative form, of the political economic conditions that shaped the process of displacement and initial stages of resettlement for Bhutanese refugees in order to build a foundational understanding of the history, motivations, and structural parameters guiding them through the process of U.S. integration. Specific research questions which structured my analysis of the literature and my selection of ethnographic content for inclusion in chapter three included: What regional contexts, political powers, cultural ideologies, and economic conditions contributed to the presence of ethnic Nepalis in Bhutan and their eventual displacement? What power structures and political economic ideologies shaped the establishment, organization, and management of the refugee camps in Nepal, and what implications did this have for the types of opportunities (temporary and long-term) afforded to the Bhutanese refugees who were living in these camps? What international, federal, state, and local power structures control the selection and placement process of refugee resettlement in the U.S.? And finally, what implications do these processes have for the types of opportunities and challenges that Bhutanese refugees face in the U.S. after resettlement? What experiences and memories do participants in this study have which relate to these events and how does this positively or negatively shape their perceptions of U.S. resettlement?

*Analysis of Objective 2: Identify what sociocultural and structural conditions Bhutanese refugees perceive to facilitate or challenge the process of U.S. integration, and, subsequently, what historical experiences and sociodemographic characteristics participants perceived to be important in guiding the types of strategies being used by community members to negotiate these conditions (Chapter 4).*

Analysis for Objective 2 was based on data collected during semi-structured interviews and participant observations. All interviews and observation field notes were transcribed and loaded onto N Vivo 10 ethnographic software (QSR 2010). To address objective 2a, thematic coding was conducted to identify the most important sociocultural and structural conditions Bhutanese refugees perceived to impede or facilitate their ability to access resources, find employment, develop social connections, and establish cultural citizenship/belonging, health and wellbeing during the process of resettlement. Sociocultural influences included the ideas, messages, and pressures which came from social interactions with Bhutanese/non-Bhutanese family, friends, peers, and colleagues. Structural influences included the ideas, messages, and pressures which came from institutions and broader U.S., state, and local policies guiding refugee resettlement in the U.S.

To address objective 2b, subsequent coding was conducted to identify any individual, family, or community level strategies which related to the structural and sociocultural conditions identified in objective 2a, and, further, to explore whether participants perceive demographic differences (e.g., age, gender, caste, employment/education status) in their community as important influences on the types of strategies being used to accommodate post-resettlement conditions. For the purposes of this study a “strategy” was defined as a deliberate modification in thought and/or behavior in response to specific sociocultural or structural influences in order to secure access to resources, employment opportunities, social connections, cultural citizenship/belonging, and health and wellbeing. Strategies were coded as “individual,” “family,” or “community” based on whether the benefit of these efforts targeted the individual, family, or community as a whole and recorded beside the corresponding sub theme. When participants noted sociodemographic factors (age, gender, caste, etc.) as important influences on these, sociodemographic sub-codes were assigned to the relevant segments of ethnographic data for description during the ethnographic analysis in chapter four.

All salient sociocultural and structural factors identified as a “facilitator” or “challenge” to integration were summarized in a data matrix (see example Table 2.3), including any related sociodemographic factors, strategies, and the integration domains (resources, social connections, financial stability, cultural citizenship/belonging, and health and wellbeing). The matrix helped to

organize sociocultural and structural influences according to general importance and demonstrate the range of related sociodemographic factors and strategies being used by members of the community to respond to integration conditions.

**Table 2.3.** Structural and Sociocultural Facilitators and Challenges to Integration and associated Refugee Strategies

	Impact on Integration					Interacting Socio-demographic Factors	Refugee strategies to respond to structural and sociocultural facilitators/challenges			Integration Domains Affected
	Endorsed as Facilitator		Endorsed as Challenge		Did not Discuss		Individual Strategies	Family Strategies	Community Strategies	
	n=	%	n=	%	n=					
Primary Theme 1										
Sub theme 1										
Primary Theme 2										
Sub theme 1										
Sub theme 2										
and etc...										

*Analysis of Objective 3: Determine how refugees' responses to conditions that facilitate or interfere with integration translate into food-related strategies and physical activity patterns and consider their implications for optimal energy balance (energy intake/output) and subsequent trends in nutritional health (overweight, obesity, and diabetes). Compare overall nutritional health trends in the sample against the U.S. and other U.S. refugees. (Chapter 5)*

Analysis of Objective 3 was based on data collected during interviews, observations, and anthropometrics. To satisfy objective 3a, thematic coding was conducted to identify salient sociocultural and structural influences which impacted diet and physical activity related beliefs and behaviors among participants in this study. All food related sociocultural and structural themes were defined and coded and summarized as for Objective 2, but with the criteria of focusing only on those which participants identified as directly or indirectly impacting their access to dietary resources and/or consumption patterns/beliefs rather than ability to integrate (See example Table 2.4).

**Table 2.4.** Structural and Sociocultural Facilitators and Challenges to Food Access and/or Dietary Preferences and associated Food Related Strategies

	Impact on access to food resources or dietary preferences					Interacting Socio-demographic Factors	Refugee food related strategies to respond to structural and sociocultural facilitators/challenges			Impact on Consumption and/or Food Choice Behaviors
	Endorsed as Facilitator		Endorsed as Challenge		Did not Discuss		Individual Strategies	Family Strategies	Community Strategies	
	n=	%	n=	%	n=					
Primary Theme 1										
Sub theme 1										
Primary Theme 2										
Sub theme 1										
Sub theme 2										
and etc...										

Additionally, interviews were coded for participant descriptions of physical activity patterns before and after U.S. resettlement. Demographic influences were also noted with regards to physical activity when participants discussed differences in their families or community based on age, caste position, language ability, gender, prior experiences, wave of U.S. arrival, and/or employment/education status. All sociocultural and structural themes that related to pre and post-

resettlement physical activity patterns that emerged during interviews were summarized in a table with the number/proportion of participant endorsements and number/proportion of participants who did not discuss that particular factor to demonstrate its importance in the sample (see example of exercise theme Table 2.5).

**Table 2.5.** Themes related to post-resettlement changes in exercise and nutritional health (weight status and diabetes) that emerged during interviews

	Endorsed Theme		Did not Discuss	
	n=	%	n=	%
Exercise related theme 1				
Exercise related theme 2				
Etc..				

To address objective 3b, subsequent coding was conducted to identify individual, family, or community level food-related strategies developed in response to the structural and sociocultural conditions identified in objective 3a, and, further, to explore the potential role that participants perceive demographic differences to play in shaping the types of strategies being used by community members (e.g., age, gender, caste, employment/education status). For the purposes of this study a food-related “strategy” was defined as a deliberate modification to dietary beliefs and/or behaviors in response to specific sociocultural or structural influences in order to secure access to resources, employment opportunities, social connections, cultural citizenship/belonging, and health and wellbeing. Food related strategies were coded as “individual,” “family,” or “community” level based on whether their benefits targeted the individual, family, or community as a whole. When participants noted sociodemographic factors (age, gender, caste, etc.) as important influences on these strategies, sociodemographic sub-codes were assigned to the relevant segments of ethnographic data for description during the ethnographic analysis in chapter five.

All salient sociocultural and structural factors identified as a “facilitator” or “challenge” to food access and/or food practices and beliefs were summarized in a data matrix (see example Table 2.4), including any related sociodemographic factors, food related strategies, and impact on dietary behavior (i.e. consumption patterns and food choices). The matrix helped to organize sociocultural and structural influences according to general importance and demonstrate the range of related sociodemographic factors and strategies being used by members of the community to respond to integration conditions.

To address objective 3c, the nutritional quality of each food item listed on the food inventory during the research period was identified using the Traffic Light diet system (Epstein et al. 2001; Dodds et al. 2014): green for go, yellow for caution, and red for stop. “Green” foods are foods that are recommended as part of daily diet, may be eaten as often as one likes, and are low in fat, sugar and calories. “Yellow” foods are high in many nutrients that are important for overall health but are also high in fats, sugars, and calories and should not be consumed more than once per day (Epstein et al. 2001). “Red” foods are foods that are recommended no more than one time per week and have excessive amounts of fats, sugars, and high calorie content compared to other nutrients. After grouping foods according to the traffic light diet, interview and observational data were indexed for the highest ranked food items from each category and thematic coding was conducted with each food item to identify common consumption/preparation patterns in the sample.

All food items were then summarized on a table (see example Table 2.6) according to food group and traffic light color alongside an ethnographic description of highest ranked foods from each food group. In each traffic light category the food items were ranked in descending order from the most to least observed/ endorsed. On separate tables the relative proportions of foods grouped according to traffic light color within each food group were summarized (see example Table 2.7) and the relative proportions of foods grouped in each traffic light category from all food groups were summarized (see example Table 2.8) to compare the importance of each

traffic light color within each food group and against other food groups in the overall diet. Common consumption patterns associated with important food items from each food group that emerged during ethnographic coding were summarized using participant quotes and researcher observations and included in the food inventory table to further clarify their role in the diet and contribute more information about energy balance in the community.

**Table 2.6.** Summary of food inventory grouped according to “traffic light” color with ethnographic description of consumption patterns surrounding high ranking food items

Food Groups	Traffic Light Color			Ethnographic of consumption patterns associated with the food group
	Green	Yellow	Red	
Vegetables				
Fruits				
Etc.				

**Table 2.7.** Table summarizing the relative proportions of foods items in each traffic light category (green, yellow, red) for each food group

Food Groups	Traffic Light Colors			
	Green	Yellow	Red	Total
Vegetables				
Fruits				
Etc.				

**Table 2.8.** Table summarizing the relative proportions of food groups, and the relative proportions of food items from different food groups in each traffic light category

Food Groups	Relative Proportion of Food Groups	Relative proportion of food groups classified under individual traffic light colors		
		Green	Yellow	Red
		Vegetables		
Fruits				
Etc..				
Total				

To satisfy objectives 3d and 3e, all anthropometric and demographic data from the anthropometric sample were entered into Mini-tab 17 statistical software (Minitab 2015) for analysis. Anthropometric descriptive statistics were calculated for height, weight, BMI and %BF for the sample, and the z-test for proportions were used to compare overweight/obesity and self reported diabetes diagnoses in the current sample against proportions reported in the recent literature (2011 – 2015) for the general U.S. population as well as immigrants and refugees.

Finally, statistical analyses were conducted to determine relationships between nutritional status and socio-demographic characteristics in the sample. Ordinal logistic regression analyses were run to investigate whether age predicted rates of overweight and obesity based on BMI and %BF for the sample as a whole and for males and females separately. Chi-square tests of independence were then calculated comparing the frequencies of underweight, normal, overweight, or obese by employment status, education status, vegetarian status, and caste position to determine if significant differences in nutritional status outcomes exist based on these socio demographic characteristics. Post-hoc analyses were conducted using the z-test for proportions to clarify the directionality of significant chi-square findings. All anthropometric and nutritional status results were summarized in tables, and significant results are presented graphically.

## Conclusion

Grounded in human adaptability and political economic theories, and adopting a biocultural approach, this dissertation investigates how Bhutanese refugees negotiate changing *structural and sociocultural conditions* and considers the consequences these negotiations may have for optimal energy balance and nutritional status. The methods and analyses that I have described above serve these functions. First I elucidate the relevant historical processes and experiences which guide Bhutanese refugee's own integration motivations. Then I establish the political economic agendas in the U.S. which set the foundations for how refugees are expected to behave in order to access resources and successfully integrate. From this interaction, I then identify which past and present conditions, in particular, are most relevant to understanding diet and exercise patterns in the community, assuming that these patterns are shaped by the combination of prior knowledge and present circumstances. Then, using these two components of the energy-balance equation, i.e., dietary and physical activity, I provide a more complex contextual analysis of the nutritional status trends that I observed in the community, comparing these findings against nutritional status trends I documented using anthropometric techniques. In combining these methods, I aim to identify important relationships that link refugee nutritional health to ongoing processes of resettlement, meanwhile speaking to broader anthropological questions about the ways that people, as cultural and biological beings, engage with and adapt to contexts characterized by rapid change.



### Chapter 3: Narratives of Displacement: Historical Context on the Bhutanese Refugee Crisis and Resettlement Experiences in Prospect City

#### Introduction

According to the 1951 Convention Relating the Status of Refugees, the term “refugee” applies to anyone who *“owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”* (UNHCR, 2016)

Today, many in the world have received the politically significant label of “refugee” and through it have participated in the ongoing transglobal flow of people forced to flee their homelands and rebuild their lives in new and unfamiliar places. In most of these cases, the political and cultural roots of their persecution are eclipsed by the more heinous acts of violence accompanying them. Cases such as these are ubiquitous in international media, but their stories are not new. Today’s internet updates on the death tolls in Syria are modern incarnations of newspaper headlines from past decades on the number of Jews escaping the atrocities of Nazi concentration camps in WWII, Hmong torture victims from Laos following Vietnam, or the Rwandan genocides in the 1990’s.

By comparison, the Bhutanese refugee crisis in 1991, which culminated in the expulsion of roughly one sixth of Bhutan’s population (HRW 2003), occurred in a media vacuum. But as, Valentine Daniel (1996:52) has stated “history is not so much about finding truth as it is about making true,” illustrating, much like Foucault (1977: 28), how political and social power derive legitimacy from narratives which attempt to establish and organize knowledge. Twenty years later, while the last of the Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal are disbanded and the final families resettle in the U.S. and other countries, rather than being pinned as the setting of political and cultural upheaval, it is with great irony that Bhutan is celebrated for being one of the “happiest” countries on the planet (Kamenev 2006) and for having a “uniquely preserved cultural heritage” that is “isolated” from the modern world.

As a discussion about refugees and foreign resettlement, this dissertation naturally touches on issues of power. By this, I mean the power of a government to evict a substantial portion of its population; or the power of an international body to then label a person a “refugee” and determine their subsequent placement and access to resources. But it also includes the power that individuals hold as agents to make choices and navigate their options to best suit their immediate and long term needs. In this chapter I examine the Bhutanese Refugee Crisis of the 1980s and 1990s from a political economic standpoint to foreground the different types of structural power (i.e. *political* and *institutional*) that played a role in displacing ethnic Nepalis from Bhutan and shaping their pre- and post-resettlement circumstances. I do this in narrative form—as displacement and resettlement are processes that extend through time—and I pay careful attention to contexts and players in each historical moment, including participant’s experiences, to better illustrate these shifting relations of power.

Before moving on, it is important to emphasize that it is not my intention to privilege one “history” over another, but to demonstrate how perceptions of truth, in the construction of history become just as important as the actual interactions between Bhutanese refugees and the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB) in shaping the events that unfolded. Combining these varying sources of knowledge and experience, I also hope to provide at least a general understanding of the events, misconceptions, and contentions which contributed to the Bhutanese Refugee Crisis. But, I must also acknowledge my own role as “editor” in selecting the relevant events, important players, and individual narratives as I develop this chapter, and I encourage the reader to view

this particular representation of the Bhutanese Refugee Crisis as my own interpretation of these events and their connections through time.

The political economic framework that I use throughout this chapter and dissertation relates specifically to the dimensions of *institutional* and *political* power which have shaped the lives of Bhutanese refugees, including their displacement, resettlement, and the opportunities and constraints that they have encountered and negotiated throughout this process. Eric Wolf (1982; 2001) and William Roseberry (1998:75, 79-81) speak of political economy as the “mobilization of resources and labor” through historically configured relations of power. They challenge us, as anthropologists, to “seek the connections” which link people through historical processes to larger structures at the global and local levels (Wolf 1982; Roseberry 1998:75, 79-81), and to ask how these relationships differentially mediate the distribution of resources and labor (Roseberry 1998).

I argue that refugee resettlement is an outcome of complex power relations, and is grounded in historically rooted political economic processes. And while this is not often a central feature in academic discussions about refugees, these processes culminate in the appropriation of refugee labor for capitalist enterprises. Therefore, when I say that I use a “political economic” framework I mean that I aim to elucidate the relations of power, within their historical contexts, which have shaped the circumstances of Bhutanese refugees in this study. This includes the policies, politics, and bureaucracy behind their displacement and resettlement that have been used to determine their eligibility for refugee status, their placement on foreign soils, access to resources, and their eventual participation in the U.S. labor force.

I begin this chapter with what is known about the social and political economic conditions that led to expulsion of ethnic Nepali people from Bhutan by first addressing controversies over why they were in Bhutan, for how long and why the RGOB felt compelled to evict them from its borders. Following along the chronology of their displacement, I then explore the role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in managing displaced people, and what these protocols have meant for the Bhutanese exiles in terms of their twenty year confinement in Nepali refugee camps as well as their prospects for finding a “durable solution” to this protracted situation. Finally, I examine the ins and outs of the U.S. resettlement and admissions program (USRAP) considering the policies and politics that shape refugee placement, employment opportunities, and funding procedures which have relevance to the Bhutanese community in Prospect City. Along the way I consider how these broader structures articulate with the experiences of Bhutanese refugees who participated in this study, hoping to illustrate how a history of displacement, their experiences in the camps, and the political economy of U.S. refugee policies begin to define the opportunities and constraints they face today and in years to come.

### **Bhutan: Geographical and Ethnic Background**

The Kingdom of Bhutan is a small landlocked nation state nestled on the eastern rim of the Himalayan range (see Appendix A for atlas map of Bhutan and Nepal). To its immediate north lies what is now Tibet Autonomous Region (occupied by China). To its south is India, including the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, West Bengal, and Sikkim known since colonial times for agriculture and tea production. As a part of the Himalayan range, Bhutan’s topography is characterized by a dramatic change in elevation from its north to south. The highest peaks rise up to 24,836 feet and descend precipitously into the more temperate and arable foothills of Bhutan’s central territory. Elevation then continues to descend more gradually southward until reaching a thin swathe of hilly, but densely vegetated subtropical forest that cradles Bhutan’s southernmost border with India—a mere 660 feet above sea level. Despite its small size and unrelenting elevation change, the particular geopolitical space which Bhutan occupies once held an important position in British strategies for maintaining its colonial hold over India (Collister 1987; Hutt 2004; Rose 1974). Although some have hailed Bhutan’s seeming “isolation” and independ-

ence from colonial takeover (Mathou 1999), it seems that in many respects the differential articulation of British activities with rivaling indigenous power structures and local economies within and around Bhutan helped to shape it into the sovereign state that it is today (Collister 1987; Hutt 2004) and set in motion the events which sparked the Bhutanese Refugee Crisis of the 80s and 90s.

In terms of its population, Bhutan is divided along three ethnic categories: the Ngalong, the Sharchop, and Lhotshampa (Dhakal et al. 1994). Together the Ngalong, and Sharchop practice sub-varieties of a Tibetan style of Mahayana Buddhism, and occupy the northern sub-alpine stretches of Bhutan as well as its temperate central zones (Dhakal et al. 1994; Hutt 2004). The Ngalong are believed to be among the earliest of the three groups to inhabit Bhutan, settling its north western and central mountain ranges in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries AD (Aris 1979), and are also attributed with bringing Buddhism into the region—the predominate religion in Bhutan (Hutt 2004). The Sharchop are also Buddhist, but they adhere to a different school of Mahayana Buddhism and inhabit the northeastern corner of the country (Hutt 2004). Together the Ngalong and Sharchop are included under the more general ethnonym *Drukpa* which is derived from the Drukpa Kaygu school of Buddhism practiced by the Ngalong (Hutt 2004). By contrast, the *Lhotshampas*, which Michael Hutt (2004) translates as “southern borderlanders” are a majority Hindu, and share greater cultural and linguistic ties to Nepal than they do to the Drukpa Buddhists of the north—they adhere to the caste-system and speak Nepali as their primary language. These differences are significant in the broader ethno-political context of Bhutan, and by and large, the Lhotshampas comprise the majority of refugees exiled from the country in the 80s and 90s (Piper 1995).

### **Bhutanese Refugee Crisis**

***They came from Nepal:*** While there have been extensive historical analyses of the Ngalong and Sharchop of northern Bhutan (e.g. Rose 1974, 1963; Aris 2005, 1979), the people of its south eluded historical documentation until the arrival of British surveyors in the late 1800s (Evans 2010; Hutt 2004). Whether this was the result of an oversight on part of the Bhutanese rulers at the time or because Nepali immigrants didn’t arrive in Bhutan until around the time the British arrived is a source of contention between the historical narratives of the refugees and the RGOB. In interviews conducted in refugee camps by Michael Hutt (2004) several of his informants claimed to have been in the region for many generations. This narrative places them in south Bhutan in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries when the *Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal* of Tibet commissioned Nepali laborers to assist in the building of local temples in Bhutan (Hutt 2004). Hutt (2004) had a difficult time substantiating these claims with historical evidence. However, he hesitates to discard them outright because there were indeed interactions between Tibet, Nepal, and Bhutan during those years which could have involved the exchange of Nepalese labor. The RGOB, in contrast, contends to this day that Nepali immigrants didn’t arrive in Bhutan until the early to mid 1900s, and that the status of their arrival was only as “temporary” laborers (Hutt 2005; HRW 2003). Thus we have an issue of historical precedence and a question of overall legitimacy within both accounts.

Colonial survey and census records do tell us that there was a substantial Nepali population just south of the Bhutanese border in India by the 1830s (Hutt 2004). Several push and pull factors appear to have influenced this population shift (Dhakal et al. 1994; Hutt 2004; Evans 2010). At the time, Nepal was suffering a crisis in its southeastern districts with too many people for the amount of available farm land (Hutt 2004). Heightened pressures caused many to leave the region. Meanwhile, the British colonial hold on India and its surrounding area was well underway. The East India Company was in the process of establishing tea gardens in Assam, Sikkim and Darjeeling, pulling in laborers to meet the demand from growing foreign markets (Hutt 2004). The influence this economic development had on mobility of people in the region cannot

be overemphasized. Pradhan (1991) has estimated that up to 15 % of Nepal's eastern *Kiranti* population migrated to north India to work on tea plantations at this time, and there remain patterns migration to this day as a result of tea production.<sup>7</sup> With a substantial Nepali community working only miles from the border of Bhutan, it is not unreasonable to assume that some pushed further northeast and began cultivating Bhutan's southern hills.

British economic interests in Bhutan officially began in 1765 when Maharaja Dharendra Narayan requested the help of the British East India Company to help remove "bootanese" raiders from his kingdom—land which the Bhutanese rulership perceived as their own. While this was only intended as a temporary mission, the region's potential as a staging ground for establishing future trade relations with Tibet and China became clear, and the East India Company decided to remain in Bihar to send prospecting expeditions north into Bhutanese territory. Unfortunately, relations with Bhutan were marred by the fact that the East India Company had assisted the Maharaja in pushing them out of Kuch Bihar.

After two failed diplomatic attempts at reestablishing peace, the East India Company finally secured access to the region by military force in what became known as the "Duars Wars" (Collister 1987). Within 5 months, Bhutanese forces were suppressed, and in the signing of the "Sinchula Treaty," Bhutan ceded the regions of Assam and Bengal to Britain. But in order to maintain positive relations with Bhutan, Britain agreed to pay Bhutan an annual fee of Rs 50,000 in order to compensate for its losses (Singh 1988). In addition, Bhutan was allowed to manage all of its domestic issues and maintain cultural dominance in the region (Dhakal et al. 1996; Hutt 2004). Meanwhile Britain acquired the more profitable role of managing all foreign relations for Bhutan, which allowed the East India Company to travel freely through the region for trade purposes and to begin cultivating newly acquired fertile land for tea production (Dhakal et al. 1996; Hutt 2004).

Several important developments came out of the new relationship established between Britain and Bhutan in the Treaty of Sinchula that relate to the Nepali immigrants in Bhutan's southern region and the refugee crisis that occurred in the late twentieth century. Foremost, Britain's continued military and economic presence in the region destabilized political power in Bhutan, toppling the Tibetan derived theocracy that had maintained control for over two centuries. This made space for new rulership to take hold, and in 1907, Ugyen Wangchuck, a former *Penlop* (Tibetan word for governor) of central Bhutan lauded for his strong British ties, was appointed as the first Hereditary King of Bhutan (Rose 1977).

It is unclear exactly what the decision-making process was like in determining Ugyen Wangchuck's appointment to the throne. Yet, to this day, the "House of Wangchuck" rules Bhutan<sup>8</sup> and its strong Tibetan influences have helped to solidify Buddhist dominance in the region. While not a "puppet" to British rule per-se, Ugyen Wangchuck's relationship with the East India Company made him an asset to colonial interests (Dhakal et al. 1994), also cementing British influences in the region. Meanwhile, the increasing demand for tea production from Europe brought new vigor to the flow of economic migrants from Nepal to Bhutan to begin cultivating East India Company's newly acquired farm land (Dhakal et al. 1994; Hutt 2004). By 1933, the population of Nepali farmers in Bhutan had increased to over 60,000 (Sinha 1991).

***Bhutanese Citizenship:*** The rising population of Nepali farmers in south Bhutan caused tensions to rise between Britain and the Bhutanese rulership in the midst of broader geopolitical changes sweeping South Asia. As a Buddhist monarchy, the House of Wangchuck was uneasy with the expansion of Hindu beliefs and practices across its southern lowlands (Hutt 1996; 2004;

<sup>7</sup> These same push and pull factors were still happening in the late 1980s and early 90s shaping southern Bhutan's population. Several of the participants in this study recall traversing the borders of India, Nepal, and Bhutan frequently to work on the still very active tea farms before the height of the refugee crisis.

<sup>8</sup> In 2008, the RGOB declared itself a constitutional monarchy in an effort to become more "democratic" in the modern age.

Rizal 2004; Evans 2010). The cultural similarities between the Nepali immigrants and the people of north India threatened Bhutan's claim on the region, both politically and culturally. Meanwhile, China was in the process of advancing its cultural and political dominance into Tibet (Singh 1988; Collister 1987). This move did not go unnoticed by the British Raj and the East India Company who felt threatened by China's proximity to their colonial land holdings and sources of tea revenue (Collister 1987; Singh 1988; Hutt 2004).

With China looming just over the Himalayas, the Nepali population on Bhutan's southern rim suddenly became a fortuitous cultural and political buffer for Britain (Collister 1987). Under pressure from the British Raj—who held the reins on Bhutan's foreign relations after the signing of the Sinchula Treaty—the RGOB agreed to allow immigrants from Nepal to continue settling its southern regions to help protect India's highly profitable tea and agricultural industries (Hutt 2004). However, the Drukpa Bhutanese elite were intent on protecting their own vulnerabilities, and immediately began to document and register the Nepali settlements on its southern border so that they could be more easily managed (Hutt 2004). This was the first step towards integrating Nepali settlers into Bhutan's national fold.

In his analysis of the growth of state power in South Asia, James Scott (2014:43) has described how geographical space can limit state control over its peripheral populations—a problem he refers to as “the friction of terrain.” According to Dhakal and Strawn (1994:110-115) prior to the influx of Nepali migrants in the late 1800s, southern Bhutan was riddled with dense forests and malaria and was mostly uninhabited. Nepali migrants began clearing and cultivating the region, opening it to new economic development. But they remained distant from *Thimphu*, Bhutan's power center high in the northern mountains. This presented political, economic, and cultural challenges to the Bhutanese elite, who saw control of the south slipping away. To span this void and gain control of the Nepali settlements the RGOB took several political and economic measures, which, in retrospect, have been noted for having an important modernizing effect on Bhutan (Dhakal et al. 1994; Hutt 2004).

Head men, or *Thekadar*, were appointed from each village in southern Bhutan to manage domestic disputes and act as an interface with the Monarchy (Hutt 2004). To facilitate these interactions and maintain more consistent political oversight, new infrastructures had to be developed, including roads, schools, as well as bureaucratic protocols for documenting land ownership, productivity, and household sizes (Hutt 2004; Dhakal et al. 1994). Taxes were also levied, but Nepali migrants had a history of working within a British economic system and had become accustomed to a cash economy. So for the first time, rather than taxing “in kind,” as had been the tradition in the Northern Bhutanese populations, Nepalis were taxed mostly in cash, requiring Bhutan to embrace a monetary taxation system (Hutt 2004; Dhakal et al. 1994).<sup>9</sup>

In the midst of a modernizing Bhutan, political tensions were mounting in India, which loomed even closer in light of the improvements in roads and communication across the Bhutanese landscape. In 1947, as a result of the relentless efforts of the Indian Independence movement, Britain relinquished its colonial hold over India, leaving a power vacuum in its wake (Singh 2011). Neighboring polities were left scrambling to reassert their control and preempt similar uprisings. Dhakal and Strawn (1996) as well as Rizal (2004) suggest that India's independence movement, as well as the Gorkhaland movement in Nepal in the 1980s may have contributed to a heightened xenophobia among Bhutan's elite. As economic interactions grew closer between the Nepali settlements in the south and Bhutanese government in the north, the threat of ethno-political turmoil within its own borders became more palpable, forcing the RGOB to start considering strategies for unifying their culturally disparate populations.

In 1958, these fears manifested in a positive way as the government, under the rule of Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (third King of Bhutan) made efforts to mollify cultural differences with-

<sup>9</sup> To “tax in kind” involved the collection of a percentage of produce. For instance, if you grow chickens, you are taxed an annual number of chickens, etc.

in its borders by offering its Nepali subjects a pathway to Bhutanese Citizenship. In the Citizenship Act of 1958 the RGOB offered citizenship to all people of Nepali descent who could prove that they had lived in Bhutan for 10 years (Hutt 2004). Moreover, in an effort to further blur the lines of ethnic difference the act encouraged intermarriage between Nepali and Bhutanese men and women (Dhakal et al. 1994). Following this sweeping and unprecedented grant of citizenship, Hutt (2004) describes a brief “honeymoon period” in Bhutan. In the two decades following 1958, Nepali settlers experienced significant improvements in their circumstances and were given new lands to cultivate and new educational opportunities. The south and its newly cultivated fields were becoming highly productive and economically valuable. Roads were built connecting *Thimpu*, the Capital of Bhutan, to its southern regions. This allowed King Wangchuck to travel south for the first time to meet the Nepali settlers and discuss national issues (Dhakal et al. 1994). Meanwhile, schools were built in the south and taught in both English and Nepali (Hutt 2004).<sup>10</sup>

But for some reason, in the 1980s, the honeymoon period took a sudden turn, and many ethnic Nepalis who had been granted citizenship in the years prior lost their citizenship without explanation. These changes came as a surprise to many older participants in this study.

Life was pretty good in Bhutan for my father and grandfather [...] We were farmers. We didn't get anything from the government, so we grew our food for our living. We would eat most of what we grew, but we would sell it too sometimes. We grew rice, maize, wheat, cardamom, and some other spices [...] But a lot of discrimination from the government started to happen in my lifetime when I was about 40 and we were kicked out of the country because of it. We were compelled to stay in Nepal. (Ganga, male, age 60)

**One Nation One People:** Participants in this study were not exactly sure why Bhutan's approach to integrating its southern Nepali settlements suddenly turned hostile towards them in the late 70s and early 80s. As Evans (2010) and Rizal (2004) have suggested, it is likely that the Gorkhaland movement, which promoted a “Greater Nepal” in the neighboring hills of Darjeeling, had negative impact on Bhutan's general impression of Nepali people. The movement hit its apex in 1986-88, and its tactics were violent, organized, and highly motivated to carve out Nepali cultural and political dominance in the region adjacent to Bhutan (Samanta 2000). Despite its close proximity, however, there is no evidence that the ethnic Nepali population in Bhutan in the 1980s had any desire to promote its cause (Rizal 2004; Evans 2010; Hutt 2004; Dhakal et al. 1994). But many other minority groups in south Asia were becoming politically organized and contributing to social unrest at the time, often with violence, which likely set a precedent for Bhutanese concerns.<sup>11</sup>

Fredrik Barth (1969) has postulated that ethnic identities are products of social interactions and are formulated through a continual process of *inclusions* and *exclusions*. This process is further mediated, he suggests, by the unique socio-ecological and economic circumstances that frame these interactions.<sup>12</sup> Viewing the violence that was erupting across South Asia in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it seems more than coincidence that Bhutanese citizenship laws and efforts to become culturally “harmonious” began to tighten in this timeframe. In the mid 1980s Bhutan began to promote *Driglam Namzha*, a Tibetan term meaning “the way of conscious harmony” (Phuntsho 2004), which fell under the RGOB's broader “One Nation, One People” policy. Through *Driglam Namzha* the social organization, dress, and even the architectural aesthetic of Bhutan was reconfigured to suit Drukpa teachings and etiquette, overshadowing and delegitimizing other ethnic identities and ways of living (Rizal

<sup>10</sup> Strawn and Dhakal (1994) as well as Hutt (2004) indicate that the Nepali language was taught only because the state had access to very few Bhutanese teachers and educational material at the time.

<sup>11</sup> Gorkhaland activities in Darjeeling followed conflicts to the east in Bangladesh in the 70s and paralleled the Sri Lankan civil war in the south that stretched across the 70s, 80s, and 90s with the violent political activism of the Tamil Tigers.

<sup>12</sup> Note that Barth places similar emphasis on historical contexts as Eric Wolf (1982) and William Roseberry (1998) do later on when describing political economy.

2004). Though these exclusionary policies were guised under the rhetoric of “unification,” they were perceived as highly antagonistic by the Nepali community.

[In Bhutan] mainly we have two religious groups, one part is Buddhist and the other part is Hindu. And in the Buddhist part they have various ethnic groups. And then from Nepal the Hindu group, we are of Nepali ethnicity and we have the culture of Nepali origin and language. And in the late 80s there was an ethnic cleansing in Bhutan. The King of Bhutan made up a rule, *Swaagatem* and this means “one nation one people, one country.” That means “one people” regardless of your ethnicity or your culture. So they wanted us to be one. They wanted us to be Buddhist and learn their language, carry out inter caste marriage. (Jhuma, female, age 40)

In 1961, *Dzongkha* the Tibetan derived Ngalong language was declared Bhutan’s official national language (van Driem 1994). Nepali and English had been taught in southern Bhutanese schools prior to this declaration. This is because Dzongkha was not yet established as a written language (Hutt 2004). However, through the 1970s and 80s Bhutan began converting Dzongkha into Romanized written form to bolster its role in day-to-day activities (van Driem 1994). When this task was completed it immediately replaced Nepali in schools (Hutt 2005). After Dzongkha was declared the official language, Hutt (2004; 2005) reports that all southern Nepali teachers were relieved of their positions and Nepali texts were replaced by new books and materials published by Bhutan’s government. To this day Dzongkha is taught alongside English in schools and holds a distinguished position in bureaucratic and educational settings (Jena 2014).

Just as Bhutan began cementing itself culturally through *Driglam Namzha*, in 1977, it also began to pass new citizenship laws that aimed to further homogenize its ethno-political diversity under one national identity. However, while the new laws applied to everyone who lived in Bhutan at the time, it was clear that they were aimed at solving the emerging “Nepali problem” (Evans 2010; Rizal 2004). The earliest of these laws reiterated the citizenship requirements first established in 1958, but lengthened the amount of time required for people to have lived in Bhutan to be eligible for citizenship (Rizal 2004). Additional requirements were also added that mandated Dzongkha proficiency and knowledge of Bhutan’s *Drukpa* cultural history (Hutt 2004). Then, in 1980, a new marriage act was passed reversing the 1958 Citizenship act which had originally promoted intermarriage between Bhutanese Nationals and Non-Nationals (Rizal 2004). Thus, all Nepali people who had been granted citizenship by marrying a Bhutanese national were suddenly no longer citizens. Citizenship laws continued to tighten in 1985, making eligibility by birth only possible for those born to parents who were *both* born as Bhutanese Nationals.

Hutt (1996; 2004) points out that there was a lag time of several years between the writing of the new laws and their implementation and enforcement. As a consequence, ethnic Nepalis who had been granted citizenship through the 1958 Act were reclassified as non-citizens without even knowing it and continued to live in Bhutan on borrowed time. This changed in 1988, with the national census, as the government began documenting its population based on the new citizenship requirements.<sup>13</sup> Families suddenly found themselves divided in their classifications. Some family members were verified “F1” as legitimate Bhutanese Nationals while others were classified as illegal “F7,” incarcerated and/or forced to leave the country (Evans 2010; Rizal 2004; Hutt 2005). Those who were not classified as illegal but were identified as non-citizens who married a national in the F4 and F5 categories were required to reapply for citizenship (Hutt 2005). This process of recertification was confusing, lengthy, and of little consequence when the rest of a person’s family or community was forced to leave the country. When the census con-

<sup>13</sup> Government appointed census takers travelled south and began to register people into seven categories: F1, Nationals; F2, Nationals who Migrated and Returned; F3, Missing during the Census; F4, Non-national woman married to National man; F5, Non-national man married to National woman; F6, Adoptions; and F7, Non-nationals (migrants, and illegals).

cluded, over 100,000 people, the majority being Nepali, had been classified as F7 non-nationals “illegally” residing in Bhutan’s southern regions (HRW 2003).

What came of the national census was substantial social and cultural disruption in southern Bhutan. Alarm was raised across the Nepali communities who felt their families, culture and livelihoods were being stripped away. Responses to these assaults varied, however. Many families maintained distance from the emerging crisis and behaved as usual in the hopes that the events unfolding around them would soon come to an end. Meanwhile, a small group of highly educated Nepali activists attempted to unify the community and inspire revolution by publishing anti-government pamphlets. As Hutt (2004) has indicated, much of their initial campaign was modeled after the Indian Independence Movement, drawing non-violent strategies from Mahatma Gandhi to inspire change and Nepali acceptance in Bhutan. Unfortunately, when viewed within the broader context of more violent ethno political turmoil popping up across South Asia, these efforts were misinterpreted by the Bhutanese elite, and their anti-government rhetoric only heightened Bhutanese fears of Gorkhaland uprisings like in Darjeeling (Rizal 2004). Not surprisingly, all Nepali activism in Bhutan was portrayed as “terrorism” by RGOB officials, contributing to an atmosphere of mistrust and fear on both sides.

With the rhetoric of “terrorism” came a rash of Nepali incarcerations by the RGOB and rumors of violence. How much violence was actually committed and by whom remains unclear and contested by the RGOB and refugees alike. One government claim suggested that violence was used by activists themselves against their fellow Nepali people to coerce them into participating in Anti-Government rallies (RGOB 1992; Amnesty International 1994a; Amnesty International 1994b). Hutt (2004) hesitates to accept this accusation wholesale, however, suggesting that it would be an odd strategy to gain the support of friends and family who are suffering under the same oppressive regime. Meanwhile, other acts of violence targeted local government officials, police, and census takers, which culminated in several gruesome deaths (RGOB 1992; Amnesty International 1994a; Amnesty International 1994b). These were also allegedly carried out by Nepali activists, a narrative that was published by the Government and disseminated to the Nepali communities in the late 80s and early 90s to incite internal divisions and to delegitimize the exile’s claims for official “refugee” status (Hutt 2004).

Refugee narratives tell a rather different story, however, and often contend that the violence was used by the officials within the Bhutanese Government to inspire fear and force them to leave. Below, Ram (male, age 35) explains in greater detail.

In the 1990s, there was a great agitation between the local government and the people who spoke the Nepali language. And because of that the government started giving a lot of torture to the Nepali people, saying that they were terrorist. And the Nepali people just demand the human rights, the basic human rights you know? But there was no human rights, in all of Bhutan. And everything was banned for us, banned for our culture, banned for our dress, banned for our speak. So because of everything the people just demanded to be allowed to speak our language and perform our cultural practices, but the government went against our demands and said “you are terrorist” and “you are not allowed to stay in the country.” And they started arresting the people, and taking them to prison, and giving them just severe, severe punishment. They raped the mothers and sisters too, because it caused a lot of fear. So people just start to leave the country.<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately both sides of the story probably hold some truth. But as Liisa Malkki (1995:103) has observed in interpreting other complex refugee situations, parsing out the “truth” is less important than seeing the effects of what was *perceived* to be true by the Nepali people and

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly in a Human Rights Watch article providing an update on the Bhutanese refugee crisis with commentary from author Bill Frelick (2011) suggested that Bhutan’s ties to Buddhism gave it a “peaceful” reputation which has helped to buffer it from international scrutiny on these grounds: “Glossed over by its image as a peaceable Shangri-La, Bhutan has escaped international scrutiny and censure, and with each passing year memories of the ethnic cleansing fade and accountability seems more and more to slip away.” (Frelick 2011)



the RGOB. We do know that all Nepali activism in Bhutan—whether peaceful or violent, truth or rumor—had the reverse impact than intended and only bolstered reactions and discriminatory policies from the RGOB. Consequently, it is no surprise that Amnesty International reports from the mid 1990s say that the arrests of ethnic-Nepalis in Bhutan were common and incarceration lengths were indefinite (e.g. 1994a; 1994b; 1995). Reports of torture in Bhutanese prisons were also cited (Amnesty International 1994b), which caused some participants in the current study to ultimately depart from Bhutan with their families. So it is also not surprising that after 1990, Bhutan experienced a constant outmigration of Nepali people with estimates of several hundred a over the first months and increasing to 200 to 300 per day in 1992 (Hutt 1996). By 1996 over 100,000 ethnic-Nepalis from Bhutan had claimed refugee status in Nepal (Hutt 1996).

Since the exodus of ethnic Nepalis from Bhutan, the RGOB has made a number of efforts to dispute their status as legitimate “refugees.” The contention of the Bhutanese government over this claim comes down to the legal circumstances by which many of the refugees left the country. The first wave of refugees fled because their citizenship had been legally revoked through the census process (Amnesty International 1994b). But many who left Bhutan following this initial wave were classified as bona fide citizens during the 1988 census. Their departure occurred during the height of the crisis while incarcerations and rumors of violence were highest. In these cases the Bhutanese Government has taken a different approach, arguing that they waived their citizenship “voluntarily.” Indeed, the Bhutanese government has in its possession many “voluntary migration certificates” signed by people living in the Nepali refugee camps, which surrenders their citizenship under Nationality Laws (Amnesty International 1994b). Some of these signings are even documented on camera which the government of Bhutan has used to demonstrate the “voluntariness” by which ethnic Nepalis left the country.

Interestingly, most of the refugees who left Bhutan after the 1<sup>st</sup> wave admit to having signed voluntary migration certificates for Bhutanese census officials and some even recall being filmed in the process. However, many also claim to have been coerced. Reiterating a common narrative told by the Bhutanese refugee community, Ryam (male, age 48, left Bhutan in his early twenties) described how his family was forced to sign the certificates by census officials before they escaped.

My parents were actually forced to leave the country. They were forced to sign a voluntary migration paper. But it wasn't voluntary. They were forced to sign. They were told “if you don't sign, you will go to jail. There is no guarantee you will live long. You will die there. So if you want to live, sign this paper and go to Nepal or India and leave the country.” Because they were tagged as non national—antinational actually—as they say in Bhutanese language molop which means anti-national like terrorist ...as he who works against the king. So they were tagged as anti-national and they wanted these people to leave the country.

Another younger participant explains the situation more broadly, likely drawing from his own memories as well as those of his older family members:

The government was just arresting people and would take them to the office and sit them in front of camera and say “you just smile and say that I am going to willingly leave the country.” And people had to do it because they were scared. They were afraid they would be beaten, tortured, or killed. Many were killed you know. Many were thrown in the river. There were a lot of scary moments at that time. (Ram, male, age 35, left Bhutan at age 10)

Michael Hutt (2004), upon hearing similar rumors of coercion went to the Nepali camps to investigate in the early 1990s. His interviews revealed identical stories; many refugees were claiming to have been forced to “voluntarily” relinquish their citizenship. Often this was to negotiate the release of relatives who were incarcerated in Bhutanese prisons. Others claim to have been visited by government officials at their houses and threatened into signing the forms despite

being classified as F1 in the census. Others returned home from being incarcerated only to find their family gone and their household razed or occupied by Drukpa families. The veracity of these stories is certainly a point of controversy given the opposing narrative of the government and its “documentation” of the events. Nonetheless, these documents have become important legal capital in Bhutan’s efforts to diminish its culpability for causing the situation (Amnesty International 1994b; HRW 2003). Regardless of the exact legal status of their departure, the sheer number of former Bhutanese citizens claiming refugee status in Nepal and now resettling in third countries speaks to a larger context of persecution and discrimination that made life unlivable in Bhutan.

## Nepali Refugee Camps

*Journey to the camps:* The first refugees to flee Bhutan were unprepared for the journey. Initial attempts were made to establish camp in Sikkim, a small peninsula of north Indian Territory separating Bhutan from Nepal. But seeing that the evacuees were of “Nepali descent,” Indian officials quickly began shuttling Bhutanese refugees to the eastern border of Nepal and wanted nothing to do with the emerging crisis (Rizal 2004; Hutt 2004; Amnesty International 1995).<sup>15</sup> This ethnopolitical ambiguity comes through as Ram (male, age 35) recalls the initial journey out of Bhutan.

People started moving without their stuff, just leaving everything. Walking through the forest all night until they just cross the border and got to India. And then we stayed in India for a while, like few months, and then the Indian government told us we were not allowed to stay in India anymore and they moved us to Nepal because our forefathers origin was in Nepal.

Gradually they made their way to the banks of the Mai River in the eastern Nepali district of Jhapa and began to accumulate in increasing numbers with each passing day. But without adequate shelter, food, or means of sanitizing the water, the camps along the river quickly fell into disarray and were plagued by outbreaks of measles and cholera (HRW 2003). Children and elders suffered the greatest casualties, with up to 30 deaths a day in the first few weeks (Hutt 2004). The same participant continues.

There was a camp in eastern Nepal, where my dad was staying, that was the beach of a river, you know, the side of the Mai River. And I, when I came for the first time there, I was crying you know. Like, I was young at the time and there were many things I don’t know. But I was about to cry. People were dying every day and there were like 15 or 16 dead body by the riverside you know. It was a small camp, plastic roof, too much hot, and lot of disease, and sick. There was no restrooms. It was the beginning of the camp, the camp in eastern Nepal. And then after that the UNHCR told the state to start to resettle in better conditions. So they move to different place in Nepal, and they settle in small, small camp in like seven different camps that were close together. And finally the UNHCR and other organizations start to help us with food, clothing and schooling and things like that.

As stories like Ram’s illustrate, Nepal had legitimate reasons to worry about the swelling population at its border, and immediately opened communications with Bhutan to negotiate a solution. By and large, these interactions were unproductive (HRW 2007). Bhutan was dismissive of its role in the crisis and unwilling to discuss terms of repatriation. Sensing the futility of these interactions, Nepal then petitioned the UNHCR for assistance in establishing refugee camps its eastern provinces (HRW 2007). Bhutan in the meantime contested any use of the term “refugee,” describing them as “terrorists” or local Nepali people posing as refugees, and attempted to dis-

<sup>15</sup> Strawn and Dhakal (1994) suggest that India’s silence on the refugee issue stems from a desire to protect economic investments it has made in the recent decades in negotiating the construction of multiple hydroelectric projects in Bhutan. The Bhutanese government has always been slow to agree in these negotiations, making India second guess involvement in other arenas of Bhutanese geopolitics. This is speculation, however.

tance itself politically from the situation (Amnesty International 1994b; RGOB 1993).<sup>16</sup> These descriptions were also published by the Bhutanese government and disseminated to a wide readership through international news sources in an attempt to preemptively diminish international concerns. As the crisis progressed, Bhutan feared that UNHCR involvement would send a different signal to the global community, and it began to work a variety of political channels to keep the UNHCR out of any subsequent negotiations (Adelman 2013).

**Camp social structure:** UNHCR assistance in establishing the Nepali camps did, nevertheless, result in dramatic improvements in shelter and sanitation for the refugees from Bhutan (HRW 2003). First, viable tracts of land were identified that had less potential for the spread of disease and could support large groups of people (Amnesty International 1994b). The refugees were then relocated from the banks of the Mai River to the newly cleared land and divided into seven smaller more manageable camps, each of which were separated further into “sectors” and then “units.” Hem (male, age 27) explains the organization of Beldangi II, the camp in Jhapa Nepal where he lived in for 20 years

All the camps in Nepal were divided into sectors and units. Like I was from sector B—like abc. And in each sector they had like 4 units, or 5 units, and then in some sectors only 3 units. I think the units made it easier to distribute the facilities and rations. So we were in sector B, and in Sector B there were four units, B1, B2, B3, and B4. We were from sector B2...and in each unit, there were hut numbers. So in B1 it starts from hut 1, 2 and 3 and so on. And then in each unit we had a representative. In our sector, B2, we had 76 huts, and we had one sector head, who was the head of Sector B and all units. And then in our unit, we had a representative and vice representative. And they would take care of what date we distributed rice and vegetables and rations. This was all based on United Nation policy.

As Hem indicates, the divisions are an important aspect of UNHCR camp protocol. In the camps, the organization of people into smaller groups allows for easier distribution of resources (Hyndman 2000). But it serves a variety of other purposes as well. It creates an atmosphere of order and social cohesion and sanitation (UNHCR 2007). And, it facilitates the documentation, verification, and registration of camp members, so that camp officials can keep track of births, deaths, illnesses, and new arrivals (UNHCR 2007). Representatives were selected from each section and unit to meet on a regular basis with UNHCR and other Foreign Aid officials to coordinate resources and to manage internal disputes (UNHCR 2007; HRW 2003). The unit representatives were also important in disseminating information throughout the camps involving developments in the ongoing political negotiations between Bhutan and Nepal.

In this sense, refugee camp systems become similar to Ferguson’s (1994) description of the Nation State, where hierarchical and spatial power are reinforced through bureaucracy in the form of random forms of surveillance (spot checks, census taking, etc.), and power is localized by associating lower level workers with smaller domains of authority. This not only distributes state authority over wider territory, but also reinforces higher state authority over localized spaces. Thus, refugee camps become highly organized and regimented living spaces (Agamben 1995). But death tolls and illness rates also declined for the Bhutanese refugees because of these measures.

**Political and economic isolation:** Following the disbanding of the International Refugee Organization in 1949, the UNHCR became established as the linchpin of international law, humanitarianism, and geopolitical arbitration. But its primary charge has been to manage the global

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<sup>16</sup> The phenomenon of immigrants and locals “posing” as refugees is not unheard of. Karen Jacobsen (2005) has shown that in cases where refugees share ethnic background with the local population, it is not uncommon for locals to pretend to be refugees in order to access aid and other resources. For Bhutanese refugees, it is possible that all of these descriptions were true for some of the people claiming refugee status, but not the majority.

movements of refugees and asylees and to recognize their humanity through the provision of basic human rights. As cases like Bhutan illustrate, refugees enter the humanitarian view as dislocated populations in the wake of persecution and violence. Part of this process involves crossing international borders, a geopolitical action which Jennifer Hyndman (2000) has characterized as “trading citizenship for safety.” What Hyndman (2000) illustrates is a fundamental process of disempowerment. Ultimately, it is the vulnerability of dislocation and the uneven dimensions of state and international power that force refugees across borders and into dependent relationships with humanitarian organization’s aid and protection.

It is important to remember that humanitarian law has historically been external to state governance and is incapable of providing refugees with any of the true benefits of citizenship (Pandolfi 2003). The power of the UNHCR is confined in this way to only a partial recognition of the refugee’s humanity, offering a legal status that is sharply limited to the protection of life in its most basic sense. For these reasons, Giorgio Agamben (1995) has described the circumstances of refugees in terms of “bare life” arguing that they inhabit a “space of exception,” born through conflict and social injustice, where the biological and juridical categories of identity decouple and render bodies politically and legally naked.

While theoretically vague, Agamben’s description of refugees has very real implications. For 20 years, the refugees from Bhutan that accumulated in camps along Nepal’s eastern border occupied a “space of exception.” They were disowned by Bhutan for their Nepali heritage and stripped of their national identities and citizenship. But their political status as “refugees,” by its very implication, made them different than the populous of Nepal, despite strong cultural similarities. While the refugees’ living standards were meager by comparison with 21<sup>st</sup> century Western lifestyles—having no electricity, living in plastic wall and thatched roof huts, needing to walk to the center of the village for water, food, and to use the bathroom, and cooking with firewood cleared from the nearby forests—Human Rights Watch (2003) describes a striking contrast of foreign attention and resources within the camp against the backdrop of poverty in the surrounding region of Nepal. Local Nepali residents grew to resent the refugees for the privileges they were afforded.

These tensions came through in a variety of ways during interviews. One very extreme example stood out, however, as one participant looked back on his youth in the camps and described what he and his friends used to do for fun. Indra (male, age 20) was born and raised in Khudunabari camp, which lies at the confluence of two rivers in eastern Nepal. With little else to do in the camps, these geographical features became a source of enjoyment. But they also raised tensions with members of the local community as refugees from the camps, like Indra, ventured out to swim

**Indra:** Us kids, we used to go to the nearby river to swim. But if my parents found out they would have been mad because sometimes if it rain the river floods and people get hurt. Like, there was a big big river nearby, and we used to cross it. But if it rain the river get really big and if somebody went across after the rain they would get stuck there and not go home until it lowered. But there was a mountain at the river and we would jump from there into the water. But this one time when I went there with seven of my friends there was this guy from the local Nepali village who was throwing big stones at the people swimming to scare them away. He accidentally hit one of the kids swimming from his own village and killed him. He was trying to hit us, but he hit the kid and killed him. It was really scary. We were all naked, and we ran home naked! It was so so so scary.

**Interviewer:** Why was he throwing rocks at you?

**Indra:** We weren’t local from Nepal. Sometimes there was this fight, because they were mad that we were there. And some people they used to think we make a lot of money in the camps, and we would get UNHCR support, so the local people would sometimes get jealous. That day, we ran home, and after that the seven of my friends we didn’t talk for months...we were so scared. We were so far away from

our homes that day; it was like a one hour walk. So when we were going by the local Nepali houses, and we were so scared we didn't even tell them somebody was killed. We thought if they found out then they would think we killed him. So we went home. I didn't go back for two or three years after that.

As the above experience demonstrates, the camp boundaries made apparent very real social and political distinctions shaping the lives of the refugees and local populations in the area. In the first years after the camps were established, the refugees from Bhutan were not permitted to leave camp boundaries at all (HRW 2007). Violations of this rule certainly occurred and the rules became more relaxed as time progressed, but segregation from the outside remained a legally enforced protocol for regulating the camps until they were disbanded in 2008 for third country resettlement:

Bhutanese refugees are denied freedom of movement, but they are also prohibited from engaging in income-generating activities, even within the confines of the refugee camps. By being denied the right to work, the refugees have been forced into a situation where they are entirely dependent on the support of the international community for their survival. With the passage of time, this support system has come under increasing strains, with budgetary constraints necessitating cuts in the provision of essential services, including food, fuel, and medical care. These cutbacks, and the heavy toll they exact on the refugees, show that a policy that denies refugees the means to achieve self-sufficiency cannot be sustained. That Nepal has taken no meaningful steps in more than 15 years to integrate Bhutanese refugees is due, in part, to its relations with Bhutan. Nepal sees the refugees as fundamentally a Bhutanese responsibility and is unwilling to suggest by naturalizing them that Bhutan was in any way justified in denying them citizenship and expelling them in the first place. (HRW 2007:57)

Later on the internal camp policies shifted. As the statement above indicates, UNHCR funding had decreased dramatically during a global recession. Meanwhile the promise of repatriation to Bhutan was diminishing and refugees within the camps were demanding greater work and education opportunities. To answer these demands and maintain control over the traffic in and out of the camp, the UNHCR negotiated with Nepal to begin to allow some people to leave the camps for work and school. This required refugees to obtain permission from government authorities within the camps. If permission was granted, the refugee was given an "out pass," which provided permission to leave the camp (HRW 2007). However, as Tara (male, age 41) explains, these new camp policies were not always recognized by local Nepali officials outside the camps.

**Tara:** In the camps, we were confined in the fence, I mean, there were fences around the camps, and we didn't have the opportunity to get outside the camps. For the first few years, maybe five. We were prisoners. I even got arrested for trying to go outside the camps. I was a student, and I was going to the school to get things to eat and I was taking things to my room and they caught me and they said oh you can't go outside. Because we had to have permission. And I had permission on that day and they just confiscated my license and everything and put me in the police station. And I kept arguing. And the next day they let me go. It was like that at first, but after a few years it got more relaxed.

**Interviewer:** So they really made you feel like you were not part of Nepal.

**Tara:** Yes, definitely we were not, because the situation was really something different for Nepalis as well as refugees. They couldn't let us out of the camps because we weren't Nepali. I mean, we were similar in every way, but for political reasons we were different. And if they had just let us be free and assimilate into their society we would have lost the issue, the political issue. So they did it that way, and we are still able to keep our identity.

Interestingly, as this Tara illustrates, there was view among refugees within the camp that segregation was a strategic maneuver by the UNHCR and Nepal to increase the likelihood of their repatriation to Bhutan. Segregation helped to downplay their strong cultural ties to the local Nepali population while emphasizing their political ties and nativity to Bhutan.

Tools for managing interactions with the outside population included curfews, ID cards, permission slips to leave the camps, and work permits that were difficult to obtain (HRW 2007; UNHCR 2007). Despite these more “relaxed” policies, some refugees never left the camps in the twenty years they were in Nepal. And for those who did, it wasn’t very often. Similar conditions in a Hutu refugee camp led Liisa Malkki (1995) to describe the camp as “a technology of care and control... a technology of power entailing the management of space and movement—for ‘people out of place’.” This political and social isolation had several real life consequences for the Bhutanese refugees. Segregation from the rest of Nepal diminished people’s ability to legally earn income to support their families beyond very meager supplies provided by the UNHCR. Thus, several older participants felt that they had been deprived of their productive capacity. Tara, from above, describes his feelings of regret from the camps for being unable to work and provide for his family at an age in his life when this was culturally expected of him.

I feel like I lost a lot. I was almost 17 when I left my country [Bhutan] and I lived in Nepal for twenty years. I think I got resettled when I was 36 years old or something like that. And I lost the productive part of my life. From twenty to almost forty is the most productive part of one’s life... it might not be applicable in the United States, because people feel like you are productive throughout the life. And people here are individualistic, and so you have to work throughout your life. But over there you have the responsibility for your whole family, and we felt the responsibility for that. Because if you are the eldest son or the dad, you are responsible for all your family, no matter what. And I know I’m the responsible party, I mean the person for the whole family, and I was growing up and the eldest one. And if I were in Bhutan, or any eastern part of the world, like India, and I were the eldest son, the productive part of your life is 20-40 years, and you should be able to do whatever you want to do during that period. Build up your profile and everything, I mean that is the time you earn for your family, and during that period I was in the camp where I had nothing. It was hard to get a rupee, and so I feel like I lost a lot... I lost my nationality... I mean I was nationless. I didn’t get the opportunity to build my career, or profile, so that was another loss. I could barely take care of my family, which I was supposed to. Being in the camp. And if you just get your food out of the track at that time, then you are never able to build up your family, because the rest of the family would be in crisis. And if something happened, I didn’t have enough money to go to the good schools, so I had to go to the general schools, and I just dreamed of being an engineer, my dream job or profession was an engineer when I was in Bhutan... but I had to just forget everything when I was in Nepal.

Almost entirely dependent on aid, one kilogram of fortified parboiled rice was supplied per person every fifteen days in the camps.<sup>17</sup> In addition, families received small amounts of vegetables which were highly perishable in the tropical heat of Nepal and eaten hastily to prevent rotting. With no electricity in the camps, there was no means of storing food for more than a day. No spices were provided either. And, to add variety to their diets and escape the boredom of eating plain rice, parents began working illegally or begging in nearby towns to buy extra food and spices. Many claim to have been beaten by Nepali police and harassed by local citizens for leaving the camps illegally or for collecting wood from nearby forests to sell or use as firewood (HRW 2003). Meanwhile, children were born into the camp and grew into their late teens and early twenties who—outside of what they learned in school and from their parents—never experienced the *right* to work and be productive members of society.

***Camps as preparatory spaces:*** Although the Nepali camps were isolating for Bhutanese refugees in many respects, they were not vacuums devoid of social, cultural, or political influ-

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<sup>17</sup> This is based on participant descriptions of food rations in the refugee camps. Many people recalled on their own the 1 kilo/month/person amount. Most stated that it was parboiled rice with some vegetables. They often wished it was white rice, which they preferred, but acknowledged that the parboiled rice was better for them. The vegetable supply was always discussed as “too little” and would rot if it wasn’t eaten quickly.

ence. Drawing on Foucault, Aiwah Ong (2003:9) has described humanitarian organizations like the UNHCR as “technologies of governing” which “transform [refugees] into particular kinds of modern human beings bound for Western liberal democracies.” In the Khmer refugee camps where she worked she explains that “relief organizations began the task of physically and socially converting refugees into ‘citizens of the world’ using public health campaigns, schools, and even women’s organizations” (Ong 2003:9). The UNHCR (2001) makes these functions explicit as it describes the role education plays in its broader humanitarian mission:

Education in emergencies is a pillar of humanitarian assistance, enabling services to be provided to children and young people from early in an emergency onwards. Speedy access to education and other activities which help to restore the child’s development after trauma is a human right which must be respected by agencies, guided by a normative framework based on international human rights law. And education in crisis and transition can be enriched to serve as a cornerstone for building a new social order, promoting mutual respect and tolerance, peaceful discussion and problem solving at local level, and an understanding of the role of law and of representative and honest systems of governance in problem-solving at national level. (UNHCR 2001:75)

If not simply for maintaining social order within the camps,<sup>18</sup> education “normalizes” the chaos of displacement while converting refugees back into “governable citizens.” But the role of education in preparing refugees for participation in the global economy is also apparent, and the power to do this seems to derive from their isolation from other influences while living in the camps:

Given the protracted nature of most conflicts, the durability of any solution needs to begin during these long periods of exile. Further, given the uncertainty of the future for refugees, the increasingly globalised realities that most of them face, and the promise of knowledge-based economies, durable solutions need to be flexible and portable. Education can be both... Policy and programming in refugee education need to be conceptually linked to livelihoods. In order to be a durable solution, education needs to prepare refugee children for futures in which they can be economically productive, physically healthy, and civically and politically engaged....The quality of this education is tightly linked to its relevance, particularly how well it is aligned with the limited opportunities for employment in local labor markets and with its portability, which enables graduates to be flexible given probable high rates of mobility. (UNHCR 2011:83)

Recall that Eric Wolf (1982: 73-100) and William Roseberry (1998:75, 79-81) speak of political economy as the “mobilization of resources and labor” through historically configured relations of power. While not necessarily its mission, it appears that one of the outcomes of UNHCR involvement in refugee situations is the rechanneling of displaced populations towards political economic ends. The school curriculum that was taught in the Nepali refugee camps was also designed in this way. Prior to 2008, when the offer of third country resettlement was put on the table, the Bhutanese refugees were still hopeful for repatriation (HRW 2007). But as world refugee patterns demonstrate, the path to repatriation is often unsuccessful. Recognizing these outcomes, the UNHCR developed educational strategies to prepare Bhutanese refugees for a variety of placement options while not dismissing their hopes of returning to Bhutan. Education in the Nepali camps strategically melded Western cultural values, knowledge content, and language skills with Nepali and Bhutanese curricula to ensure that the refugees did not become obsolete in their immediate contexts while being made viable for third country resettlement:

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<sup>18</sup> According to the UNHCR (2001; 2011) a benefit of refugee camp schooling in protracted situations is to keep younger refugees “occupied.” This allows their parents free time to manage other parts of their lives and also helps to prevent younger members of the camp from getting swept up in political movements. There were stirrings of Maoist movements among the youth in Nepali refugee camps in the late 1990s and early 2000s that began to threaten the tenuous political status of the camps.

The Bhutanese refugees are using English as the language of instruction in their schools, following the same pattern as in Bhutan. They feel that an international language provides a better-quality education, which is therefore more motivating for them. This contrasts with the government schools in Nepal, which use the Nepalese language (only the private schools, reputedly better than the government schools, use English as a medium). The refugees are following a mixed system, combining elements of both Bhutanese and Nepalese curricula, so that they can be prepared for the eventuality either of returning back home or of settling in the host country. A generation of children has been born outside Bhutan, who needs to learn about their home country. (UNHCR 2001:131)

Cultural coursework was also taught to help reinforce Bhutanese community values in the midst of the social and cultural disruption in the refugee camps. But western ideologies for gender equality and individualism were incorporated into these programs:

The refugees have recently added a new subject, value education, from Grade 4 upwards, with the purpose of making children aware of the values held by the Bhutanese community. There is a danger that the refugees may lose touch with their traditional culture when exposed to the negative effects of camp life. In these classes, the refugees learn about their responsibilities, respect for their elders and how to make a positive contribution to their community. They also learn how values can change for the better, for example the community's changing attitude towards the education of girls. Teachers handling this new subject are given special orientation programmes. (UNHCR 2001:133)

Meanwhile, the UNHCR partnered with international accreditation councils to develop standardized and "portable" methods of testing students' comprehension of the material. This way, any academic achievements made by students within the camps would have better traction in international settings:

The examinations in the refugee schools are now recognized by the government of Nepal. This ensures that the students passing these examinations are considered to have attained a satisfactory level of achievement. The certificates acquired, moreover, provide satisfaction to the successful students in that their achievements have been duly recognized. This gives the student confidence and self-esteem, important for building up even higher achievements, which is a great motivating force for other students to follow. When examination results are officially certified, the qualifications become portable and can be used to obtain employment or further education in the host country, country of origin or in a third country of resettlement. (UNHCR 2001:142)<sup>19</sup>

In this way, refugee camp schools become preparatory spaces where displaced people are isolated from immediate external influences while being refurnished with the international credentials and life skills necessary for social, cultural, and economic participation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Ong 2003:83; Hyndman 2000). Not surprisingly, with two decades of confinement in Nepali camps, education was a singular focus for many Bhutanese refugees. And the UNHCR has lauded the education system it developed in the Nepali camps as one of its educational success stories. A 2001 UNHCR report indicated that 40% of the 97,000 Bhutanese refugees registered at the time were attending school in camps in that year, with nearly 100% enrollment rate for individuals of primary school age (UNHCR 2001).

The infrastructure of the camp school system was sizable too, employing over 950 teachers and 138 non teaching staff, many of whom were former students. In part this is because teaching and staff positions were among the few sanctioned means of income earning within the camps, providing small stipend of less than \$13 a month. But teaching was also an educational opportunity viewed by the UNHCR as a stepping stone in the preparation of refugees for their future integration (UNHCR 2001; 2011). Teachers were provided seminars on how to teach, and

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<sup>19</sup> In the United States, these credentials have done little to help Bhutanese refugees find employment related to their specific skill sets. Several participants were trained as engineers, accountants, and teachers. None of them found jobs in these areas.



were given certificates of completion that could later be used to demonstrate their acquired skills in international settings (UNHCR 2001).

Unfortunately, the opportunity for education and teaching was available mostly to the young. Nearly everyone who participated in the current study who was under the age of 35 graduated from the camps with the U.S. equivalent of a high-school diploma. But many continued on to earn Associates and Bachelor's degrees, and very rarely, some went even further, travelling to India to earn Masters Degrees and PhDs. By comparison, the majority of Bhutanese refugees 35 and older came from farming backgrounds and by the time they arrived to the camps in Nepal they were too old for a full education. As a consequence there were sharp differences in education and literacy between young and old members of the Bhutanese refugee population with whom I met during this project. These differences were of little consequence to life opportunities within the camps but have had a profound influence on post-resettlement employment outcomes.

### **Process of Third Country Resettlement**

Once identified as a refugee, there are three potential outcomes that fit within the UNHCR's concept of what constitutes a "durable solution," including repatriation, host country integration, or third country resettlement (UNHCR 2003). Third country resettlement often entails a rather dramatic transition for refugees, requires significant political orchestration, and is viewed a "last resort" by the UNHCR (2003). Repatriation and host country integration are most ideal as the refugee and host populations are often more culturally and linguistically similar (UNHCR 2003), requiring little preparation for individual refugees to become self sufficient and socially/economically viable.

From 1992 until 2005, multiple bilateral talks were held between Nepal and Bhutan to negotiate the repatriation of Bhutanese refugees (HRW 2007; Evans 2010); but the RGOB demonstrated a general unwillingness to cede any ground on the issue. Meanwhile, Nepal's economic circumstances were far too tenuous to offer a durable solution; and India, the only other local country with the economic capacity to absorb such a substantial population, had maintained a careful distance from the situation from the very beginning (Rizal 2004; Dhakal et al. 1994:481).<sup>20</sup> Finally, in 2008, responding to pleas from the UNHCR, the United States along with 7 other countries opened its doors to third country resettlement. The United States accepted 60,000, of the 107,000 registered in the camp at the time (HRW 2007).<sup>21</sup> The remaining Bhutanese refugees were approved to resettle in Denmark, Norway, Canada, Australia, Great Britain, Netherlands, and New Zealand.

It is unclear exactly how individual decisions were made about which refugees would be sent to which of the eight countries accepting them. Each country has its own policies for this. Participants in this study were asked how they ended up coming to the U.S. rather than the other countries. Many of them had applied to the U.S., but said they didn't know why their application had been selected over others in the camp. Those who had an idea suggested that the UNHCR had determined that they were more "strong and able" than those who were sent to the other seven countries. Careful searches of "ref-world," the UNHCR search-engine, as well as refugee resettlement related sites published by the U.S. Department of State and those by Australia, Denmark, and other countries accepting Bhutanese refugees revealed little to explain where participants were getting the term "strong and able" which was repeated in several interviews. However, according to INA Section 212(a) of the Inadmissibility Act (USCIS 2015), refugees can be excluded from U.S. resettlement if they are determined to be a health or security threat to the U.S. It is possible that some who applied for resettlement in the U.S. were restricted on the grounds of

<sup>20</sup> India has several hydro-electric projects in Bhutan which provide electricity to many of its larger cities. Dhakal and Strawn (1996) have suggested that this economic relationship prevented India from involving itself in the situation.

<sup>21</sup> This number has increased to above 75,000 (USDOS 2015). The arrivals are declining now, however.

mental illness, while others who had been flagged as “terrorists” by the Bhutanese government were also deemed a threat by the U.S. and not admitted.

## U.S. Resettlement Policies

The United States has a well established history of accepting immigrants and displaced people. However, the concept of the “refugee” only gained traction in U.S. policy in the wake of World War II when global efforts sought placement solutions for over 11 million people who had been displaced by the Nazi occupation of Europe (ORR 2015). Of the 1 million who resettled overseas, the U.S. accepted 250,000, gaining the reputation it holds to this day as an international leader in resettlement (Lemay et al 1999; ORR 2015). At the time, however, the admission process for refugees was in its infancy and subsumed under broader U.S. policies for accepting immigrants (Haines 2010; Holman 1996). Recognizing that U.S. immigration policies were ill-equipped to account for the rising number of displaced people arriving at its shores, President Harry Truman urged Congress to adjust the immigration quotas to make space for the refugees who had fled Europe (Anker et al. 1981; Holman 1996). Even so, the new quotas proved insufficient against the backlog of people waiting for approval (Lemay et al. 1999). And, over the next 7 years, U.S. policy-makers worked towards solidifying a national stance on refugees in general.

*The “refugee” in U.S. policy:* The first real conversation about “refugees” in U.S. policy began with the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 which established quotas for people displaced from Europe that were separate from the immigrant quotas established by congress each year. Over 400,000 more displaced people were admitted under this policy (Lemay et al. 1999). Revisions and additional refugee entitlements were added later in the Refugee Relief Acts of 1951 and 1953, followed by several amendments in 1954. Under these policies, the U.S. outlined its initial approaches to the resettlement process, setting a precedent for future policies on admittance and care. However, quotas that were established in 1951 and 53 almost exclusively prioritized refugees from communist countries (Holman 1996; Cavosie 1992), reflecting deeper ideological concerns driving United States foreign and immigration policy at the time. Cavosie (1992) argues that these sentiments were important in shaping the cultural tides of incoming refugee populations to the U.S. in coming decades, which, in turn, had important influences on subsequent amendments to the ways which the U.S. approached refugee resettlement overall. But the policies developed in 1951 and 54 also outlined the bureaucracy of resettlement that we see in effect today, placing post-resettlement responsibilities for refugee care and temporary support solely in the hands of volunteer agencies (Volags) and reinforcing the importance of securing financial support for refugee care from the private sector.

According to Holman (1996) in the short period following World War II when global refugee policies were first being established, the flow of refugees to the U.S. was substantial but manageable, but the government was forced to expand the assistance it provided refugees in 1959, when Florida experienced a sudden influx of Cubans escaping the Castro Regime. The unplanned arrival of nearly 100,000 people to Florida in the following year left little time for preparation. The U.S. government was forced to adjust its strict monetary policies and provide federal assistance to overloaded state and private agencies (Holman 1996). Soon after, U.S. involvement in Vietnam triggered another rapid influx of refugees. Only this time, they were not concentrated to one state, but distributed across multiple unprepared states, requiring further increases in federal commitment to refugee aid (Holman 1996). Money was channeled into state coffers under the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975, specifically covering costs for health and social services, as well as classes on English language and employment related services (Lemay et al. 1999). Some assistance was also provided to help reduce the impact on local school systems. Immediately after, the U.S. experienced another rapid inflow of refugees from the Soviet Union, taxing the state and federal services even more.

In 1979, the U.S. began drafting what would become the Refugee Act of 1980, which removed the criterion that refugees come only from communist countries (Anker 1981). It also stipulated that an annual quota of refugees would be set by the president (Anker 1981);<sup>22</sup> however, the Refugee Act of 1980 has been amended several times since its first drafting. Holman (1996) points out that the bulk of these adjustments involve a retightening of the federal purse. The initial 1980 act provided federal assistance to refugees under the Cash and Medical Assistance Program (CMA) for up to 36 months following arrival to assist in basic expenses while finding employment, but the slow economic integration of refugees from Indochina heightened Federal concerns about refugees becoming too “dependent” on financial assistance (Cavosie 1992). In response, the U.S. government redrafted its refugee policies to give explicit priority to “economic self sufficiency.” The federal aid offered to refugees was made contingent on the active pursuit of employment and reduced to a maximum of three months, where remains today (ORR 2012). To help ensure that refugees achieve these goals, policies were designed to limit distractions. For instance, refugees are ineligible for CMA coverage if they enroll in higher education (ORR 2012), as this would only impede their immediate ability to earn an income. Thus the overarching purpose of the funding and assistance under Federal policy is to ensure that refugees are employed and economically independent as soon as possible, regardless of the quality of this employment or the career opportunities it offers.

***The “American Dream” and U.S. refugee policy:*** It is important to note that the tightening of the federal purse for refugee assistance that occurred throughout the 1980s and remains in effect to this day did not arise out of new federal concerns over welfare dependency. Resettlement policies of the 1950s also placed considerable importance on ensuring that refugees embraced a strong work ethic and became self-sufficient as quickly as possible (Holman 1996; Lemay et al. 1999). These policies relaxed out of urgency in response to unexpected flows of refugees and an ill-equipped system for addressing their needs. But according to Holman (1996), government phobias of welfare dependency were so high in the 50s that refugees were not admitted to the U.S. during these first years “unless it was *guaranteed* that they would not become public charges.” These underlying fears resonated against deeper ideological currents within American capitalism like the mythology of “rags to riches” captured so cogently by the “self-made man” or the ethos of the “American Dream”:

...The dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement... a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (James Truslow Adams in 1931: pp214-215)

In describing the “American dream” Adams (1931) portrays the U.S. as a great equalizer to the poor and destitute of the world. Given the right opportunities and the incentive for hard work, *everyone* shares equal promise at improvements in their economic standing and welfare. Whether this speaks to the reality of life in the U.S. is a different question. As many social scientists have illustrated, one unfortunate consequence of these types of Neoliberal assumptions is to interpret suffering and poverty as outcomes of individual laziness (Seccombe et al. 1998; Morgen et al. 2003; Morgen et al. 2008; Ganti 2014). Welfare, seen through this lens, becomes a vice that subsidizes character flaws of the individual while failing to address the moral gaps corrupting the fabric of society (Morgen et al. 2008). This highly conservative perception has done a great deal in shaping federal approaches to refugee assistance. For instance, Section 412.1 A and C of the 1980 Refugee Act states that:

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<sup>22</sup> This policy remains in effect today, and annual refugee inflows of 50 to 80,000 have been consistent since the Act was passed.

[The Federal Government is to] make available sufficient resources for employment training and placement in order to achieve economic self-sufficiency among refugees as quickly as possible... [and] ensure that cash assistance is made available to refugees in such a manner as not to discourage their economic self-sufficiency

As newcomers to the U.S., refugees are presumably unaware of these deeper historical and ideological assumptions which seem to guide the mobilization of labor and resources in the American economy. Therefore their initial participation in the economy through federal hand-outs poses certain ideological threats to the American capitalist enterprise. It is not surprising that the first refugee policies attempted to codify these conservative and individualizing ideologies into law, taking on both symbolic and political economic functions. If not to serve as a simple reminder of what it means to be a hard working self-made “American,” then refugee policy would attempt to incentivize the adoption of these basic values. Efforts to diminish refugee dependency on federal aid remain a central feature of current U.S. refugee policies and stands as common rhetoric throughout official U.S. resettlement documents (e.g. PRM 2013; UNHCR 2014). The State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration states that “most Americans value self-reliance and hard work.” (PRM 2013). And the UNHCR, in its handbook on resettlement tells refugees that “achieving economic self-sufficiency is the cornerstone of the U.S. resettlement program ... refugees are encouraged to improve their language and job skills in order to move up the economic ladder” (UNHCR 2014).

To see how the “American Dream” influenced Bhutanese refugees in this study I asked participants what hopes they had for their own futures and children’s futures now that they live in the United States. The responses varied, but all demonstrated hopefulness with a sense of realism and practicality.

We have many dreams. Now we have 15 members in our family here. And we have children. My brother has three children and my second brother he didn’t get married... he live with us. And my third brother get married and have two sons. I have one. We are futuring for them to become not like us. Because we didn’t get good job, we have no good English. We have to do housekeeping, I mean, house-keeping is good job, but there is more good job than housekeeping. We are planning to made our children in better ways than we live. We want them to be able to study. We are working hard for them to be able to study good and to make their future bright. (Chhali, female, age 22, lives with husband, brother, and newborn son)

Others described more immediate desires and opportunities. To illustrate this, below I have included an excerpt from my fieldnotes documenting a conversation I had with Devi, a 28 year old male participant, about his hopes and dreams for the future after resettling in the U.S.

I meet Devi in a Starbucks parking lot on his request so that we can walk to his house. The participant requests to just do the interview outside since it is such a nice day. Before the interview begins, we are discussing hardship after resettlement. I ask why so many people I interview tell me that resettlement has been easy when it seems that they have endured so much difficulty. Devi responds that “it is all a matter of perspective.” When they arrived in the U.S. they came from a place where they had nothing at all, no food, no water sometimes, no money or means of earning it and no rights. In the U.S., they had all of these things so everything seemed great by comparison. He continued, “our perspective has changed in some way. Where we compared our circumstances with the little we had before, I’ve lived here long enough to see that I can have more.” [He sees a new ford explorer drive by us] “Now things have changed. I see that guy [points to ford explorer] and I say, ‘I want that car and the house he has! I want his job and his life!’” (Devi, male, age 28)

Meanwhile, some illustrated a harsher socioeconomic reality that directly opposed portrayals of the “American dream” that they had seen and heard before arriving.

I felt like it was completely different. The things, like the history and geography that we studied back in our country...of the different countries...these things were treated far more differently than what I saw. Because we read different things, because we had learned that U.S. is highly advanced country, and in the dream of the country, we had expected it to be totally different... just like, when we saw the pictures we just saw skyscrapers and high buildings towers, and everything. But when we just landed in the United States we saw that ok, we have those high towers, but only in downtown areas... haha. We also saw that people here are struggling too, majority of the people have difficult time feeding their families. If they don't work for one day, or call in sick one day, they have difficult time getting food the next. And we had not thought that that would be the case in America. We came here, we realized that everyone is struggling at every second to make the living. (Tara, male, age 41)

The influence of Adam's (1931) "American Dream" is evident in all of these accounts. The policies and portrayals of the U.S. have shaped refugee perceptions of what opportunities will be available to them once they arrive. These notions even begin to develop before they arrive. Some maintain these hopes despite the difficulties they encounter in the post-resettlement environment while others see them more clearly as illusions. But economic concerns are also central to the placement of refugees across the U.S., and underlying these decisions is also the goal of inducing rapid economic independence.

**Selecting and placing refugees:** The selection and placement of refugees in the U.S. is a process managed through a complex and highly bureaucratized collaboration between international and national political and private players. At the top level, the U.S. Department of State coordinates overseas with the Resettlement Support Centers and UNHCR in identifying eligible refugees for U.S. resettlement (USDOS 2015). As I mentioned before, it is unclear exactly how this initial selection process is conducted, but once a refugee is accepted by the U.S. they are given priority ratings to determine their resettlement status and their particular needs (UNHCR 2014).

Priority One (P-1) is given to individuals who personally qualify as "refugee" under international humanitarian law for reasons of immediate persecution and threats of violence against their person. Priority two (P-2) applies to a "specific groups of special concern" identified for their particular need by the U.S. Department of State, UNHCR, and other NGOs. Priority Three (P-3) refers to "Nationals" of another country but who are spouses, children, or parents of individuals identified as P-1 or P-2. The majority of Bhutanese refugees in the U.S. were identified as P-2 based on the protracted nature of their stay in Nepali refugee camps and the unlikely event of their integration with Nepali society or repatriation to Bhutan (UNHCR 2014). Some were admitted as P-3, based on kinship ties to a P-2 refugee. Of the 21 interview participants, 11 had come to Prospect City to reunite with family, 2 of whom had moved from another state after resettling.

Once identified, biographical summaries of each individual refugee is transferred by the Department of State to nine domestic resettlement agencies or "stakeholders" who manage the majority of refugee caseloads entering the U.S. every year under the broader supervision of the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (PRM 2014).<sup>23</sup> These larger stakeholders represent over 350 affiliated resettlement offices across the country (Nezer 2013). Every week, a select committee representing the nine stakeholders is given the special task of matching the "particular needs" of each incoming refugee with one of 190 local U.S. communities that have been identified for the resources they offer (PRM 2014). If a refugee wishes to reunite with family members who have already been placed in one of these locations, this request is prioritized in their placement deci-

<sup>23</sup> The nine stakeholders include: Church World Service, Episcopal Migration Ministries, Ethiopian Community Development Council, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, International Rescue Committee, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, and World Relief (PRM 2014) Only the International Rescue Committee and U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants are secular. While the other seven espouse various religious viewpoints, proselytizing of refugees under their supervision is prohibited under federal law (PRM 2011).

sion. Family reunification guides the majority of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> wave placements as well as secondary migrations.

If reuniting is not requested or not an option, the decision making process is heavily informed by the ORR *Statistical Abstract for Refugee Resettlement Stakeholders* (SARRS). This is the primary protocol for deciding first wave placements of P-1 and P-2 refugees, as no family members have been placed ahead of them (ORR 2014). Put out each new fiscal year, the SARRS is a complicated spreadsheet comparing a range of economic conditions and refugee outcomes on a state-by-state basis so that the committee can make informed and speedy decisions about which local communities are best suited for refugee placement at a given time. These selections are based on recent statistics showing cost of living, income medians, unemployment rates, in addition to refugee employment rates, secondary migrations, and state and private funding opportunities. The presence of a resettlement agency within 50 miles is required for a community to be considered a resettlement option (PRM 2011), and the level of funding and resources available to the agencies in the area greatly predicts the number of refugees placed in their care. Agencies that achieve high placement rates are also more likely to receive future funding.

Overall, Western State's SARRS profile is positive, making it an ideal location for refugee placement.<sup>24</sup> Bhutanese refugees were first granted U.S. resettlement status in 2006, and began to arrive in 2008 in the midst of a global economic recession, making the prospect of "economic self-sufficiency" difficult at best. Western State's unemployment at the end of 2008 went from a low between 3-4% to above 8% at the start of 2010. Nonetheless, over the past decade, unemployment in Western State has consistently remained below national averages. Today it has fallen back down far below the U.S. average. This, in part, is a result of substantial growth in low, medium, and high skill jobs in Western State compared to other states.<sup>25</sup> By and large, Bhutanese refugees in Prospect City who participated in this project found low skill jobs. Most worked janitorial positions at the airport, hospitals, or local malls and parks. A few with more education found employment in medium skill-level jobs as case-workers and lab technicians.

Once the matches were made, the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal were informed through the Resettlement Support Center and provided 5 days of "cultural orientation" (USDOS 2015). They were also interviewed by the Department of Homeland Security before receiving authorization to proceed in the resettlement process. Meanwhile the International Office of Migration (IOM) began to make preparations for their travel by organizing flights and arranging with local resettlement agencies to set up itineraries and pick-up times (USDOS 2015). While refugees are given federal funding in the first months of their arrival, the cost of travel is not covered, and they must sign a promissory note before accepting the offer of resettlement saying that they will pay back the U.S. government the expense of the airline ticket (USDOS 2015).

After arriving, the Department of State relinquishes its role in the resettlement process to one of the nine domestic resettlement stakeholders and its subsidiary local agencies. This transfer of responsibility is documented in a "cooperative agreement" between the agency and Department of State (PRM 2011), ensuring that refugees receive the appropriate amenities, social/cultural assistance, and funding outlined in U.S. resettlement policies to assist them in becoming self sufficient members of society as outlined in the Refugee Act of 1980. Volunteers usually are responsible for picking refugees up from the airport and setting up their new apartments. If members of the community are already resettled, they often accompany the welcome party.

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<sup>24</sup> References are intentionally excluded to protect the identity of the community. General information on SARRS can be found at (ORR 2014) in the bibliography.

<sup>25</sup> "High" and "medium" skill jobs require higher education degrees and include dentists, chefs and head cooks, teachers, and engineers or teacher assistants, dental hygienists, medical records and health information technicians, and carpenters. Often these types of jobs are unavailable to incoming refugees who have poor English proficiency, minimal work experience, and non-transferable educational credentials (ORR 2014). "Low" skill jobs, according to the SARRS (ORR 2014) do not require a college degree or significant training and include home health aides, waiters and waitresses, childcare workers, and construction laborers.

The issue of refugee “dispersal” is worth more attention. Initial attempts by the U.S. government at refugee placement sought to distribute refugees evenly and widely like “broadcasting seeds” in order to diffuse economic and cultural pressures within communities and to ensure better employability for refugees themselves. Overall, these goals are still central factors in the process of finding good locations for refugees to settle down (UNHCR 2013). Howell (1996) has pointed out, however, that these policies tend to neglect cultural and social characteristics of refugee communities. The consequence of this following Vietnam was a striking pattern of secondary post-resettlement migrations as refugees relocated to rejoin family and establish larger communities (Howell 1996). These secondary migrations have placed unexpected strains on local resources and infrastructures in communities around the U.S. (Lugar 2010). More recently, refugee trends in secondary migrations have been added to the list of outcomes in SARRS (ORR 2014) that are considered when making refugee placement decisions. Locations with fewest out-migrations are presumably most ideal. In the past two years, as an example, Western State has had seen relatively stable “net” migration of in and outgoing refugees.

### **Final Destination: Prospect City**

The first wave of Bhutanese refugees arrived in Prospect City in the winter of 2008 at the height of an economic recession. They had little more than the shirts on their backs and a few items of cultural significance. When they arrived, they were met at the airport by caseworkers and some local Nepali interpreters. Many of them had eaten nothing since they left Nepal. From the airport they were shuttled across the valley floor to their newly furnished apartments where they were introduced to the bathroom, kitchen, and how to use the appliances safely. They were also driven around the city and shown how to get to their resettlement agency, how to find and use public transportation, and where to buy groceries. In the days that followed, they began a process of learning—learning to fill out forms, to pay rent, how to apply for federal aid. But in the next weeks and months their time was consumed by job searches and seemingly endless interviews—many of which were unsuccessful. These experiences are common for many who enter the U.S. under the U.S. Refugee Admission Program, a process which has historically emphasized “economic self sufficiency” as the only pathway to integration (Halpern 2008; Ong 2003:83-85).

*Journey into the Unknown:* Traveling to the U.S. was difficult for most of the Bhutanese refugees whom I interviewed. No one had flown in an airplane prior to their resettlement; and even 4 and 5 years after the fact, many could still recall the musty, unidentifiable smell of the cramped airplane cabins in which they sat for their long journey from Nepal, to Europe, and then to the United States. The experience was unfamiliar in all regards, particularly for the older members who spoke little if any English. Getting tickets and finding the terminals was confusing in a sea of faces, computer screens, and intercoms barking commands in a variety of unknown languages. There were thousands of people from every region on the world in the airports bustling urgently toward unknown destinations. On the planes, the seating was tight and uncomfortable, the windows were small, engines were loud, and the food and bathrooms were like nothing they had seen or smelled before.

Many of the flights began with a long bus-ride to Kathmandu from the camps. From there they boarded a huge airplane and flew to Heathrow Airport where they changed over and then made their way to New York or New Jersey. In New York, they had to wait with sometimes very long layovers to catch the smaller flights to their designated cities spread around the country. Meanwhile, larger groups of families and friends who gathered at the buses in Nepal saw their numbers dwindle down with each stop along the journey to their final destinations. The closer they came to what would be their new home, the more isolated they felt.

Having lived in Nepali camps for 20 years, and met many foreign aid workers, their minds were full of preconceived ideas about what the U.S. would look like, smell like, and feel

like. Many of these notions were inspired by images and descriptions of New York City and Los Angeles that they had seen and heard about while in Nepal. As a result, many over generalized the level of urban development across the U.S., expecting to see nothing but sky-scrapers, roads, people, and lights. There were also rumors of the dangers of living in these places (HRW 2007), as those who wanted to stay in Nepal tried to scare people away from the idea of resettlement. These thoughts were particularly frightening and several participants expressed the relief they felt when they arrived and saw the U.S. for the first time. Bishnu, a 25 year old male participant who lived in a seven member household shared how some of these sentiments impacted his own perceptions of the U.S. before and after arrival.

I don't know if everyone thinks the same way, but once you are planning that you are coming to the United States, you have a pretty big idea about what the United states is gonna be like. You have a pretty big broad idea you know. But once you come in here, it's totally different. You imagine all those big buildings, but, there are buildings but you are not really close to them. And you live in this small house, and all those things. And we heard rumors that you can't walk outside because people will shoot you. Rumors that people will kill you. All those things. But when we came here, we could walk outside, you can do whatever you want to do, you know.

The last food that they had eaten was in Nepal which they made in the comfort of their huts on the familiar heat of their wood-fired hearths. During interviews, participants relished memories of the robust flavors and smells of foods they made in their home-country. These memories contrasted greatly with the competing smells of meats, vegetables, and grains being grilled, fried, and steamed for the convenience of the million travelers patroning the airport food courts. The unfamiliarity of this environment kept many away from eating any food over concerns about accidentally eating beef—a religiously prohibited item. In New York the resettlement agencies had coordinated to provide Bhutanese refugees “culturally appropriate foods.” While attempts at feeding the refugees were made, the foods they were offered were often unfamiliar, and combined with fatigue of international travel, many were overcome with nausea. This “sickness” which was likely jet-lag, stayed for several days after their arrival, and was accompanied by dizziness and exhaustion that made any experimental forays into American cuisine even more unlikely. Below, Chhali, a 22 year old female participant, describes this “sickness” in greater detail

In our flight over we change like four different plane coming from Nepal to Kathmandu, Boran to Paris, Paris to New Jersey, New Jersey to Dallas and they brought the boiling chicken and we don't even like that. And I feel dizzy and vomiting and in Dallas Texas we were in the gate and my little sister feeling dizzy and feel like to vomit and the guy said 'hey you are sick you have to stay away' and we are all family and we had to stay because they cancel our flight and they call a doctor and he check everything and they say your flight is changed to 10 pm.

Her husband interjects:

It was because she was hungry and she don't like to eat the American food. She feel dizzy and throw up, and then her family call someone here, and someone here pick up the phone and her brother translate over the phone those guys and say like “They like to eat Asian food, you guys need to provide Asian food! After that, when they eat Asian food or Indian food, they gonna be fine.” When they brought those food, they eat little bit, and still feel dizzy, because it's a long way from Nepal, they gonna feel dizzy. (Male, age 25)

The majority of younger Bhutanese refugees were able to speak English upon arrival as a result of the language curriculum provided in the refugee camps. This prepared them for the first days of life in the U.S. However, all of the people that I interviewed who could speak English when they arrived described the difficulty of getting used to the “American accent.” Having at-



tended school in Nepal and sometimes India, Bhutanese refugees were exposed to “British English” and felt unprepared for the dialects and accents they encountered in the U.S. Tara, a 41 year old male participant explains some of these challenges.

Most of us were lucky and went to school. And our curriculum was in English from kindergarten up, so we learned English. The only difference is our accent, in the British English. We learned British English and Indian English which sound a little different. Here there are other ways of speaking. It was really difficult understanding people in North Carolina. Even people from the northern part of America, they go to North Carolina and don’t understand the accent.

**Resettlement agency contact:** After arriving in their destination cities, refugees are assigned a caseworker (PRM 2014). The length of this relationship varies depending on the resettlement agency and the needs of the refugee. In Prospect City, there are two primary resettlement agencies. One is well funded by federal, state, and donor sources and offers refugees with casework up to 24 months, which is far longer than most other agencies in the U.S. The other offers casework to refugees for only 6 months, by comparison, and receives most of its funding from federal grants. There is also a third organization in Prospect City that manages refugees, but not resettlement itself. This organization takes on casework for refugees in need after they exceed the allotted time offered by the two primary agencies. It also provides a variety of psychological, social, and health services not offered by the other two agencies. Refugees with disabilities or who have extra needs often require this type of extended support that is not provided by the government and outstrips the resources of many resettlement agencies (PRM 2014).

Nonetheless, serving as the initial interface between refugees and “mainstream” American society, Shrestha (2011) has argued that resettlement agencies play a key role in the “Americanization” of refugees. They construct “new neoliberal subjects” by instilling ideologies of individualism, self-sufficiency, and opportunity into refugees through cultural orientation classes and enforcement of Federal stipulations for financial support (Shrestha 2011). Indeed, most interactions between incoming refugees and resettlement caseworkers involve finding employment. Initial assistance is provided by the resettlement agencies in helping the individual or family to get established, learn about paperwork, rent, money, healthcare, and normal day-to-day life, but because “self-sufficiency” is the core principle of U.S. resettlement policies (Halpern 2008), adult refugees receive employment authorization at the moment of their arrival (PRM 2014), and the clock begins ticking on their eligibility for the federal grants. Applications for these grants need to be submitted in the first month of arrival and their eligibility is contingent upon their “active pursuit of employment” (ORR 2012). Logistical issues of paying rent, mailing letters, finding transportation and grocery shopping that define the caseworker-refugee relationship in the first weeks are quickly overshadowed by the need to get job interviews and find a stable income.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, children are enrolled in public schools at the appropriate grade levels.

The first waves of Bhutanese refugees that came to Prospect City were all designated P-2, as there were no prior established family members in the area to reunite with. Only 140 arrived to Prospect City in 2008 (ORR 2015), and according to participants, these arrivals were spread thinly across the 12 months. Most came as small family units and shared apartments, food, and other resources, a common strategy in the Prospect City Bhutanese community for addressing economic pressures. There was a small Nepali community in the area that had come in years prior for economic purposes. With encouragement from the two resettlement agencies they assisted in translation and providing cultural support. But they were busy with their own lives and their support was very limited. As a result, the first families to resettle in Prospect City described feeling very isolated and alone during those initial months. Some made efforts to communicate with

<sup>26</sup> There is often high turnover for refugees in their first jobs as they get acquainted with the system, transportation, and work style. Unfortunately, the credentials earned while in Nepali refugee camp schools have not transferred to the U.S. Many Prospect City Bhutanese refugees who received higher degrees have been unable to find jobs that match their skill levels.

friends and family in Nepal who were still waiting for paperwork to go through. These communications were made possible by a proliferation of internet café's in Nepali townships surrounding the refugee camps after U.S. approval for resettlement was confirmed.<sup>27</sup>

Rates of Bhutanese arrivals to Western State increased five-fold between 2008 and 2014, to a total of between 1200-1600. This does not include secondary migrations to the state by refugees who had originally resettled in other parts of the country (see table 3.1). After the initial waves of P-2 placements, subsequent placements were organized based on family reunification for other P-2s whose paperwork had been held up and any P-3s who were still in Bhutan. Several interview participants had moved to Prospect City after resettling in Washington, North Carolina, and Georgia to reunite with extended family and get better jobs. Some married during the process of resettlement to individuals who had been approved to resettle in other countries. This required special paperwork to be submitted that retroactively re-designated the new spouse as P-3 or P-2 so that they could apply for resettlement in the U.S. Unfortunately, the approval process usually takes 12 to 18 months (PRM 2014; UNHCR 2014). These circumstances forced the new spouse of one participant to stay in Nepal an extra year after her family had moved to Australia to be able to join her husband in the U.S. He had resettled in the U.S. a year prior.

**Table 3.1.** Estimated Range of Bhutanese Refugee Arrivals to Western State and the U.S. by Year (2008-2014)

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Western State	100-200	250-300	250-300	150-250	200-300	100-200	50-150
U.S.	5244	13317	12309	14882	15021	9045	8316

Ranges are used instead of actual numbers to protect the location identity of the community

Much like many refugees who arrive to the U.S. for the first time, the first families who arrived in Prospect City experienced many unforeseen challenges, and their responses to these challenges set the foundations for how their community would address the demands of resettlement in years to come. Many of these challenges involved simple aspects of everyday life that are taken for granted by the general U.S. population but become monumental challenges to newly arrived refugees. Transportation, finding food, and learning how to safely use appliances like microwaves, stoves, and heaters are among some. But more broadly, many described the difficulties of becoming acquainted with “the system,” which, based on their stories, included the larger institutional parameters structuring day to day life, such as the rules of society, culture, economy, law, politics, and education which organize our time, behaviors, work schedules, shopping patterns, and what we accept as right and wrong in these regards. In many respects, the description that Indra (male, age 20) recalled from his first days attending high school in the U.S. serve as a metaphor the broader challenges of navigating any bureaucratic system in the U.S.

**Interviewer:** What was it like during your first week here?

**Indra:** Yeah, I remember really well because I was lost at school the first day. I was at Evergreen High School and it was my first day and I was lost, and it was really big. And there were only two or three Nepali kids at the whole school. So the guy I was with, he left me when he went to class. But I don't know what to do! So I just stood there the whole day in the same spot. And then at the end of the day that guy came back and we went home. And he started teaching me like this is class and stuff... you know, how to get places.

**Interviewer:** Nobody came to help you?

<sup>27</sup> Local Nepali entrepreneurs saw the coming need for basic computer classes and began opening new businesses to suit the demand. The UNHCR also funded some of these businesses according to one of my participants. As more people resettled, the need to communicate replaced the need to learn basic computer skills. Skype and Facebook have become common forums by which families and friends are able to keep in touch around the world.

**Indra:** Yeah one guy came but I don't know what he said, so he went away. All I used to say was "Ok," haha! So whatever he said I just said "Ok." So he just went away.

**Interviewer:** How did you get to school the first time?

**Indra:** My friend, he was in my apartment complex, so I went with him. So the school got in touch with that guy and we walked together a few times. But he also has to go to class, and he was in a different grade. So he had to leave me. I went to the first class, but when I got out I didn't know what to do, so I just stood there. Even I show my schedule to the teacher and I don't know what he said. And so I said "ok," and came out and waited in the hall until the end of the day.

The first families to arrive were confronted by all of these challenges, but with even less of a social network to depend upon. And they had little guidance beyond brief cultural orientation provided by the caseworkers and resettlement agencies to assist them. As a consequence, many strategies were developed at the individual and family level to address different issues as they came up. As more families arrived and encountered similar problems, these strategies were passed along, until they crystallized as broader community strategies. This passage of knowledge from one family to the next has influenced the types of car insurance people get in the community, to the stores people frequent, and even the coupons people use to get discounts. As an important example, all of the people that I interviewed who arrived before 2011 describe significant difficulties finding employment when they first arrived. By and large, participants attributed these difficulties to a general lack of job experience in the U.S., poor language skills, and some indicated that the economic recession was an added challenge. Despite being helped by the resettlement agencies that have established relationships with local employers (Sargent et al. 1999; Chan 1994), the first people to arrive spent many months finding a job.

More recent arrivals have experienced greater success at finding employment, sometimes looking no more than a few weeks. In some respects, the success of newer arrivals can be attributed to job growth and an improving economy in Western State over the past years. But their successes also stem from the efforts of those who arrived before them in paving the way into the job market and establishing solid relationships with prior/current employers who they can refer to newcomers.

It took like 3 months for me to get a job after I arrived. What happen was like, one of my neighbors, she is pretty good, and her sister was an HR manager at the Arch Way systems [pseudonym]...the one that manufacture for carpet cleaning company. So she took me over there and we fill out application and everything because she was HR manager. So she just call me the next hour! And like "hey, you want to start your job next Monday?" and I say, ok! Then it was pretty easy for me. But it was really hard for other families. So once I started there, I talk to my supervisor and I took my brother and sister there and got them jobs too. (Bishnu, male, age 25)

Informal strategies within the community have been very helpful in getting people established during the initial resettlement process. And this type of assistance from community members who arrived earlier is encouraged by the local agencies who are working at capacity to manage the overall resettlement process. But over the first year, refugees quickly outlive their eligibility for federal aid and agency support, and soon require alternative sources of assistance (Lugar 2010). At the same time, they encounter new milestones that present their own unique bureaucratic challenges. At the end of year one, refugees are required to apply for permanent residence in the U.S. to receive a green card, and at the fifth year, refugees become eligible for U.S. citizenship and begin the application process for the civics exam (PRM 2014). These two larger milestones set by the U.S. government in the process of becoming "American" straddle a host of other smaller milestones, such as getting a drivers license, finding insurance, paying taxes, maintaining employment, and finding alternative sources of financial aid if necessary.

***The Bhutanese Community Organization (BCO):*** To address these particular bureaucratic challenges, and solidify refugee's move towards becoming more economically independent, many states encourage refugees to establish their own organizations that will take the reins on managing the individual needs of their community members over the long term. In 2013, the Bhutanese Community in Western State (BCO) was officially approved by the State of Western State as a non-profit organization, taking its position as the arbiter of all cultural, economic, and political concerns of its members. Above all, the BCO, provides a locus of identity for its members to meet, celebrate Hindu holidays, and share in their culture, food, and language. I personally attended multiple events organized by the BCO during my fieldwork and was able to witness the important role that the organization plays in this regard. But its bureaucratic functions rise to importance where the services of the resettlement agencies end, providing a variety of financial, social, legal, and cultural support to the Prospect City Bhutanese community.

In some ways, the articulation of the BCO as a state sanctioned minority organization, against broader Federal refugee policies and funding sources becomes an important outlet for extending the influence of deeper "American" ideologies on refugee communities. As a designated 501(c)3 non-profit organization, granted on the basis of refugee capacity building, the BCO by-laws and funding are heavily shaped by larger State and Federal Refugee policies, including those that have historically emphasized self-sufficiency. All funding of the BCO is supplied either through donations (mostly from membership dues from within the community) or "capacity building" grants, the majority of which come through federal and state sources.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, the BCO sits at the nexus of multiple cultural and political economic influences coming from the state, federal government, the Prospect City community, as well as the Bhutanese community itself. The articulation of these multiple influences is evident in the BCO "vision statement" which outlines its intentions in helping all members of its community achieve "self-sufficiency and full integration into mainstream society" while also "promoting [and] preserving the ethnicity, culture, tradition, diverse religions and building organizational and individual capacities."

How this vision is achieved is more specifically outlined in Section 5 of the BCO bylaws, where seven purposes are identified (see Appendix B for full BCO Bylaws) which demonstrate a clear transition of responsibilities normally held by resettlement agencies to the BCO. But the services offered by the BCO also take on a new function beyond what any resettlement agencies could offer, and that is the *translation* of U.S. policy, law, and culture into more understandable terms for its community members. In this sense, the BCO becomes an extension of the "Americanizing" functions that Shrestha (2011) described of the resettlement agencies. Since it was first organized the BCO has worked to provide its community members with information necessary for their participation in U.S. society, this includes classes on U.S. law, finances, how to interview for a job, and even assistance with drivers education.

Through this process of education, members of the Bhutanese community are given explanations for what is perceived by the BCO board to be the deeper cultural and economic "values" that are essential to life in the U.S. These, of course, are interpretations drawn from their own experiences and what they have learned through interactions with resettlement agencies, federal policies, legal officials, and teachers among the many other sociocultural influences. Sometimes when these values contradict former ways of thinking, the board is forced to persuade community members into changing their behaviors to meet these new cultural expectations. According to participants, a variety of issues have resulted in these types of community conversations, including issues with caste discrimination, gender roles, and parenting practices. As just

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<sup>28</sup> According to a former BCO board member, resettlement agencies seek similar funding sources, resulting in competition between the BCO and Prospect City resettlement agencies for grants. This has led to some hard feelings between the organizations, and required significant bureaucratic maneuvering on the part of the BCO, which has received several grants in the past years.

one example, Hem (male, age 27), a former board member of the BCO, explains a conversation he has begun in his community over parenting strategies.

We usually train the people. We get a grant, and then train the community in each and every aspect of living in the U.S., like how we can manage the children in the house... the children aren't going to be like they were in Nepal or Bhutan because they are getting education in a very different way. We were born with the physical punishment. But that is not acceptable over here. So that way, we are trying to engage the people in different meetings and we have different speakers from different backgrounds, and once this speaker of the truth it will be translated into Nepali and they will know what is going on.

The U.S. offers Bhutanese refugees freedom—the freedom to practice their religion, speak their language, dress how they wish, and celebrate their culture, all of which presents an obvious contrast to the highly discriminatory policies passed by the RGOB in the 1980s and 1990s. But after arriving in the U.S. they are still constrained in new social, cultural, economic, and legal ways that limit the extent to which these freedoms can be pursued. In taking on the functions described above, the BCO has become an important institutional influence on the community overall, guiding the articulation of former cultural practices with the new demands of post-resettlement life in the U.S. The BCO identifies these particular limitations and illustrates ways that the community can find a compromise that will allow them to move beyond them. But through their participation in these classes, community members are also taught to be new kinds of people, or “individuals.” They are taught to be productive members of the U.S. labor force and broader society. And, following the path laid out for them by the Refugee Act of 1980, they are expected to learn how to take personal responsibility for their actions and their futures, a value that is modeled by the BCO.

## Conclusion

Roseberry (1998:75, 79-81) argues that anthropological investigations of political-economy should focus on the relations by which resources are controlled, mobilized, and appropriated, but he broadens the scope of political economic theory by stipulating that “political economy” includes global processes of capitalism but should not be defined solely on this basis. Instead, the control of resources and labor should be understood within local contexts by identifying the relations of power as they exist within specific, historically constructed social fields that may occur outside of and/or articulating with global capitalism.

In the paragraphs above, I have attempted to illustrate, in narrative form, how the Bhutanese Refugee Crisis of the late 1980s that resulted in the expulsion of over 1/6<sup>th</sup> of Bhutan's population exemplifies the “historically situated” political economic processes of which Roseberry speaks. I argue that the crisis was born through competing relations of political, economic, and cultural power in South Asia and the world, stemming back to British colonial influences in Bhutan, India, and Nepal up through to the present in the form of humanitarian organizations and processes of third country resettlement. But most importantly, all of these forms and uses of power have contributed to the mobilization of ethnic-Nepalis across time and geographical space for different political and economic ends. Today these forces have positioned the ethnic Nepali refugees as new members of the U.S. labor force.

As many have pointed out (e.g., Spence 1984; Stocking 1992; White 2009), historical narratives often suggest some level of continuity of intentionality through time. They carry a reader from beginning to end along the well-defined or cohesive storyline, tying past events to future outcomes. This may be the case (though still debatable) for short periods of time in the lives of individuals, but certainly not when multiple players are involved over many generations.

My goal in this analysis was never to suggest that the events described above represent an “intentional” political economic process on the part of the British, RGOB, refugees, UNHCR, or

U.S. among any of the other main “actors.” Indeed, as Ferguson (1994) has suggested, power often has a mind of its own and can lead to unpredicted outcomes. The ethnic Nepalis who migrated to Bhutan did so in a particular historical context and under the circumstantial pressures of particular economic conditions. These initial processes were not “orchestrated” to culminate in the exile and eventual resettlement of Bhutanese refugees in the U.S. for their participation in a global economy. The ethnic Nepalis now identified as “Bhutanese refugees” illustrate a particular narrative which involves the articulations of shifting intentions across historically situated relations of local / global power. The course of ethnic Nepalis along these historical fault lines tie together the many intentions of power into what appears to be a more cohesive story; but their identities, histories, and economic worth at any moment in this history can only be interpreted within their specific contexts, which I have attempted to do by looking at their history in segments.

To summarize, this story began with the growth of tea industries in Darjeeling and Assam, and the efforts of the British East India Company to draw in cheap labor from Nepal which was suffering its own land problems at the time. As ethnic Nepalis began settling the lower regions of Bhutan, only miles away from the tea gardens of north India, their sudden presence offered new economic opportunities as well as cultural challenges to the political elite of Bhutan who began negotiations with British India to decide what to do with them. These negotiations resulted in the acceptance of ethnic Nepalis in the region, though tenuous as this decision was, mostly to satisfy British concerns of larger political challenges from China. But following the Indian Independence movement, and the colonial withdrawal, Bhutan and other fledgling South Asian nation states found themselves in the midst of emerging ethnic turmoil. Consequently, Bhutan began solidifying a national identity. Initially, these attempts were inclusive of the ethnic Nepalis, but these sentiments changed in the late 1980s when Bhutan passed highly discriminatory cultural and political policies that stripped the ethnic Nepalis of their recently acquired citizenship.

The mass exodus of ethnic Nepalis from Bhutan in 1991 and the establishment of the Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal marked a new chapter in their political economic narrative. The Bhutanese refugees, now stripped of national identity, found themselves caught between competing global and local power structures once again as Nepal, Bhutan, UNHCR and Amnesty international began negotiating “durable solutions.” Even though twenty years of negotiations proved ineffective at securing a path to repatriation, this prolonged period of confinement played an important role in the meantime, preparing the Bhutanese refugees for alternative resettlement solutions. The majority attended and graduated high school, some went on to earn higher degrees and in so doing, they were introduced to new systems of knowledge and learning that began to shape them into more ideal citizens of a global economy.

In 2008, these preparations came to an end and the Bhutanese refugees began shipping out for third country resettlement. This diaspora has built a global network of Bhutanese exiles in eight different countries, each of which presents its own challenges and opportunities upon arrival. In the U.S., these opportunities and constraints are largely shaped by federal policies that demand self-sufficiency and rapid economic independence from refugees within a short period. These policies, which stem from deeper assumptions underlying American capitalism, frame the placement, funding, and treatment of refugees at the federal, state, and local levels. Two consequences of such a singular focus, however, are low-wage employment and few opportunities to seek higher education for many 1<sup>st</sup> generation refugees, yet the dream of opportunity often remains among refugees, and parents work hard for their children to achieve greater things. Meanwhile refugee communities develop strategies to “preserve cultural identity” in the face of new economic and political demands.

But cultures are not isolated and self-contained “ideal types.” In the end, what we see is a compromise between the old and new ways of living and thinking. Local histories become embedded within broader flows of power that are shaped by and shaping global processes (Wolf 1982; Roseberry 1998:75, 79-81). Thus, as Roseberry (1998) cautions us to tread carefully on the

distinctions we make between the “global” and “local,” and reminds us that to move in either direction is to reify one over the other, I suggest that refugees begin to blur these distinctions. Indeed, to summarize points made by Wolf (1981:41, 42) among many later anthropologists, societies and cultures cannot be treated as islands. Nor is there a monolithic, uniform process by which the global can be analytically imposed upon local contexts. Rather, we must examine the *particular* arenas of social interaction and the interrelations structured through the control of labor (Roseberry 1998:75-91). This necessarily involves analysis of the local and global historical dimensions by which social relations are configured and gain power. As I have shown, Bhutanese refugees occupy a space in which all these dimensions have converged in shaping new identities and new sources of labor.

## Chapter 4: “U.S.A. Stands for U Start Again:” How Bhutanese Refugees Navigate Post-Resettlement Conditions to Successfully Integrate

### Introduction

In the previous chapter I borrowed a political economic perspective from Eric Wolf (1982; 2001) and William Roseberry (1998) to foreground the historical events behind Bhutanese refugees’ displacement and eventual resettlement in the U.S. During this analysis, I explored the relations of power that threatened Bhutanese refugees’ freedoms and cultural beliefs in Bhutan and Nepal and shaped the strong motivations they now carry into the U.S. to preserve their cultural identity and way of living. I also discussed the ideologies that frame U.S. resettlement policies and what this means for the economic demands placed upon Bhutanese refugees during integration. In the current chapter, I examine refugee resettlement as a particular kind of human-environment interaction, the outcomes of which are grounded in these historically and culturally motivated interactions. To do this, I combine adaptability and political economic theories to examine how Bhutanese refugees, as *agents*, balance their own motivations against sociocultural and structural demands coming from the American environment. I then consider what implications this might have for their ability to achieve other integration objectives outlined in Chapter One (i.e., resources, social connections, financial stability, cultural citizenship/belonging, and health and wellbeing).

**Background and specific aims:** Adaptability theory is critical to this dissertation and to my interpretation of how refugees interact with their environments. Adaptability is derived from *adaptation* which historically has been used to refer to the transfer of “beneficial” traits (or genes) from one generation to the next as natural selection acts on existing variation within a population (Wiley 2004).<sup>29</sup> In its current uses, adaptation has broadened beyond its connection to natural selection to include the spectrum of “adjustments” organisms undergo that impact survival and/or fitness within their lifetimes and across generations (Wiley 2004; Mazess 1978; Thomas 1998). Importantly, phenotypic and behavioral adjustments are included on this spectrum because these types of plasticity buffer organisms from immediate constraints and improve survival (Mazess 1978; Thomas 1998; Wiley 2004). Moreover, because these adjustments are often accommodative, it is now also generally accepted that they are not “cost free” but involve tradeoffs between the survival and health of the organism (Wiley 1992; Schell et al. 2007). What we can draw from these points is that: (1) organisms *actively* engage their environments to survive, (2) how they go about doing this varies, and (3) the different responses individuals develop may have variable impacts on health.

Traditionally, adaptability theory has used variable health outcomes in a population to gauge individual capacities to respond to constraints. From an evolutionary standpoint, health is an ideal measure for evaluating “success” because we assume that biological wellbeing hinges on the ability to acquire resources, survive, and reproduce; but as humans, we are also unique in our ability to use behaviors to construct complex social contexts that buffer us from natural forces (Dressler 2005; Schell 1997; Wiley 2004). In these environments “success” is a far more *relative* and socially constructed term that is mediated by structures of power that orient individual and collective behaviors towards different ends. While a person’s pursuit of “success” within these contexts may ultimately reshape the pathways by which resources are acquired and health is achieved, this connection is less direct. Thus, to understand *human adaptability*, we must acknowledge how social contexts place parameters around our capacities to access resources, re-

<sup>29</sup> This type of adaptation can also be understood as the process of change through natural selection. It is still a passive process on the part of the organism in that it is born with a phenotypic variant upon which natural selection acts.



spond to constraints, and survive (Messer 1986; Goodman et al. 1998; Wiley 1992; Crooks 1995; Ulijaszek 1997; Schell 1997; Schell et al. 2007).

Refugee resettlement represents a unique arena for exploring issues of human adaptability because the concepts of “success” that motivate and constrain refugee behavior are derived from two, sometimes very disparate, political and cultural histories: those from the resettlement environment, and those from the refugees themselves. The U.S. resettlement program, for instance, evaluates a successful integration on the grounds of economic self sufficiency and structures its integration policies to guide refugee newcomers towards this goal, however different refugees’ perceptions of integration may be (Haines 1996; Howell 1996). At the same time, refugees arrive to the U.S. with their own ideas of what a successful integration involves (Haines 1996). As I illustrated in the previous chapter, for Bhutanese refugees, cultural preservation appears to be a priority with strong historical precedent. To better understand how the process of integration relates to health among refugees, the unique pathways that emerge out of refugees’ interactions with the new environment must first be mapped out and understood.

Among Bhutanese refugees, as became clear in the previous chapter, there is a strong cultural privilege given to collective values. This was evident in the emphasis participants placed on reestablishing family, building community, and sharing resources among their community members following resettlement. As we will see in this chapter, and has been argued by other social and cultural scholars of life in South Asia, nowhere is the importance of collectivism more apparent than within the Hindu joint family (Mines et al. 2002; Wadley 2010), which Wadley (2002:11) describes as a flexible and adaptive multigenerational social system built on the “idea and reality that power comes through numbers.” In other words, the interdependence that arises from a shared belief that “belonging to a group is more important than individual goals and aspirations” provides security and support to each member and becomes its own buffer against the constraints of daily life (Wadley 2010: 11). While there is very little information on the role of joint families among Bhutanese refugees prior to their exile from Bhutan, or from within the refugee camps in Nepal, participants in the current study made it very clear that the joint family was present in their community long prior to their arrival to the U.S. As we will see in the coming paragraphs, while the joint family is not a fixed system and seems to be undergoing changes after coming to the U.S., it nevertheless has become an important strategy within Bhutanese refugees’ overall integration strategies.

In this chapter, *integration* is two things. First, it describes the ability to respond to challenges in the resettlement environment, assuming that this interaction is guided by the histories and motivations of the refugees and the structural parameters within which they must operate. Second, integration is a set of ideal objectives that refugees must strive to achieve in order to establish healthy, meaningful and sustainable lives which I outlined in chapter one in terms of access to resources, social connections, financial stability, cultural citizenship/belonging, and health and wellbeing. My goal at this point is not to link post-resettlement behaviors to health specifically,<sup>30</sup> but to understand the process of integration itself by clarifying what historical, social, and structural forces are at play when Bhutanese respond to perceived opportunities and constraints and how this impacts integration domains. Following these theoretical premises, my specific aims in this chapter are to: (1) identify the salient structural and sociocultural conditions that Bhutanese refugees perceive to facilitate and/or challenge the above listed integration domains, and (2) explore how they respond to these conditions at the individual, family, and community levels as they draw on their own unique sociodemographic and historical backgrounds.

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<sup>30</sup> Nutritional status and health will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

## Methods, a brief review

To satisfy the aims described above, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 adults from within the community during which the salient sociocultural and structural factors shaping the resettlement experiences of Bhutanese refugees were identified. During data analysis, specific factors were coded as challenges or facilitators based on participants' descriptions of the positive or negative influences these conditions had on their ability to access resources, develop new or maintain old social connections, establish financial stability and/or a sense of cultural citizenship/belonging in the post-resettlement environment.<sup>31</sup> The strategies being used at the individual, family, and community levels to respond to these conditions were identified during interviews when participants discussed ways that they had changed their behavior or way of thinking as a result of different facilitators/challenges they encountered in order to improve one or more of the aspects of integration listed above. These data are provided in 4.2 and 4.3. Pseudonyms are used for names and locations to protect the identities of study participants and their community. For more detailed descriptions on how data were collected, coded, and analyzed, refer to Chapter Two.

## Sample Characteristics

Demographic data from the interview sample were entered into Mini-tab 17 statistical software (Minitab 2015) and descriptive statistics were calculated. Relevant socioeconomic and demographic characteristics from the sample are summarized in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1.** Sociodemographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics from Interview Sample (n=21)

	Mean	Range	SD
Age (years)	31.62	18 - 60	10.58
Household Size	5.52	2 - 16	3.07
Household Employed	2.47	1 - 6	1.43
Household in School	1.42	0 - 4	1.27
		(n=)	(%)
Gender			
Male		12	57
Female		9	43
Caste Position			
Brahmin		13	61.7
Kshatriya		6	28.9
Other		2	9.5
Educational Background			
Uneducated		4	19.04
Nepal, Associates or higher		12	57.1
U.S., High School or higher		5	23.8
Occupation			
Unemployed		7	33.3
Custodial/Factory		5	23.8
Restaurant/Dishwasher		3	14.3
Cashier		2	9.5
Lab Assistant		1	4.7
Case Manager		1	4.7
Store Owner		1	4.7
Construction		1	4.7
Vegetarianism			
Vegetarian		5	23.8
No Beef		21	100
Socioeconomic Indicators			
Homeowner		7	33.3
Personal Vehicle		16	76.1

<sup>31</sup> These are the criteria I have outlined for a "successful" integration.

### **Factors shaping the process of integration and related strategies:**

Interviews revealed a range of structural and sociocultural conditions that facilitated and interfered with Bhutanese refugees' abilities to integrate. Tables 4.2 and 4.3 represent the most fine-grained analysis of sociocultural and structural challenges and facilitators from the ethnographic data, including the integration domains they relate to (resources, social connections, financial stability, cultural citizenship/belonging, and health and wellbeing), interacting sociodemographic characteristics (i.e. age, gender, language, caste, etc.), and related strategies used within the community. During the course of analysis, I discovered that many of the factors and strategies overlapped in complex ways and cross-cut multiple integration domains. To best capture these complex relationships, the findings presented below are organized by relationships between larger themes and the relevant integration domains that emerged during analysis.

**Table 4.2. Structural Facilitators and Challenges to Integration and associated Refugee Strategies**

	Impact on Integration		Interacting Socio-demographic Factor	Refugee strategies to respond to structural facilitators/barriers			Relevant Integration Domain		
	Endorsed as Facilitator	Did not Endorse as Challenge		Individual Level Strategies	Family Level Strategies	Community Level Strategies			
								n=	%
US Placement									
Advancement	15	71.4	*	6	28.5	Application for US resettlement	Application for US resettlement	Cultural citizenship/belonging Fin. Stability	
Freedom and Citizenship	13	61.9	6	28.5	9.5	ESL and Civics Studying	Networking for Personal Tutors	Cultural citizenship/belonging	
Law and Law Enforcement	5	23.8	6	28.5	10	47.6	Self Education, Avoiding contact with law	Providing guidance to elders	Cultural citizenship/belonging
Separation of family and friends	*	*	7	33.3	14	66.6	Social Media, Personal Vehicle ownership, Travel	Applying for resettlement together as Family, Living in joint family, sharing a personal vehicle	Cultural citizenship/belonging, Health
Timing of US Arrival									
First Wave in US	*	*	9	42.8	12	57.1	Dependence on resettlement Agencies; Social media; self education	Resource Pooling	All Domains
Subsequent Waves	16	76.1	2	9.5	3	14.2	Self education	Waiting to apply for resettlement, Knowledge Sharing, Resource pooling	All Domains
Financial Aid offered to Refugees									
Financial aid	12	57.1	8	38	1	4.7	Seeking out Financial aid opportunities; Self Education on "the system"; Making compromises in education, family, and work;	Identifying Leadership that can assist; living in Joint Family; Reconfiguring family relationships to satisfy aid regulations	Resources, Fin. Stability, Cultural citizenship/belonging,

**Table 4.2**  
Continued

	Impact on Integration			Interacting Socio-demographic Factor	Refugee strategies to respond to structural facilitators/barriers			Relevant Integration Domain			
	Endorsed as Facilitator		Did not Discuss		Individual Level Strategies		Family Level Strategies		Community Level Strategies		
	n=	%	n=		%	%	%		%		
Resettlement Agency Support											
Case Support	16	76.1	2	9.5	3	14.2	Arrival Wave	Seeking case worker assistance	Ω	Resources, Fin. Stability, Social connect	
Agency Job Support	9	42.8	*	*	12	57.1	Arrival Wave	Seeking agency job assistance	Ω	Cultural citizenship/belonging, Fin. Stability, Resources	
US Employment											
Finding Employment	6	28.5	14	66.6	1	4.7	Age, Language Mobility	Seeking out interviews; Accessing transportation; Acquiring education and credential building experiences	Ω	Resources, Fin. Stability,	
Being "Productive"	5	23.8	*	*	16	76.1	Age, gender	Seeking employment to become "productive"; making compromises in education and family in order to work	Ω	Cultural citizenship/belonging, Financial Stability, Resources	
Wages/Benefits/Career Mobility	*	*	15	71.4	6	28.5		Seeking jobs that develop skills; Working multiple jobs/overtime; Job switching	Resource Pooling within joint family to enhance financial stability	hiring a community job developer	Resources, Financial Stability, Health
Time Use (structure of work day/ week/ etc)	2	9.5	13	61.9	6	28.5	Age, Language Joint Family Mobility	Cultural Flexibility (promise); Job changes; Hours swapping	Using us law to protect religious freedoms at work; planning family events around work,	Hiring a community job developer; Organizing events to meet time needs of community	Financial Stability, Resources, Cultural citizenship/belonging
Education System											
Career Advancement	12	57.1	*	*	9	42.8	Age	Seeking education opportunities/credentials at work and school	Resource pooling to invest in child education	Ω	Financial Stability, Cultural citizenship/belonging
Time and Financial cost	*	*	13	61.9	8	38	Joint Family	Applying for financial aid	Resource pooling to invest in child education	Ω	Financial Stability, Cultural citizenship/belonging



**Table 4.3.** Sociocultural Facilitators and Challenges to Integration and associated Refugee Strategies

	Impact on Integration		Interacting Socio-demographic Factor		Refugee strategies to respond to Individual Level Strategies		Refugee strategies to respond to Family Level Strategies		Community Level Strategies		Relevant Integration Domain
	Endorsed as Facilitator (n=)	Endorsed as Challenge (n=)	Age, Education, Mobility	Socio-demographic	Individual Level Strategies	Family Level Strategies	Community Level Strategies	Community Level Strategies	Community Level Strategies		
	(%)	(%)									
Mainstream Culture, Language, and Ideologies											
Land of Opportunity	15	71.4	*	6	28.5	Being cognizant of opportunities to "improve" that arise after resettlement	Ω	Ω	Ω	Financial Stability, Cultural citizenship/belonging All Domains	
Language	6	28.5	11	52.3	4	19	ESL Tutoring; Speaking Nepali at Home with children	ESL and Nepali Classes; Careful job placement for older non-English speakers.			
Physical Intimacy	*	*	4	19	17	80.9	Becoming Flexible and understanding;	Middle age members mediating family disputes; Family time	Community meetings about adaptation and change; Community cultural events	Cultural citizenship/belonging	
Individualism	*	*	5	23.8	16	76.1	Social media; Personal Vehicles/public transportation;	Living in Joint Family	Close Living Proximity of community members	Social Connect Cultural citizenship/belonging, Financial Stability	
Gender Roles/ Norms	4	19	6	28.5	11	52.3	Career seeking women; Mothers who stay home until child enters school; complex rationalizing of traditional gender norms within logic of "equality"	Sharing of childcare in household to accommodate financial needs and dual earning parents.	Community classes on gender equality	Cultural citizenship/belonging, Financial Stability	
Religion and Religious values	5	23.8	3	14.2	13	61.9	Utilizing opportunities and resources provided by local religious institutions; Avoidance of interaction with religious people; Cultural flexibility and incorporation of non Hindu beliefs	Ω	Ω	Cultural citizenship/belonging, Resources, Financial Stability	

**Table 4.3**  
Continued

	Impact on Integration			Interacting Socio-demographic Factor	Refugee strategies to respond to sociocultural facilitators/barriers			Relevant Integration Domain			
	Endorsed as Facilitator (n=) (%)	Endorsed as Barrier (n=) (%)	Did not Discuss (n=) (%)		Individual Level Strategies	Family Level Strategies	Community Level Strategies				
Work and School											
Colleagues and Peers	13	61.9	6	28.5	2	9.5	Age Education Employment	Seeking out positive work and school relationships. School/job switching to improve integration opportunities.	Ω (no strategies were mentioned in this specific context but living in a joint family was likely a way of diminishing negative impacts of interactions at work and school)	Ω	Social Connect, Resources, Financial Stability Cultural citizenship/belonging
Knowledge, skills, and cultural messages	8	38	11	52.3	2	9.5	Age	Using work and school interactions as sources of cultural knowledge and opportunities to develop careers; switching to better jobs with better social environments; Cultural flexibility; Avoidance	Speaking only Nepali at home; joint family to reinforce Bhutanese cultural messages; Parents finding middle ground between youth and elders	Community cultural classes; Community workshops on adaptation; Nepali classes for children	Resources, Financial Stability, Cultural citizenship/belonging, Health
Community and Family Obligation to Family/Community	20	95.2	*	*	1	4.7	Age, Joint Family	Working for family; Participating in family events; making compromises at work and school for family	Resource pooling and living in Joint family; Family events, religious practice	Families living in close proximity to each other; community events.	All Domains
Cultural Events	7	33.3	12	57.1	2	9.5		Job switching, Hours Swapping, Practice in off hours,	Budgeting for festival costs,	Careful rescheduling of cultural events to meet community members' work schedules	Social Connect, Cultural citizenship/belonging, Financial Stability
Practicing Caste System	*	*	7	33.3	14	66.6	Caste Position	Avoidance/concealment and Accommodation	Cultural space in Joint family	Classes on caste discrimination and equality in America	Cultural citizenship/belonging, Social Connect, Resources
*	Received no endorsement from participants during interviews										
Ω	No strategies were identified for this specific factor										



*Advancement, freedom, cultural citizenship/belonging and financial stability:*

Being a refugee for the whole life doesn't make sense. Cause the thing about it is, you graduate from school, you graduate from college, but you don't get any jobs because you are not a citizen. So you don't have nothing to do. Come back to the camp and stay there. Teach the kids, you know. So that's why once the United States have a proposal for third country resettlement, and I thought maybe that's a really good idea to advance ourselves. (Bishnu, male, age 25)

Over here...It more good. There are rules here, no body above the rules, nobody above the law. Its good, and when we live here for 5 months we get green card and after five years we apply for citizenship now. We live there [in Nepal] for 18 years...but never citizen. Nothing! (Duka, female, age 23)

What I feel from my point of view is that you should never be dependent on anybody. And I was full of energy [in the camps], and I could earn for myself and feed my family and others too. But at that time I had to live like a beggar, a homeless one or something. Which I felt I was being humiliated... I was really underestimated for my strength! I mean I had good potential, but the situation was like that, it was hard to even get out [of the camp] and work for myself. Even if they had let us out of the camp I would have been able to do nothing because I lost my nationality and my identity, and my struggle would have been just worthless.... So then when the U.S. offered resettlement program...I think I was one of the first persons to apply. As soon as they announced, I filled out the form...and I feel that I have regained a lot... (Tara, age 41 male)

Bhutanese refugees lost their citizenship in Bhutan amid harsh nationalization policies that threatened their Hindu beliefs, cultural traditions, language, and way of living. In response, many fled to Nepal where they remained in exile hoping for repatriation for nearly twenty years. During this time Bhutanese were prohibited from integrating with local Nepali economies and were dependent on meager food supplies provided by the UNHCR. Participants who were old enough to have families while living in the camps expressed a great sense of loss as a result of their confinement and dependence on foreign aid, which they felt deprived them of their most "productive" years and interfered with their ability to provide for their families and community.

As the opening quotes illustrate, the influence that political exile and confinement in refugee camps had on Bhutanese refugee's motivations to resettle cannot be overstated. Community members whom I met with throughout the project often claimed to have been among the first to apply for resettlement when the option was first offered in 2008. When explaining this decision, 71% of participants described how they hoped the ability to work and receive educations would allow their families to "advance" rather than remain dependent on foreign aid. Meanwhile, 62% of participants went on to explain that they selected the U.S. above other countries because of the cultural and religious freedoms it offers.<sup>32</sup>

As we will see in the sections to follow, cultural and religious beliefs are deeply linked with Hinduism and family. Viewed together, these general findings illustrate the overlapping political, economic, and cultural motivations Bhutanese refugees have carried into the resettlement context. While participants did not use the term "cultural citizenship" to describe their motivations for resettlement, the desire to become equal members of society without abandoning their cultural identities is a clear integration agenda. As I will demonstrate in the paragraphs that follow, these motivations become important determinants of what sociocultural and structural conditions participants viewed as an opportunity or constraint, which had subsequent implications for how they engaged the new environment.

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<sup>32</sup> Language was also probably a factor in their resettlement decisions. While no participants identified language as a reason for selecting the U.S., many younger refugees had learned English in the school program in the camps. Participants did discuss the challenges their family members were facing in Denmark and other non-English speaking countries where Bhutanese refugees resettled. There were several other English speaking countries that made the offer, however, which indicates that there was something more than just language factoring into the decision.

***Timing of arrival, resources, social connections, financial stability, and cultural citizenship/belonging:***

When I came to the United States, I wanted to go back to my country. My husband was still in Nepal at the time. It was so difficult for me, like with the language barrier, and the job, you know, and we didn't have good transportation. We didn't have a car at that time, so we couldn't go anywhere. I just wanted to go home (Leela, age 27, Female, arrived 2009)

Being in the first phase [of arrivals] the biggest challenge was the language but it was also just a different community. But later we were like a big family and everyone is here. We are ok now, but the first months was kinda like... it was really hard. We felt alone, and we were thinking about our other life, and our relatives, and when we can reach them you know, and meet them again. (Chandra age 29 male, arrived 2009)

When I first got here I used the bus all the time, it wasn't hard at all to go out because my cousin was helping me, he had been here for 5 years already so he knew everything. I think it was really different [when they first got here]. This country is so big, and so developed. In Nepal we didn't work, we just hanging out. Here everybody have to work, but it's hard to get jobs, and when they first got here, there was nothing for them, no language, nothing. So it was harder for them. For us it was easier. Everything was here for us when we arrived. My cousin helped a lot. He took my mom to the office and got her an interview, and then when she got the job he took my dad too and helped him. (Amir age 18 male, arrived in 2013)

Well, when we first got here, we didn't know anything. We are totally new over here. We don't know how to go buy anything. Like they used to give us food stamp, and we don't even know how to slide the card... So the first Bhutanese people that come here, they used to come visit us and say like hey, you have to do like this... this is the way we have to shop. When I came here, my uncle was here already, so he helped me a lot about that. And in a couple months, we start learning like this is the thing you have to do, this is where the market is, we know the place, like after a couple months by learning and going outside with friends. (Tika age 27 female arrived 2011)

Seventy six percent of participants suggested that the first community members to arrive in Prospect City suffered the greatest integration burdens, which diminished in severity with each subsequent wave. The abrupt separation from family and friends threatened their sense of citizenship/belonging in the new environment, a feeling that was reinforced by the many unfamiliar logistical challenges they encountered trying to find familiar foods, navigate the city, and find employment. Initial constraints to mobility were important factors that mediated community member's abilities to achieve these other objectives. Participants recall being unfamiliar with urban environments, lacking experience with public transportation, and they arrived with varying levels of English proficiency which made them hesitant to experiment with the busses and trains for fear of getting lost. Gradually they learned to use public transportation, and some eventually got licenses and vehicles that allowed them greater autonomy, but the initial period of immobility prevented them from going to grocery stores, doing job interviews, and visiting friends and relatives in nearby cities which directly interfered with their access to resources, social connections, and ability to establish financial stability. I will discuss this in the following section in greater detail, but it is important to note that age intensified the types of challenges first wave arrivals faced.

With time, initial resettlement challenges diminished, especially among younger community members; each new wave of arrivals brought greater social support, and contributed to a growing repository of knowledge and resources that could be shared with newcomers and help ease their transition into the new environment. Established community members went to airports to pick up new arrivals, cooked familiar meals that fit within their caste restrictions, and taught them how to navigate the transportation systems. Having had time to develop relationships with local employers established community members served as important pathways to employment.

The strong cultural privilege given to social bonds reinforced the pattern of resource sharing and provided newcomers with a greater sense of citizenship/belonging than was available to those who arrived prior. This is not to diminish the integration difficulties experienced by later arrivals, but to illustrate how the challenges they did experience were buffered by the existing network of family and community.

***Age, language, social connections, citizenship/belonging, and health:***

If you can't hold a conversation in English, you cannot integrate in the society. Language is critical to becoming part of the culture and society, without it, we cannot improve our situation. Like, if we leave our apartment, we cannot even speak to the neighbors! (Rishi, 55 year old man, required translation for interview)

[In the U.S.] kids don't have to invest much time to learn English. They go to school and speak English and teach English, everything English. You don't have to practice much in English, its immersion. It will come. This is the natural language of the place where we live, so it will come very easily... So I tell my children to just learn their language, sometimes that can be a stressful thing later in life if they don't learn to speak Nepali. And Hinduism! I tell them, if you can't speak in your own language or tell somebody about Hinduism you will feel very very inferior to them. (Ryam, male Brahmin, age 48)

At first we were only three families [in Prospect City] and my parents got sick and depressed because everything was different and they didn't know anything. And then me and my three brothers start working, and my parents are sitting there at home and there is no communication with their friends and the resettlement agencies never can find jobs for the older people. So at first we were the only people and it was really hard, but after a few month more people were coming in and we would just take them to their houses and after that life became better for them, when their friends or family came. (Hem age 27 male)

[In Prospect City] there are three [Hindu] temples. A big Krishna temple, another down the road, and one is in South City. I attend them when I have time off of work, only occasionally, but when I have free time. The elderly people like to visit often. But if one of their children like son or daughter is available and has the day off on that day, they can go. But elderly people like to have frequent visits but they have to wait for someone to drive them. (Pita age 35 male)

Age appeared to be an extremely important factor moderating how community members interacted with post-resettlement conditions and negotiated the process of integration. As Hem illustrates above, timing of arrival interacted with age in some cases, making the integration experience more difficult for older early arrivals. Participants always discussed age related differences in terms of education and English proficiency, indicating that older community members experienced greater difficulties integrating (in all five dimensions of integration) because they had not received educations and were unable to speak English. Language and education were closely related because, the school curriculum in the refugee camps in Nepal was taught in English, Nepali, and Dzongka (Bhutanese) to facilitate integration capacities in a variety of potential resettlement scenarios. Bhutanese refugees who entered the camps at the age of 20 were generally not provided the same educational opportunities, however, and many did not learn English. As a consequence, community members over 40 in Prospect City experienced a rather different set of challenges than younger Bhutanese refugees. This is not to suggest that language was not ever difficult for younger community members. Several younger participants' facility with English was moderate at best, and others struggled with the "American" accent.

The integration challenges participants associated with poor English proficiency and lack of education were profound. At the most basic level, the inability to read, write, or speak English stood as an immediate challenge to finding employment, limiting the relevance of older community members to local employers in Prospect City. This worked in the Bhutanese community because older community members still had relevance within the joint family as caretakers, but lan-

guage difficulties also interfered with mobility which had its own implications for other dimensions of integration, especially in the first stages of resettlement. Traffic signs, street addresses, bus routes, and communications with fellow passengers were all in English, not Nepali. Recognizing these very real logistical challenges older community members (and younger non-English speakers) were often too frightened to use public transportation for fear that they would get lost and not be able to find their way home. Even younger participants who did speak English got lost on some occasions and discussed the overwhelming feeling of stress they had when they first realized they didn't know where they were. This type of immobility interfered directly with employment, accessing resources, and maintaining social connections with family and friends who had been placed in other parts of the city.

For the people that don't speak English or know numbers, they've had a lot of difficulty with public transportation. Like my brother-in-law, he didn't know anything, you know, and he just visited some relatives and who were just a few miles away from him, and he was scared of the bus! So I told him, like you find the bus that goes where you want to go, and then you tell the bus when you want to stop. And he just remembered one bus because of the red color...and I asked him, "Wow, if the bus came and was a different color what would you do?" Haha! (Ram, age 35 male)

Language and educational differences between young and old community members have also gained importance in more recent years as both a cause and evidence of a widening cultural gap between Bhutanese and American identities. Because differences in the ability to speak English mediate mobility in the community, they also shape the types of environments young and old community members are exposed to on a daily basis. While older community members are staying at home to take advantage of the culture security provided by the joint family and to contribute to the overall financial stability of the household (see section on joint family), younger community members are attending school and going to work where they are absorbing American cultural ideas and lifestyles. Older participants and parents felt that the U.S. educational system was directly influencing cultural changes in their children, causing them to think about religion, physical intimacy, and family in new ways that contrasted their Hindu cultural heritage. When brought back into the household, these ideas challenged older community members' sense of cultural citizenship/belonging and contributed to intergenerational conflicts.

Below, Ram, a 35 year old parent who lives with his wife, brother, parents, and children in the same house, speaks about the types of culture changes he has observed among children in his community as they attend school and expresses his concerns for his parents if these practices should make it into his home. Note the fears that his parents and other older community members had when he was convincing them to come to the U.S., and how these play out in how he rationalizes his duty as cultural "moderator" in the family.

We feel like there are a lot of differences between the Americans and Bhutanese Nepalis. Like our culture is different you know, and the lifestyle is completely different. We don't like sexual relations and things. We see lot of difference. In our culture, we are ok with love between boys and girls, but not as young. Now they are kissing and hugging, you know, that is not acceptable in our culture. And they dress up. And the girls, they put on only a little bit of clothing you know. That's not acceptable. I'm just scared about that with my kids that maybe they will be like that. For sure in just one or two generations the kids will be like that. But I'm scared you know. It's just uncommon in our culture. And I'm scared because, we have our parents, and they don't like it. And if we just started adapting from our generation maybe they will become frustrated. They would think, "you guys bring us here because you said that, like when we were in Nepal, oh this will be better future, and we don't want to come here," because they say that we are different cultures and language and everything. And we had to convince them to think about our future, let's go with our future. And when we come here if we just start going against everything they believe, they will become frustrated and depressed. I see a lot of suicide in different states...not this state, but different state... a lot of our parents generation age people do suicide... lot of suicide in our community in different states.

Like Ram, several participants linked cultural change to the very high rates of suicide reported among Bhutanese communities across the U.S. (for a report on suicide refer to CDC 2013). For instance, Ryam, age 48, explains below how he intentionally waited a year to submit applications for his parents to give them extra time to prepare for the transition. Meanwhile he sent his sister and husband's family ahead to set up a "foundation" for their arrival.

Initially my parents were very much not interested in leaving Nepal because they were told it would be a very different culture, and it would be very hard to live. And many older people thought that way, and so it was a very hard time to convince these people. But I managed to convince my friends and family. But I didn't want to leave before they were ready to come because I didn't want to have some mental health problem in the community...leaving there before they were ready to come here. So we waited... I have seen so many people, you know, they came into a very stressful situation, and I think, my belief is that many people die because there is a compromising situation, and they don't have all of their family, and they feel very alone, and they feel very stressful and they commit suicide. This is because they don't have their family, they don't find anything compromising with their culture and they feel very alone... So at the first wave of resettlement, I sent my sister. I sent her earlier just to make sure to restart our foundation.

As illustrated in the opening quotes by Hem, older Bhutanese refugees who arrived in the first wave did indeed experience periods of depression as a result of the sudden transition and cultural isolation. While the experience of isolation may have been more intense during the first waves of resettlement, many older Bhutanese refugees are still struggling to adapt to the new environment. Sadly, in 2014, one member of the Prospect City community joined the disturbing pattern of suicides among Bhutanese refugees in the U.S. Language and education are certainly not the only factors contributing to depression among older community members, but they do structure the broader integration challenges older refugees are facing as well as cultural changes occurring among younger community members that impinge on older community member's sense of cultural citizenship/belonging. If depression is, indeed, linked to feelings of unfamiliarity and isolation, it points to a potential relationship between social connections, cultural citizenship/belonging, and health and wellbeing in the Bhutanese community that requires further research.

#### ***Hinduism, caste, resources, social connections, and cultural citizenship/belonging:***

In Hinduism we have a saying that wherever we live, under a tree or in a beautiful house, the human being has to do their cultural things, like the death, wedding, and celebrate the festival as well. And those kinds of things we have to earn and manage the money for by ourselves. For managing those kinds of activities we have to manage the money for ourselves.... [But] the U.S., we need to work for survival, to pay rent, to pay bills, we don't have any free time to practice that, but then also whenever we get off work and get home, we will try to celebrate the festivals. (Pita, 35 year old male Brahmin)

Our cultural events and festivals are a different experience for the kids. They will learn, you know. When they see the event, they will come and ask questions, like "what is that?" And so I think this is an important opportunity for every parent to teach their culture, you know. And I do the same thing to my kids. (Ram, male, age 35)

Hinduism is the foundation of cultural identity in the Prospect City Bhutanese community and something that participants hoped to preserve by coming to the U.S. All participants discussed Hinduism at least once during their interviews, and many demonstrated their deep investment in maintaining their religious traditions by participating in religious events and holidays and fasting on regular basis. Signs of daily worship—*puja*—were evident in participants' apartments and houses in the form of small statues of Shiva and Durga surrounded by mounds of incense ash,

fresh flowers, fruits, and milk. Meanwhile the colorful paper remnants of religious festivities, weddings, baby naming ceremonies, and funerals from weeks and years past hung from ceilings and banisters illustrating a vibrant and living Hindu tradition in the U.S., and a significant source of community and shared cultural citizenship/belonging.

While a source of controversy in the community, the caste system, as a feature of Hinduism, had an important influence on how Bhutanese refugees interpreted and interacted with the post-resettlement environment. There was a strong relationship between caste and diet that impacted the types of foods participants ate. I will discuss the dietary implications of this in greater detail in Chapter Five, but fears of accidentally consuming or touching caste-restricted foods prevented some community members, especially higher castes, from getting jobs or going to restaurants with peers and colleagues who they met at work which some felt interfered with their ability to establish social connections. Reiterating some of the difficulties his community faced finding jobs in the beginning, a Brahmin community member explains how being of higher caste was an added constraint in this new environment.

In the beginning it was very hard to find job, because sometimes we don't like, because especially culturally, upper caste people we don't like to touch meat, different kind of meat, so we couldn't find any kind of job handling meat. So it was very hard time. But some reason there was no other option, so some people started doing that. Even I started touching meat. (Ryam, age 48 male)

With a very similar response, another Brahmin participant explained how meat restrictions prevented him from eating lunch with non-Bhutanese colleagues, and he deliberately forced himself to become more "flexible" and eat at restaurants in order to nurture these friendships. The alternative approach to being flexible is to avoid these types of contexts, which, participants felt, had the potential of limiting job options and social connections and interfering with cultural citizenship/belonging and financial stability. Alongside meat restrictions are social restrictions regarding the exchange of foods that have been prepared by people of different castes. Some community members felt that these restrictions stood in the way of developing social connections within the community after resettlement. In response to these concerns, the BCO has also adopted flexible strategies to eliminate the threat of food related caste conflicts from encumbering participation from all castes at their community events. This strategy became clear during the *Teej* festival I attended in late August 2014 that had been put on by the BCO.

It is August 23, and I have been invited by the board of the BCO to attend the annual Women's Festival. The festival is held in the "Cultural Room" at a local church. Several members of the church help to usher in guests, but the majority of people attending are Bhutanese refugees. When I enter the large room, I am immediately greeted by Ram, a board member, who begins to explain the festival to me in great detail. The festival is an annual religious event, normally three days in length celebrating the goddess Parvati and the monsoon season. Traditionally, women are fed by men who do all the cooking on the first day. Ram explains that this is a day of feasting, dancing, and celebration. The next day women fast...and the third day involves prayer rituals. Ram explains that all of these activities were condensed into one event about 4 hours long to accommodate the busy work and school schedules of community members...though, some community members will likely continue the celebration on their own time during the week. After Ram finishes explaining everything to me about the celebration, I note that on a festival day that characterized by feasting, there is barely any sign of food at the event aside from a bowl of apples. Ram takes on a more serious tone and explains that this is to prevent any caste related disputes over food and contamination among participants. The BCO is trying to eliminate caste discrimination in their community. No food served equates to no dispute. At the last community event, he emphasizes that literally no food was served. Today they have made an exception. The apples are a compromise given that the day is supposed to be characterized by feasting. (Excerpt from fieldnotes, August 23, 2014)

Only 33% of participants discussed non-dietary caste related issues but, while doing so, they revealed a variety of economic, social, cultural, and legal pressures that are changing the practice of caste in the U.S. and threatening some community member's sense of cultural citizenship/belonging. In the paragraphs below, we will see both flexible and avoidant strategies play out as other dimensions of caste intersect with American social and cultural norms. It is important to note that all of the participants who spoke about caste were either Brahmin or Kshatriyas, lower castes were underrepresented in the interview sample (see Table 4-1), which is a study limitation. This imbalance may stem from the chain referral sampling strategy used to recruit interview participants for this project. Higher castes are believed to have acquired greater levels of "purity" through reincarnation. The social and spiritual consequences for violating caste-related restrictions associated with this acquired purity are different for higher and lower caste rankings (Mines 2006). People are also treated differently within this hierarchical system. Interviewing lower caste community members would have provided valuable balance to this study. Nevertheless, several participants discuss trends occurring among lower-caste community members that are revealing in and of themselves.

Participants identified age, language, and education differences in their community as important influences on the types of changes caste is undergoing as well as the responses community members are developing with regards to its practice in Prospect City. In general, younger community members were more flexible than older community members in how they interpreted and practiced caste, if they practiced it at all. Meanwhile older members—particularly those of higher caste—were viewed as more rigid in their adherence to caste distinctions, social etiquette, and dietary restrictions. Indra, a 20 year old male participant from a Brahmin family, blames differences on age/education as he describes the changes he has seen in the practice of caste since his family resettled in Prospect City.

Caste is changing a lot since resettlement. The younger generation doesn't even talk about caste anymore, but older people still want to hang on to what they have been practicing all their lives. I think this is because of lack of education. If someone doesn't understand things very well, it is very easy to convince them to believe something but almost impossible to change their mind afterwards.

Indra's comment reveals a subtle disdain for the caste tradition as he contrasts stubborn adherence to it against the greater understanding of the world one acquires through education. This is important because it reiterates how some of the internal cultural changes occurring within the Bhutanese community are impinging on older community member's status, relevance, and cultural citizenship/belonging in Prospect City. Building on Indra's comments, others emphasized how socialization in school has been an important source of caste-related change for the younger generation. Hem, a 27 year old male from a Kshatriya family noted how children in his community were bringing new ideas into the home from school that made maintaining the caste system difficult and contributed to intergenerational conflicts.

Maintaining caste here is difficult. The children can just easily adjust to the people in school and around the area. And they bring these new ideas inside the house. But the parents are of a different idea, and that causes a lot of confusion and makes it hard inside the house when there is division. That makes things difficult. Me and my wife are in the neutral point right now, in between.

Like Hem, participants who discussed caste often felt that it fit awkwardly against American social and cultural norms. As he explains, one strategy parents used to manage caste related conflicts between parents and children was to remain "in between," by picking and choosing which practices they would reinforce and what they would allow to be overwritten by non-Bhutanese influences.

Another constraint on the practice of caste and a source of change in the Bhutanese community stemmed from a perception that non-Hindu Americans view caste as discriminatory and unjust. There was also a misconception that the caste system is illegal in the U.S. because it violates the principles of equality written in the U.S. constitution.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, as Romisha, a 35 year old Brahmin woman explains

People don't practice caste as much here in U.S. I mean, they keep at home, but they don't show outside everything they are doing. Because the law here in the U.S., they don't want the exposure so they keep at home only.

While short, Romisha's quote highlights her community's confusion over the legality of practicing caste in the U.S., but she also reveals how some community members are responding to this perceived conflict by "keeping [caste] at home." Uncertainty about castes legality compelled some to conceal it to the privacy of their homes and avoid public spaces. In this case, the privilege given to privacy in the U.S., while individualizing, protected people's ability to maintain caste practices out of public view. For others uncertainty compelled them to become more flexible in public spaces with regards to caste restrictions. The relationship between age and language played a role in terms of which strategies community members elected to use. With greater English proficiency, younger high caste community members were more capable of clarifying the types of practices and behaviors that would be acceptable or unacceptable in public. We will see this more clearly in Chapter Five with regards to food. Meanwhile, older individuals, with their limited English proficiencies, were ill-equipped to gauge public responses and were more inclined to avoid these spaces altogether. The cultural security of the joint family reinforced the adoption of this strategy and difficulties older community members had finding employment limited the need to leave home.

Below is a statement made by Ryam, a 48 year old Brahmin and self proclaimed "priest." What is important in Ryam's statement is the strong distinction he makes between public and private spaces in the U.S. and how he has worked to reconfigure his own interpretation of caste and Hinduism in general, to fit within this new context. In doing so, he illustrates a flexible strategy. He is particularly unusual as one of the more educated and moderately capable English speaking community members over the age of 45.

If you are observing anything publicly everyone should be treated equally, they shouldn't practice anything like caste. If you go to public, it is common ground. Public is matter of different opinion [than my own]. But personal life is your business. This public life, in the United States... so even in the kitchen, a person of lower caste cannot go into the kitchen of another's house. So it's kind of a difficult thing to decide what to do in the United States... Many people are working to figure this out... So I think slowly, I have decided to change. And slowly, people like me can adjust. But all at once you can't bring any change. It's like what they say in Hinduism that its time eternal. You can't say when it started. So these traditions are not so easy to just stop. And people are trying hard to stop it!

Despite some older community members' desire to preserve caste in its traditional form, flexible caste-related messages like the one Ryam has adopted, were being disseminated by community leaders throughout the community to make space for caste in the new social context. Concerns about how the caste system was perceived by mainstream Americans compelled several leaders to develop cultural orientation workshops "educate" older members about the social norms, ideologies, and dietary practices found in the U.S. in hopes of striking a balance between what they saw as competing cultural systems. Ram, a 35 year old male Brahmin and former BCO

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<sup>33</sup> It is possible that many community members gained this type of information through the study material for the U.S. Citizenship exam where the philosophies that informed the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution were listed out for memorization.



chair explains his own reasoning for participating in this movement. Meanwhile he reveals some of the contrasts between caste and life in America.

My friends and I have been educating the older people about caste discrimination. Like there was a problem of caste discrimination in our community... So we've been just trying to educate people in the Bhutanese community about the new environment, the society, the neighborhoods, and everything. And I think it works sometimes. Sometimes they will just calm down...not all of a sudden. Like it takes time, but just opening their eyes slowly.

Despite Ram's efforts to diminish caste discrimination in his community, he still sees cultural value in maintaining the caste system. Later in the interview he lamented at the trend occurring among lower caste community members who converted to Christianity soon after they resettled.

Some of the people in the community, the church just try to change them to Christians, and they are just making it really hard for the community. And many have converted. But I think, our religion, our caste is categorized, and the lower caste of people they are just converted too easily to Christians. And the people of higher caste like the Kshatriyas and Brahmins, we are still holding on! Hahah. We don't want to convert.

It is telling that, according to Ram, only lower caste members have opted to convert to Christianity, which may reflect deeper feelings of social injustice and inequality between caste levels within the community. While the church's influence cannot be denied in this process, it is clear that the post-resettlement environment, with its more progressively liberal social trends, affords people of lower caste new opportunities that were not as available or socially acceptable in Nepal. For lower castes, incorporation into a different religious system may enhance their sense of cultural citizenship/belonging, but these same social opportunities come at the expense of the beliefs and traditions of higher caste community members. If we accept that cultural citizenship involves the "space" society provides to maintain culture and be a contributing member of society (Flores et al. 1997), the confusion over caste's legality in the U.S. illustrates how a sense of cultural citizenship is not fully recognized in the community, at least at this point.

#### ***Joint Family, resources, financial stability, cultural citizenship/belonging:***

What we have is a culture, let's say, a culture of living in a joint family, and a joint neighborhood too, because we interact with each other. And if I have any problem, I don't have to go to the street. And if I lose a job, and if I have nothing to make a living, I don't have to go to the street because we live in a joint family and we have each other. (Tara, age 41 male)

Rishi's (male age 55) son (age 26) speaks with me about family at his newborn son's naming ceremony. He recalls a saying from Nepal about the growth of responsibility through one's life. "Before marriage we are humans with two legs, and can do what we want we have no real responsibilities except to ourselves and family. When we are married we are like a cow, with four legs, responsibility for self and wife. And when you have a child, you become like a spider, with many legs and many responsibilities." He starts laughing and then tells me that he feels many new responsibilities now for his wife and baby. (excerpt from fieldnotes August 2014)

An overwhelming 95 % of participants described their cultural identities in terms of the obligation they feel towards their families and community. The importance of collectivism as an organizing logic in the Prospect City community was substantiated repeatedly during interviews and observations by the value participants placed on sharing resources and experiences with friends, family, and even strangers in some cases. The privilege given to maintaining strong family relationships is also evident in the reemergence of joint families across Prospect City, where

multiple generations of a family live together and share resources. This practice stems from deep Hindu; but participants also noted how the collective functions of living in a joint family helped to buffer them from the material and social uncertainties of post-resettlement life. Food, utilities, mortgages, rent, transportation, and many other resources are pooled together to lower the overall burden felt by each member. In this way, the joint family was the most pervasive and important strategy across the Bhutanese community for addressing the demands and uncertainties of U.S. resettlement.

We believe in living together, and helping each other, and saving expenses... and all those things. This is very common in our community. At the very beginning when everybody just get into the United States, it was really hard to manage all the expenses. With all those banking systems and security (insurance) systems and all those things. And once I learn all those things I bought this house. But then we have the problem like how are we gonna collect all this money so that everybody contribute the same thing? So we decided that we would have one house account, so that everybody pay their house account and then from that house account, we pay whatever the expenses are for the house. That way nobody has to take their own money, you know, extra money from their pocket. So if you suddenly need any maintenance it will come from the house account. But if you live by yourself, there are a lot of expenses. So everybody in the house contributes the same amount so that nobody is behind. And if somebody doesn't have a job, it's not mandatory that they pay. They can stay as long as they will get another job [aside from the elders in the house who were not working at the time of the interview]. So that's why sharing expenses is important. It saves a lot of money. (Chandra, age 29 male)

Traditional Hindu joint families are patrilineal and patrilocal, meaning that the eldest male is considered the "household head" and while sons remain in their natal household's daughters eventually move out to live with their husband's families (Wadley 2010). The maintenance of these gendered social configurations after resettlement has contributed to a secondary pattern of migration among Bhutanese women in the community who have married Bhutanese husbands from different states. The distance between brothers and sisters in the U.S. was a source of sadness for some community members. I learned this as I spoke with two brothers in a crowded apartment parking lot while they married their younger sister to a husband from Texas. She left the following week. Nevertheless, these relationships are well maintained through digital media and frequent trips by road or plane. On multiple occasions I was interrupted while conducting interviews as participants answered Skype calls from siblings in different parts of the country. In this way, digital media has played an important role in accommodating the structural strains that resettlement in the U.S. has placed on traditional kinship practices and family bonds.

As summarized in Table 4.1 the average household size in the sample was between five and six members, with some reaching the high number of 16 members. It is important to clarify that this average only reflects the number of members living under one roof, and not the distribution of resources within larger joint family structures. Joint Bhutanese families frequently occupied large sections of neighborhoods and apartment buildings, and functioned as though they were together in the same house. Nevertheless, the spatial separation of smaller units of larger joint family relationships into adjacent apartments and houses illustrates how "individualism" has been structured into the urban American landscape. Participants noted how everything in Prospect City is spread out, and even houses are separated by grass and fences sending a clear signal of "privacy" that tread heavily upon their sense of community. To several participants this represented a deep cultural difference between themselves and American society. Devi, a 28 year old male participant foregrounds this difference by describing his first experience in the U.S. and comparing it to the more social world he came from in the densely populated Nepali camps.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> While participants highlighted many negative aspects of life in the camps, the strong sense of community they were able to develop was one of the benefits. It is difficult to say if their collective motivations stemmed more from their Hindu beliefs, experiences in the camps, or if collectivism was amplified through the interaction between these historical backgrounds.

Take note how he draws on the foundation of prior experiences to interpret challenges in his new environment.

I didn't know what to do here when I first arrived because I was from a small village in Nepal where I knew all the roads and paths and all the people around me. But it wasn't like that here in the U.S. People here do not know who their neighbors are! And I learned that this is because nobody here will ask what others are doing because it's their right to stay alone and be private you know.

Community members also noted how federal, state, and local policies promoted “individualism” in a way that competed with their abilities to live in joint families. Apartments have “maximum” occupancy policies that place strict limitations on the number of people under one roof. Meanwhile, Food Stamps, TANF, and Medicaid are designed to help individuals and small families achieve “self-sufficiency” and limit resource pooling by decreasing the amount offered as household incomes increase. This is problematic for joint families that are composed of employed and unemployed members who pool resources to increase everyone's financial stability. Recognizing this conflict, some participants described how they had to reconfigure the social and economic relationships in their families to satisfy policy requirements that would allow their older, unemployed parents to continue receiving federal aid. Bishnu, a 25 year old male living in a seven member household explains his version of this strategy.

Our community it's a totally different than Americans. We all live together and share things. But when we are dealing with the normal American community we have to act how they expect, because they will see it that way. So what happens is, I am the owner of the house, and I am renting to my parents and grandparents [who are unemployed]. So I have a rent agreement. So they have to sign the agreement, so it's just like living in an apartment. So it doesn't matter anymore how much other people in the house make, because now they're different tenants.

Bishnu's solution to the conflict between aid and his ability to live in a joint family is important for two reasons. First, it illustrates how structural conditions that shape access to resources in the U.S. behave as mechanisms of social change that force refugees to adopt American norms—at least in behavior—through policy incentives and disincentives. U.S. policies have little interest in helping refugees achieve their own integration objectives, for instance. In this case, the aid regulations directly impinge on the cultural objectives Bhutanese refugees brought into the United States, and in so doing, they interfere with the strategy Bhutanese refugees are using to achieve financial stability.

Second, Bishnu's high level of bureaucratic literacy reveals an important strength of the joint family as a generalized, collectively oriented post-resettlement strategy. Due to their size, joint households have a mixed composition of ages, genders, education statuses, language abilities, cultural knowledge, and employment statuses. Together, mutual dependence between members coupled with the variable skills that each person contributes, equips the family as a unit to respond to unpredictable constraints. In so doing, the joint family improves each member's ability to achieve all five domains of integration, increasing access to resources, social connections, and financial stability, sense of cultural citizenship/belonging, and health and wellbeing. For instance, Bishnu's parents and grandparents struggled to find employment, but they provided the household with cultural knowledge and domestic labor. These efforts provided a cultural anchor point and freed young adults, who were starting their own families, to focus on work and earn an income. Meanwhile, the language and educational skills acquired after resettlement by young adults helped older members navigate confusing regulations and bureaucratic demands that would have been more difficult on their own. We will see more clearly in the following chapter how differences in the number of employed household member's shifts the distribution of labor and changes household strategies.

Participants also described changes in gender roles in their families and community as a result of employment in the U.S. The majority of these changes involved women entering the workforce. This came both as a response to the socioeconomic pressures of low wage employment and as the result of social norms that made this type of change more acceptable. Nineteen percent of participants (both men and women) were very positive about the new opportunity for Bhutanese women to work and pursue careers, a sentiment reflected very clearly in the comments of Leela, a 27 year old female participant, who felt liberated by gender norms in the U.S.<sup>35</sup>

Most women, they used to do all the cooking... like in our country, everyone need to stay home and take care of the family. All the women needed to stay home make food, and clean. Like we don't have washer dryer or anything like that, nothing... long day of work you know.. Haha, and all the women they needs to stay home. And the guys, they need to go out and work to earn money. But not so here. We are free! I am so glad to be here. We are free. We are free! I can do anything you know!

Meanwhile, 29 % of participants indicated that these transitions were hard for members of their community, and explained how men's and women's roles have equal functions in the stability of the household. The changes in gender roles that participants described foregrounded the tension that has arisen between the joint family as a strategy, new gender social norms, and the socioeconomic pressures of low wages in the U.S. In the comment below, Tara, a 41 year old male participant reveals some of this tension as he carefully navigates concerns over being perceived as unequal by defending the *value* of both men's and women's traditional roles while describing how gender roles are changing in his community.

In some families our traditional gender roles are still going on, and in others, people are transitioning. But it is not just some sort of imbalance. I mean, it is an imbalance in some of the families because they have disputes and everything and there are some men that feel that way. But it is really a divided responsibility. Both have responsibilities to the family and they just take half and half. These jobs are equally important. But in our tradition, even back in our country right now too, they have got some imbalance, and men think women are inferior, and they can't do as much as the men can do or something like that. But lately, allied bodies, and the educated, they say like, Ok, we are equally important.. men and women, because, what kind of function is one without the other... you know. So many have begun to realize this.<sup>36</sup>

As Tara alludes, gender "equality" was first introduced to Bhutanese refugees while in Nepal by the UNHCR and other human rights organizations to prepare them for third country resettlement. But exposure to this ideology has only intensified since resettlement, a result of participation in work and school. As another man explains, work related time constraints in the U.S. have made women's entry into the work force a necessity, forcing Bhutanese families to embrace the ideology of "gender equality" in everyday practice.

With gender, there is also something cultural that has been coming along ... usually our men they don't really cook. Because it is a habit or tradition. But lately, everybody has started cooking because if one is working, like if the wife is at job, the man has to cook, you know. But back in the country, it was usually the husband that work outside the home, and build the farm or even a job. And the wife, they usually stay at home to take care of the kids. And they are responsible for the internal matters in the house. The husband, they are responsible for the external ones. (Ryam, male, age 48)

<sup>35</sup> Note that Leela quit her job after her pregnancy to stay at home and take care of her child. She hoped to pursue a career after the child got older and could enroll in school.

<sup>36</sup> By "allied bodies" I believe this participant is referring to the many international humanitarian organizations (i.e. Human Rights Watch and the UNHCR) who organized the Nepali refugee camps and promoted "gender mainstreaming" concepts and equality in the camp curriculum.

Ryam's claim that "everybody has started cooking" is the perspective of a male participant who feels that he has begun to take up more of the tasks that are traditionally reserved for the women in his family. An informal conversation I had over a cup of tsia with another older male participant about the changes in gender roles within his community revealed that the extent of change is a matter of perspective. The participant made a comment much like Ryam, and claimed that he too had picked up many of the tasks that had once been reserved for women. Behind him his wife and two daughters in law giggled quietly between themselves and gave me a shake of the head to signal that this was not entirely the case. Indeed, in the time I was in their house, I not once saw the older man in the kitchen preparing food.

Despite Ryam's and other participants' sense that the traditional gender roles are changing, there were still clear signs of its presence from the perspective of an outsider observer, however dampened it may be from its original form. Most of the younger women in the community have completed high-school and attended community college, but many still choose to stay at home to take care of domestic tasks for their households. This pattern was most common among recently married and expecting mothers. Very often, the women I met with who were in their 20s to 30s had begun to pursue careers outside the home after they arrived to the U.S., but returned to their traditional roles within the household after marriage to begin a family. Several women indicated that they hoped to return to work after their children were older. At the moment, however, many remain at home with the older generation.<sup>37</sup> It may be that breaking the norms of the joint family was necessary at the start of resettlement when financial security was uncertain, and as families have become more established, this pressure has relaxed and allowed younger men and women to focus more on their cultural motivations to build families. When their children get older, and become more independent, gender roles may again change as mothers are freed to again take advantage of their new opportunities in society.

In sum, the joint family seems to gain its relevance as a post-resettlement strategy for Bhutanese refugees from their underlying family oriented, cultural motivations and from the need to compensate for older community member's employment struggles. Without a strong desire to build families and restore their collective sense of identity, the functions of the joint family would diminish in relevance. Similarly, had older individuals been provided the opportunity to learn English in Nepal, their dependency on younger employed family members in the U.S. may be different. These mutual needs and desires have arisen through a particular set of motivations and historical conditions which have reinforced the position of the joint family as a critical strategy in the U.S. As I mentioned in the age/language section, however, there are increasing signs of inter-generational conflict within joint families stemming from the diverging cultural and linguistic experiences of young children and older family members. As children come of age in the U.S. and receive educations that teach them to become "individuals," the joint family may lose its relevance. It will be interesting to see how durable this living arrangement is in generations to come.

### ***Employment, financial stability, cultural citizenship/belonging, health***

[In Nepal], there was not much work, and the work we had was really different from here. Here we work inside the house...that sort of work like housework. But mostly in our country we did not find that sort of work, we did agricultural jobs, like outside in the field. So we weren't prepared for work here. We got the training here for how to deal with the people and we got a little bit of knowledge, but we went to work and were very surprised. (Romisha, age 35 female)

As one participant explained only half jokingly during an interview, "*The acronym for U.S.A gonna be different for us. So the acronym for U.S.A. for us is gonna be "U Start Again."* Every single thing is from beginning for us! Everything." Included among these differences was

<sup>37</sup> My observations within households also revealed a hierarchy of labor, where the newest daughter-in-law to the family did most of the housework and tended to guests while the mother-in-law socialized, inspected, and gave instruction.

the U.S. employment system which, as the centerpiece of the U.S. integration policies, had profound impacts on Bhutanese refugees' abilities to integrate overall. Difficulties finding employment threatened their financial stability, and the lifestyle changes they needed to make to maintain their jobs began to place unfamiliar strains on their religious beliefs and cultural motivations. In other ways, work environments offered opportunities to make new social connections and became an important source of new health information in some cases. To clarify all of the interacting influences employment has had on integration in the Bhutanese community, both positive and negative, I will outline chronologically the conditions impacting participants' abilities to find and then maintain employment. Along the way I will discuss where the structural constraints of the U.S. employment system intersect with accessing resources, social connections, cultural citizenship/belonging, financial stability, and health.

*Finding Employment:* Refugees are guaranteed financial support from the federal government for their first three months in the country, specifically to help them to find employment and become financially self-secure. These benefits are supplied to refugees through local resettlement agencies that manage the resettlement process and provide added social support. Agency support is also limited in time, but ranges from three months to two years depending on which agency the refugee is affiliated with and what its funding status is. The more refugees that an agency resettles in a fiscal year, the more funding it receives to maintain its operations and to distribute to its clients. Some agencies also receive support from private donations, which improves the services they can provide. Prospect City has two agencies, one that offers a maximum of six months service, and the other up to two years. Because of funding pressures, there are strong motivations to reduce the time it takes refugees to become self-sufficient. As a consequence, both refugees and agencies are under pressure to expedite employment, and their interactions reflect this motivation (Shrestha 2011).

Only 43% of participants in the current study discussed the job support they received from their resettlement agencies, but those who did were highly appreciative and explained that they would have been “lost” and “overwhelmed” without the assistance. When discussing federal aid, 57% of participants also expressed a strong appreciation for the support it provided, but intermixed with these praises were frustrations over the pressure federal aid placed on them to take menial jobs rather than develop skills that would help their careers and financial stability in the long-term. As an example, Pita, age 35, recalls the pressure that was placed on him by the “matching grant” program to find work rather than go to school in the first months in the U.S.

Living by ourselves [when we first arrived] we need money to pay rent and buy food, and my wife didn't have a job at the time. Later [the agency] help her get job as housekeeper and caregiver. And she applied, but the employers needed at least some work experience in U.S., so she didn't get a job for at least three months. And later she started going to school. But they didn't ask me if I want to go to school because they want to offer me a job. And the main reason is that we were kind of able, we were put in a program called matching grants program and the matching grant program ends after 2 or 3 months so they need to find me a job as earliest as possible. So I got a job after 22 days.

Take note how Pita mentions “living by ourselves” when discussing the financial challenges he and his wife were facing. Pita and his wife lived in a different state than their extended families. His experiences illustrate how the structural pressures to expedite employment placed on both resettlement agencies and refugees can sometimes force smaller families to make compromises between education and work. Had Pita and his wife lived in a larger joint household where resources are pooled, it may have been possible for both to attend school, or for Pita to work part time.

In contrast to Pita's rather quick employment search, 66% of participants described significant difficulties finding employment when they arrived to the U.S. Some recalled attending

more than 20 interviews and taking up to 11 months to successfully land their first jobs. When discussing the biggest challenges to finding employment, participants identified problems with mobility, language, a poor U.S. job climate, and, much like Pita's wife, a lack of relevant skills and credentials as contributing factors.

Mobility was an important factor shaping employment opportunities that was, itself, contingent on a range of other interacting factors, many of which I have already touched upon (see age/language and timing of arrival section). In addition to limiting mobility, poor English proficiencies also limited the types of jobs available to older community members and still stand as challenges to their employment to this day. Much like the mobility challenges faced by older community members, the initial mobility constraints that younger community members faced when they first arrived limited their initial employment opportunities. A 27 year old male participant named Dal illustrates this point as he looks back on his first job interview.

I got a job interview at [H's Grocery]. And they ask me, will I be able to work on the weekend? And I say, no, because I don't have transportation. So I lost the job! Because the first time I am here, and I have no car, and I am just getting used to public transportation. And it's like when I come here after two and a half months I got the job interview at [H's Grocery] and we have to go to the downtown, and I said no, because I have no transportation and I had to follow the public transportation. And only later I realized, "what am I saying" because the grocery store is always busy on weekends! So how can they hire me? If I can never work on the weekends. Oh my goodness! So the transportation, or managing the transportation is one of the biggest challenges here

Fourteen percent of community members who arrived to the U.S. between 2008 – 2010, blamed a poor U.S. economy for the difficulty they experienced finding employment, noting how unemployment was high at the time even for "regular Americans." While only a few participants mentioned this challenge explicitly, many participants recalled standing in long lines of immigrants and refugees to interview for entry-level positions at factories, airports, and hospitals, illustrating the extent of competition they were dealing with at the time. Even after successfully scheduling job interviews participants still felt unprepared and often lacked the skills, credentials, and work experiences employers were looking for. Below, a 28 year old man named Devi vented to me during an interview about the frustrating dilemma faced by himself and many refugees of being viewed as under qualified for even entry level positions.

**Interviewer:** What do you think prevented you from finding a job for so long?

**Devi:** Experience, haha! Because I interview many places but they ask me "what's your experience about this job?" and I told, "you are not giving me any job." "How can I get any experience about this job! Because I work in a different country. If you hire me I can show you that I can learn and be a good worker." I told many places this same thing but they reject me. And finally I work in [Alms Center] as a volunteer for six months and I learned. And then I went and got a job doing housing construction and I did that for one year. And then after that I went to college and studied accounting and it was many hours of studying.

Devi's experience illustrates how some employers were hesitant to hire refugees because of their limited work histories in the U.S. This left him little option but to work for several months on a no-pay, volunteer basis to become more relevant to the U.S. economy. These types of compromises between building skills and receiving pay limit refugees abilities to earn incomes and become financially stable, but they also reveal a disconnect between federal policies that push to expedite refugees' financial independence and the types of skills that refugees need in order to achieve this goal. As I have already demonstrated, Bhutanese refugees have responded to these types of constraints by reestablishing the joint family, which helps buffer community members from economic burdens. Nevertheless, many Bhutanese refugees in Prospect City still find

themselves working low-wage jobs and wading through the socioeconomic challenges associated with poverty in the U.S.

There have been some improvements to the job search, however. Participants comparing differences between first wave and subsequent arrivals often mentioned how better access to transportation and the knowledge held by more established community members about the interviewing process has helped later arrivals find employment more readily. New arrivals can ask for rides from friends who own their own cars and who can warn them about what mistakes not to make when interviewing with would-be employers. In addition, the community has grown significantly since the first families resettled in Prospect City, and with this growth has come a greater capacity to organize and provide more formal job assistance to newcomers. After being officially approved as a non-profit organization, the BCO hired a job developer to help newcomers in the job search. The job developer has worked hard to establish relationships with local employers that speeds the initial placement process and assists more established members in making career advancements. As one participant explains

The difference [in employment] is very big now [that we hired a job developer]...like now we have a lot of communication with people in and outside the community... we have more interaction. And we have people from the community in high positions, and we can talk to them, you know, they are supervisors and managers in some places. So we can just send them a reference and get people into jobs much more quickly. (Hem, male, age 27 years, former BCO board member)

Improvements like the ones described above are positive signs for a community that has only been in the U.S. for a short eight years. Nevertheless, many in the community still face the struggles of low wage employment. As the initial challenges of finding employment come to a close now that most Bhutanese refugees have been resettled and the camps in Nepal disbanded, the conversation moves to maintaining jobs and balancing the competing integration demands of work, family, and community.

***Maintaining Employment:*** As I have already discussed, 71% of participants in this study hoped to “advance” their lives and careers by resettling in the U.S. What is made clear by community members' efforts to go to school, work extra jobs, and work overtime is that economic opportunities have not been taken for granted. At the same time, however, 71% of participants expressed frustrations with the time constraints and low wages, health benefits, and opportunities for career advancement associated with their jobs and described ways that these structural conditions interfered with their ability to integrate in each of the five domains (i.e. access resources, develop social connections, establish financial stability, cultural citizenship/belonging, health and wellbeing). In doing so, they reveal how U.S. integration policies, which promote rapid employment, constrain refugees capacities to succeed in the new environment by forcing them to make compromises between their own integration agendas and the exigencies of low wage employment.

***Time Constraints:*** As wage laborers, community members found it difficult to reconcile the cultural and monetary demands placed on their time by their jobs and cultural obligations. Sixty two percent of participants described how busy work schedules interfered with their ability to participate in cultural events, maintain social connections with friends and family, and even pursue educations that would improve career opportunities. Two participant comments exemplify some of these challenges. Jhuma, a 40 year old mother working as a cashier at a local dollar store illustrates how economic pressures and her employer’s strict policies hamper her ability to care for her children the way she would normally hope to.



We have to work. We have to pay the bills. Pay rent. Everything we have to pay, otherwise you get the letter from the collections. And you have to do at the right time or if you are not working or if you are not able to pay anything then later on may become homeless... We have five people here. If we are sick or something like that we have to work. Or if one of the kids gets sick we still have work, so it is very difficult for the kids... Sometime even if you call in and say you are sick and can't work today, even though, they may still fire us for that. So the system here is different and it is difficult... that is a problem for us.

Reiterating some of these pressures, Ryam, a 48 year old man working at an assembly plant, describes how work interferes with religious obligations, and describes this conflict in terms of a difference in the emphasis placed on individualism and collectivism between the U.S. and his community.

The lifestyle here is totally different because of work. People in the community try to interact with each other, but because of our work time, we used to work just at daytime in Nepal if we worked, but now we have to work nights or work two jobs. It has individualized people a little bit. We are not able to give our time to each other. And even in cultural practice, when a family member dies we have to observe some religious funeral rites for 13 days. In that situation some people have had to leave their jobs... They just had too! They were fired because they did not go to work for several days. And that has brought a lot of difficulty and stress.

In both Jhuma's and Ryam's cases, the demands of employment in the U.S. impinge on familial and cultural obligations foregrounding the compromises Bhutanese refugees must make in their social connections and sense of cultural citizenship/belonging in order to become economically established. Some strategies have been developed to address these types of conflicts. People swap shifts with other Nepali co-workers to take care of emergencies. Many community members cobbled together time to participate in their religious holidays around their busy work schedules. Some asked for time off but were denied. Others took time off but were fired. Meanwhile, dietary restrictions were relaxed and fasting periods were shortened to accommodate the need to think and do physical labor while at work. Chandra, a 29 year old male participant with a business degree from a local college, explains the legal actions he plans to take if his father's employer denies him time off of work to participate in a religious function.

I have given a day off paper, PTO [paid time off] application and I described everything in the letter and my dad's boss denied it for 2 times! He work in [the mall]. And told him if the other friends he denied, and if he is not giving a chance to stay home, then he should stay home and I will go and talk to him. I was planning take some lawyers and talk with him... this is a legal issue. They have laws for employees that gives them rights to practice their religion. And his boss doesn't seem to know that.

Chandra had applied for time off for his father twice, but both requests were denied by his father's employer. While this strategy is a unique case, it is positioned within the broader benefits of the joint family. Chandra's special knowledge of U.S. law, and his ability to navigate this system, contributes to his fathers' cultural citizenship and the financial security of the larger house, which also benefits himself. The BCO has also developed its own strategies to accommodate work related constraints to Bhutanese cultural traditions. In charge of cultural events, the BCO has started to reschedule important religious celebrations around the normal work week to allow more people to participate, shifting holiday festivities to weekends, or into the evenings rather than day. While the holidays no longer overlap traditional calendar dates, community members are able to meet friends and share in the celebrations.

What is important to emphasize here is that all of these actions represent accommodations made by individuals, families, and the community as a whole to meet the current demands of the social and cultural environment they now occupy, and each approach had different consequences in terms of long-term integration outcomes. Those who took time off and were fired from

their work suffered intermittent periods of financial instability, for instance. Meanwhile, participants who worked around their work schedule to participate were able to keep their jobs but often felt as though they were drifting from their community. In this way, cultural spaces are being shaped around the structural constraints of the American economy and being changed through this relationship.

*Health Benefits and Family and Health Knowledge:* While I conducted this research, the Affordable Care Act was still being negotiated in Congress and employer provided health-care was a nationally contested topic. Western State was one of a few states that rejected the federal policies. In turn, this state level decision allowed employers to cut back on the family coverage they offered. This was especially true for low wage, low skill-level jobs which the majority of Bhutanese refugees in Prospect City occupy. The structural parameters of health care in Prospect City left many unemployed and under-employed Bhutanese refugees vulnerable. Individualized employer based health coverage was particularly contrary to the collective principles of living in a joint family and interfered with younger “productive” household members' abilities to provide for the health and wellbeing of their spouses, children, and elders. Below, Rishi, a 55 year old man employed as a custodian at a local park explains how this has interfered with his ability to provide for his wife, who had a variety of debilitating, yet undiagnosed health issues.

I receive benefits because I am working. But it is harder for my wife because she is not working. She has a lot of medical issues and I wish at least she had some sort of medical benefits.... Western State is not expanding Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act, and they have very strict guidelines, and they don't follow the federal regulations for medical care. So it is very difficult for us.

Meanwhile, Dal, a 27 year old father, illustrates the complex balance between health, family, the expectation for low wages, and other more nebulous integration uncertainties that Bhutanese refugees must accommodate through their careers.

It's hard here [in the U.S.]. Most of the things are hard. I always have to ask myself, “does these things help me here?” “is this a benefit for us?” for example the choosing of my jobs, I am the only one that works in this home. I do not have any health insurance. So I have to look for the company that have health insurance. And some of those companies have expensive health insurance, and some have cheaper health insurance. So the choosing of these types of things is also a challenge to us. And beside that, we need more money too. And we just try to live off \$10 per hour. And this is also a challenge... the finding the jobs...and balancing how much we earn and how much we afford for our family.

Concern over health information and coverage among Bhutanese refugees has increased in recent years amid rising diagnoses of diabetes and other chronic health problems. In Nepal, Bhutanese refugees had very limited access to health care and many health problems went undetected. Initial resettlement medical screenings caught and corrected nutritional deficiencies and infectious diseases, but most health information has been acquired retrospectively as community members experience symptoms and travel to the nearest ER.

Another pathway to health knowledge has come through employment. Some Bhutanese refugees have been lucky enough to find entry level jobs at local health care institutions that offer free health programs and benefits to their employees. For the Bhutanese community, these programs represent the first consistent exposure they have had to health information about diet and exercise in the U.S., and some community members have sought these jobs out specifically to gain health information that they can disseminate to their families and community. Thus, while many employment options limit community members' ability to promote health and wellbeing in their community, there is variability in this regard.

*Career Advancement:* Participants who had worked for several years in the U.S. by the time of this research expressed their frustration over a lack of career advancement that stood in the way of more lucrative positions. It is noteworthy that this challenge directly contradicts the underlying motivations which brought Bhutanese refugees to the U.S. in the first place. When asked why they were unable to advance in their careers, several participants blamed their employers for discriminating against refugees. Similar complaints were made about the teachers younger participants had encountered while attending high school. Bishnu, a 25 year old man enrolled at community college at the time, harbored these types of concerns about his employer, which compelled him to switch jobs until he was satisfied that he had equal opportunities to other non-refugee employees.

I used to work at the hospital, and I was nutrition care associate, my job was to serve the patients...go up to their rooms, take their orders, and take them their food you know. But my boss, he just puts me to the dish room. But the American people they hire for the dish room, they move after 3 months or so, they move them to the nutrition department. There were 3 refugees working there. And they knew that the refugee work hard, so they start hiring refugees for the dish room. But they don't want to move them anywhere, just keep them there. That's discrimination. But there is no proof, no solid proof, so you can't do anything you know. So I just I apply for the radiology department, and they call me over there. Now I don't see discrimination...like that guy is really nice, and he love Nepali people.

Other participants had very positive experiences with employers, however. As an example, Dal, a 27 year old male participant recalls the kindness of his first manager and the important influence this had on him after arriving in the U.S. and getting his first job.

What I think for us, people who arrive here and join a company in a low position, the role of management is very very important. I have my supervisor [Scott], at [the restaurant], he is really good and he deal with me so kindly. I remember him. What I experienced at the [restaurant], it was great for me. It was so good. It brought out my best, because Scott is the best manager that I have ever known. He was so kind to me and always showed me the best way to do things. I was so confused at first! I don't know the name of the food, nothing nothing. None of the utensils. Nothing. Because I came from such a different place. He helped me a lot. All of the managers, they were good. But he was the best because he would come and talk with me and ask "what problem do you have?" And I speak English, but the problem is that they don't understand anything that I speak. He was so good to me because he came to me and ask me, "do you need help, how are you feeling." And he just coming in contact, it's so, it impressed me. It's impressive. And still I remember him.

Dal and Bishnu's contrasting experiences illustrate how sociocultural and structural dimensions of employment can intersect in unpredictable ways that variably impact refugee's career opportunities and integration experiences. Scott, Dal's manager, had a profoundly positive influence on Dal's career which contributed to his sense of cultural citizenship/belonging and provided him knowledge and skills that he felt would help him advance in the future. On the other hand, Bishnu's manager was not as open minded and appeared to close doors to advancement while also making Bishnu feel exploited and "othered." Community members linked these types of experiences to a general lack of U.S. work experience and credentials that made them vulnerable to employer's personalities. Not surprisingly, 57% saw education as the key to better careers. Bishnu, from above, ultimately makes this same conclusion, and explains that a degree from a U.S. education institution would provide him with the cultural capital necessary to advance his career and prove his worth in his new social context.

...a lot of people think that refugee only deserve housekeeping job... But that's what I want show to all these people...that I am capable of doing something better than the normal people here. I want to show them that I can do it. So that is why I'm going to continue my school. Because education is the only

thing that can raise your whole lifestyle...that can change your lifestyle. So I am a really strong believer in education.

Despite the clear benefits participants saw in education, many who arrived to the U.S. as adults felt that they had missed their opportunity to take full advantage of a U.S. education and saw their children as the true beneficiaries of resettlement. Hem, a 27 year old father, makes this point as he explains how children and adults take in the new environment at different speeds

We have the habit of the Bhutanese, and always we try to learn from our American people how we can be good, and how we can achieve some good things, you know, how do we get some better jobs, how do we get some better education. Its fact now that our children can get it [good things]. Because they started school here young and they can probably get their diploma here, they can graduate here, and so probably they can do it. It's a fact. But for us [points to himself and his wife], like for us you know, I think you probably have to do some extra things...extra things haha.

Another, possibly more important implication to draw from Hems' insight is how the opportunity for education is structured differently for adult refugees and their children. Adults are pressured to find work, while their children are quickly inserted into the public school system where they join the flow of American youth into the economy. Given these uneven abilities and structural opportunities, a broader strategy that parents in the community have adopted is to bear the burden of low wage work to help support their children's economic futures. Chhali, a 22 year old mother, described how her family was pooling resources to save money for their children to attend higher education, which she believed would improve everyone's lives in the long-term.

We have many dreams. Now we have 15 members in our family here. And we have children. My brother has three children and my second brother he didn't get married... he live with us. And my third brother get married and have two sons. I have one. We are futuring for them to become not like us. Because we didn't get good job, we have no good English. We have to do housekeeping, I mean, housekeeping is good job, but there is more good job than housekeeping. We are planning to made our children in better ways than we live. We want them to be able to study. We are working hard for them to be able to study good and to make their future bright

Joint family strategies like the one Chhali describes were not efforts to improve their children's lives as "individuals" but were investments in the "collective" future of the family. Similar sentiments were expressed by other parents who hoped their children would continue the joint family tradition into future generations. We will see this more clearly in the following chapter with regards to food. The investments that parents placed in their children's educations were efforts to improve the economic durability of the family in future generations. As I have already demonstrated, however, U.S. education comes with its own cultural costs. How this investment is used by Bhutanese children in years to come and what this will mean for cultural citizenship/belonging will demonstrate what influences education truly has on integration and its efficacy as a strategy in the community.

## Discussion

Drawing on adaptability and political economic theories, this chapter explored U.S. integration as a particular kind of *human-environment* interaction—one where the outcomes are predicated on the ways that refugees negotiate competing forms of historical, cultural, and political economic power. Recall that Crooks et al. (2007:669) described adaptability as “the ability of humans to interact *successfully* with their environments given available opportunities and constraints.” Meanwhile, Roseberry (1998:75, 79-81) and Wolf (1982; 2001) spoke of political economy as the “mobilization of resources and labor” through historically configured relations of

power. My aim in this chapter was to identify the salient sociocultural and structural conditions which facilitated or interfered with Bhutanese refugees' abilities to integrate (i.e., access resources, develop social connections, and establish financial stability, cultural citizenship/belonging, and health and wellbeing) after U.S. resettlement, and, to consider how community members, as agents, drew on their prior experiences and cultural identities to negotiate these conditions.

Given Bhutanese refugee's recent history of exile and confinement in refugee camps, it is not surprising that *political freedom*, *citizenship*, and *advancement* were among the most significant ideological reasons participants cited for electing to resettle in the U.S. Alone, these motivations stand as important examples of the agency Bhutanese refugees exercised in renegotiating cultural and political space for themselves after exile. More broadly, these motivations also foreground the underlying agendas orienting Bhutanese refugees' interpretations of U.S. resettlement conditions, which I will discuss in more detail shortly. The fact that prior experiences may influence refugees' responses to resettlement conditions is not a new proposition. Haines (1996), for example, has argued that Soviet Jews who came to the U.S. after living under a socialist regime showed little "independence" and were underprepared for the "self initiated" job searches required to be successful in the U.S. economy. For Bhutanese refugees, the process of integration is motivated by the experiences surrounding exile. During my research, I observed strong efforts to preserve cultural and religious identities in the community, which members balanced carefully against the new opportunities they had to provide for their families, acquire citizenship, and to participate in society once again.

A careful analysis of my findings reveals that the sociocultural and structural challenges participants identified often surfaced where two or more dimensions of "successful" integration conflicted with a sense of cultural citizenship/belonging. The strategies community members used to accommodate this type of conflict ranged in the degree of compromise they were willing to make between the competing systems. Avoidant integration strategies attempted to preserve cultural beliefs/practices and were relatively uncompromising in their rejection of new ways of living or thinking. As an example, high caste individuals who remained adherent to the social distinctions of the caste system were less inclined than lower caste community members to involve themselves in unfamiliar contexts. This buffered them from caste-related conflicts, but also isolated them from social contact. More often, this strategy *limited* interactions with the new context to prevent potential confrontation. Meanwhile, community members who used more flexible integration strategies engaged novel contexts and sought reconciliation between conflicts when they arose. This type of strategy was adopted by parents who sought compromise between their own desires and the new ideas and behaviors their children brought home from school (e.g., see physical intimacy, Table 4.3).<sup>38</sup>

Age, language ability, and caste position were very important sociodemographic characteristics that seemed to moderate the use of avoidant/flexible strategies (see Tables 4.2 and 4.3). For instance, older community members were less likely to speak English, which limited their ability to communicate with English speakers and reconcile potential contradictions to their beliefs or practices. Higher caste community members had more social and dietary restrictions to uphold, making the inability to communicate even more problematic. In this way, being avoidant seemed to be a default response to unfamiliar terrain given an inability to engage the contradicting circumstances. Flexible strategies were generally used by younger, more educated Bhutanese refugees who were informed in the nuances of both systems and could use their English proficiencies to engage with contradictory conditions in more complex ways. This allowed them to find compromises that would potentially satisfy both systems. The example of the higher caste participant who decided to maintain his caste practices in private but disregard caste in public

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<sup>38</sup> We will see this strategy more clearly in the following chapter as young parents respond to changes in their children's food preferences that violate caste related food restrictions

spaces illustrates a flexible strategy that seeks a balance between mainstream norms and potentially contradictory religious beliefs. The implication of this finding is that language proficiency and caste position moderate the process of integration for individual Bhutanese refugees shaping access to resources, social connections, financial stability, wellbeing, and cultural citizenship.

Timing of arrival was also an important factor impacting integration. After being approved for U.S. resettlement, the slow and uneven placement process had its own important impacts on individual integration experiences. Those who arrived to the U.S. in the first wave of resettlement encountered far greater difficulties learning the new environment and finding work than later arrivals. Being removed from their social context made integration difficult and slow, but integration outcomes (i.e. access to resources, social connections, etc.) began to improve as the community became more established, families were reunited, and people learned the transportation system, found employment, and started to earn livable incomes. The pioneering efforts made by those who came first to acquire information about the new environment and stockpile social and material resources greatly reduced the learning curve for later arrivals and helped to establish the foundations of the community that exists today. What came out of this process is the growth of a self-dependent community, as social and economic dependence is transferred from external organizations and resettlement agencies to a growing network of Bhutanese leaders who now manage community affairs and attempt to direct the process of integration on their own. This does not mean, however, that the difficulties of integration are over.

Patil et al (2010) have postulated that educated refugees are often deliberately approved and resettled first to facilitate integration for future arrivals and serve as a foundation for the growing community. It is unclear if educated community members were prioritized in the initial resettlement of Bhutanese refugees. Even so, educated individuals have certainly played a central role since resettlement was initiated in navigating the new system, creating job opportunities, and preserving their cultural heritage for the community. I must add, however, that the efforts of educated individuals seemed to gain strength by their position in larger family and community social networks, which gave them access to social and economic resources that facilitated the development of broader integration strategies. The role of educated individuals within joint families in navigating complex financial aid regulations is one example. Other examples include all of the community level strategies (see strategies listed in Tables 4.2 and 4.3) developed by BCO leaders who act as cultural brokers for their community on issues of law, education, culture, finances, and employment among many other resettlement challenges. What this suggests is that successful integration in the Bhutanese community may be more dependent on establishing strong social networks than on becoming individually “self-sufficient”—which is the integration agenda of the U.S. resettlement program (Ong 2003:83; Halpern 2008)

While opportunities for advancement were among the main reasons Bhutanese refugees cited for selecting the U.S. as a resettlement option, the transition into the U.S. economy from prolonged confinement and economic dependence on foreign aid appears to have had both positive and negative consequences on community members' overall integration capacities. On the one hand, participants felt more productive and made economic gains that were impossible by the living standards they were accustomed to in Nepal. Viewed this way, some of their resettlement motivations have come to fruition (i.e. advancement and freedom). However, the political economic conditions which uprooted Bhutanese refugees from Bhutan and mobilized them for participation in the global economy has, for the most part, placed them into the lowest tier of the U.S. labor force. The positive attitudes Bhutanese refugees expressed about the economic opportunities available to them may change as the U.S. environment becomes the new standard by which they evaluate their circumstances. Already we see this occurring in the community. While some participants described desires that resembled the “American dream” (see Chapter Three) others expressed frustrations reported by other refugee communities over low wages, poor benefits, and a lack of career mobility at their current jobs (Feeny 2000; Krahn et al. 2000; Colic-Peisker et al. 2006).

Few community members were able to secure jobs that they felt matched their prior qualifications, skill levels, or long-term career ambitions despite many having earned higher degrees while in the refugee camps (see Table 4.1 for education). Poor language proficiencies were a significant barrier to employment among older Bhutanese refugees, but younger participants cited limited work experience and lack of U.S. credentials as barriers, as has been reported by prior studies (Tomlinson 2002; Feeny 2000). Participants also harbored concerns about discrimination, noting that employers underestimated their potential because they were refugees. This was identified as another reason for receiving low-wages and being unable to advance in their careers. Some felt that they were deliberately held back or demoted to undesirable positions because of being a refugee, while others blamed their accents as challenges to career and educational opportunities. At the individual level the most common strategy for addressing these concerns was to seek alternative employment options. Meanwhile, the BCO has attempted to improve employment outcomes for its members by building a network of educated Bhutanese refugees in high positions that can hire more employees from the community and have more control over their opportunities for advancement.

Combined with low-wages and poor benefits, the limited opportunity to advance to higher paying jobs forced community members to take on second jobs to support their families. While these efforts have contributed greater financial stability to their households, balancing multiple jobs against time for family and community has become its own constraint that has required those who have jobs to make undesirable compromises in their cultural beliefs and practices. As examples, some complained about not being able to attend community events and Hindu festivals because of work, and others recalled times when they had been afraid to ask their employers for time off in order to participate in weddings and funerals for fear of being fired. In this way, the economic reality of having to manage financial stability against low paying jobs and busy schedules forced parents and community members to prioritize their job demands over other integration agendas like reestablishing social connections in the community and rebuilding a sense of cultural citizenship/belonging. In some cases, the poor health benefits offered through employers conflicted with participant's abilities to "provide" for the health and well-being of their families. Ultimately, efforts to reconcile these competing demands seemed to drive Bhutanese refugees' underlying desires to improve their careers.

Previous studies have reported how English proficiency moderates refugees' ability to find employment, navigate food environments, and become financially stable (e.g., Akresh 2007; Benari et al. 2007; Tomlinson 2002; Hadley et al. 2006; Feeny 2000; Haines 1996; Holman 1996). For Bhutanese refugees this was also the case, but there were key differences in language ability within the community. One of the few benefits of Bhutanese refugees' protracted confinement in Nepali refugee camps was the opportunity for children to learn English (UNHCR 2001). This appeared to contribute to far timelier job acquisition among younger Bhutanese adults than is reported among other refugee groups who transition more rapidly into linguistically dissimilar resettlement contexts (Haines 1996). Unfortunately, older Bhutanese refugees were unable to attend school while in Nepal, and participants noted how their limited English proficiencies interfered with job acquisition, as well as mobility, social connections, and cultural citizenship/belonging. Some participants tied these challenges to feelings of isolation and high rates of suicide among older Bhutanese refugees across the U.S. (CDC 2013), indicating that there is a relationship between cultural citizenship/belonging and health that to some extent is being moderated by language ability.

The strengths of the joint family as an integration strategy stemmed from the cumulative benefits of sharing resources and redistributing domestic/wage labor between large numbers of household members to maximize each person's potential contributions and minimize their deficiencies. While younger members contributed income to the household and assisted less educated and illiterate members in navigating the new social, economic, and political systems, older members provided cultural knowledge and childcare. These activities freed younger members to go to

school or work more hours and earn greater income which was pooled together for the household as a unit. Kibria (1994) has reported a very similar practice of resource “patchworking” in Vietnamese refugee households to mitigate post-resettlement instability, where greater age and gender heterogeneity between household members resulted in more resources and better resettlement outcomes. She linked this practice to an underlying privilege given to “collectivism” in Vietnamese families. Among Bhutanese refugees, the admixture of ages and skills within the household seemed to make the joint family an equally versatile integration strategy. In this way, the joint family functioned as an organization, built on reciprocal relationships, whose vested interest in its members contributed to its own long term sustainability, both culturally and financially.

Another key finding in the current study is how federal aid regulations seemed to interfere with Bhutanese refugees' capacities to achieve financial stability in the short and long-terms. In some cases, participants described ways that financial aid policies pressured them to find employment rather than focus on acquiring the “relevant” skills and credentials that would lead to higher paying jobs. In other cases, participants illustrated how policies that awarded benefits on the basis of household size and income interfered with their ability to live as joint families, which was an important strategy in the community for establishing cultural citizenship/belonging and financial stability. To accommodate, larger family structures began to adopt more “individualized” lifestyles that competed with their sense of community by dividing into adjacent buildings/apartments. Similarly, within households, parent-child and grandparent-grandchild relationships were reconfigured around rental agreements so that older, unemployed members could maintain aid eligibility. The conflict between Bhutanese refugee’s economic strategies and federal aid regulations is important because the goal of these policies is to facilitate “self-sufficiency” (Halpern 2008; Ong 2003). Instead, it appears that they promote stability in the short term by forcing refugees into mediocre employment, which may ironically contribute to greater financial aid dependence in the long term. Research in this area would be worthwhile.

Given the challenges many adult Bhutanese refugees faced finding higher paying jobs, participants often viewed their children’s education as an important link in the path to “advancement.” The emphasis participants placed on their children’s educations also stemmed from the way refugees' ages articulate with the structural arrangements of employment and educational opportunities during resettlement. Adults arrive and are immediately pressured to find jobs, while children are placed in public schools, and the future of the family often rests on their shoulders. Receiving an education in the U.S. was a mixed blessing, however. Parents encouraged their children to take advantage of education opportunities, but also expressed concern as children adopted “American” lifestyles, language, and behaviors. These types of concerns have been reported widely by other refugee studies (e.g., Goforth et al. 2015; Birman 2006; Lazarevic et al. 2012), and seemed to emerge from the uneven speeds by which parents and children were able to adapt to the new context. This has contributed to a widening cultural gap in the community, which the BCO has made strong efforts to diminish by providing Nepali culture and language classes to children and offering older community members cultural orientation classes to prepare them for the changes they will see in their children. When BCO leadership spoke of these strategies, they often used the word “adaptation,” illustrating the important role they are playing in shaping what it means to be Bhutanese in the new social context.

A final area that requires attention is the issue of health. Seven years after their initial resettlement, Bhutanese refugees are only now becoming aware of chronic health conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease. For the most part, this health knowledge has been obtained through a process of trial and error as people become ill and seek medical attention. Until this point, their primary post-resettlement concerns have involved the conflicts between their sense of cultural citizenship/belonging and the ability to become financially self secure. Screenings and healthcare were provided in the initial stages of resettlement, but responsibility for health is quickly transferred to individual refugees when federal aid is exhausted (Morris et al. 2009). Even so, there are myriad factors that arise in the months and years after U.S. arrival that



prevent refugees from seeking medical care, i.e., lack of awareness, language barriers, competing cultural beliefs, poverty, and mobility constraints among others (e.g., Palinkas et al. 2003; Morris et al. 2009). Had priority been given to providing Bhutanese refugees with continued preventative health from the start of resettlement, these conditions may have been prevented or greatly diminished. Instead what we find is that in several cases, access to healthcare was structured around employment, leaving unemployed community members vulnerable, despite the fact that these community members were generally older and more likely to develop chronic health conditions. Joint families were an important strategy that helped to buffer older community members from the economic constraints of unemployment, but because federal aid was based on household size and net income, several participants felt conflicted in their ability to provide for the health needs of their families.

Together, all the findings discussed above point to a more general observation: the process of integration is being oriented by the very narrow emphasis the U.S. resettlement program places on economic self-sufficiency. Employment is considered the gateway to wider integration successes (Halpern 2008; Ong 2003), and it is through this pathway that Bhutanese refugees are expected to negotiate space in society. Presumably access to resources, social connections, financial stability, cultural citizenship/belonging, and wellbeing will follow after. What is problematic about this view of integration is that it ignores how each of these domains can be individually important at any given moment, and by prioritizing just one (i.e., employment), refugees are forced to make difficult choices when the paths to achieving financial stability, health, and cultural citizenship/belonging conflict. As an example, we see how, from a policy standpoint, the emphasis on economic success renders older, non-English speaking Bhutanese refugees obsolete because they are unable to find employment. This has contributed to their sense of isolation and irrelevance in the U.S., which some participants linked to high rates of depression and suicide among Bhutanese communities across the U.S. Rather than promoting rapid self-sufficiency, policies must adopt a more holistic understanding of integration, and make efforts from the beginning of resettlement to limit potential conflicts between the variety of pathways that promote health and well-being in the long-term (e.g., social connections, health).

## Conclusion

My aim in this chapter has been to identify the salient sociocultural and structural conditions which facilitate or impede Bhutanese refugees' ability to integrate after resettling in the U.S., consider how these experiences interact with cultural identities in the community, and understand how community members negotiate these influences in day to day life. The results show a range of sociocultural and political economic challenges as well as new opportunities which participants in the study experienced following resettlement. Across nearly all of these influences, participants grounded their approaches to interpreting and addressing them through their own variable prior experiences and cultural knowledge brought with them from Bhutan and their lengthy stay in Nepal. Meanwhile, constraints were often linked to aspects of American life and culture which impinged participant's abilities to re-establish a sense of cultural identity and cultural citizenship/belonging, particularly with regards to family, community, and religion or other dimensions of integration (i.e., access to resources, social connections, employment, financial stability, and cultural citizenship/belonging).

The important question to ask, then, is how well attempts to re-establish and preserve cultural identities in a new environment articulate with the overall process of U.S. integration? What emerged from these results was a set of dialectical relationships between past and present influences and experiences which seemed to differentially moderate and orient the adaptability of Bhutanese refugees as they engaged with their new context. When determining the direction of community and family integration pathways, it is therefore important to consider what conditions are shaping refugee options, and how and why these options are negotiated the way they are. The

next step is to consider what implications these human-environment interactions have for health outcomes in the Bhutanese community. This is the focus of Chapter Five, where I will examine more closely the nutritional status outcomes that arise as Bhutanese refugees negotiate post-resettlement conditions in their food choices.

## **Chapter 5: Continuity and Change: Diet, Food Related Strategies, and Physical Activity Patterns among Bhutanese Refugees Following U.S. Resettlement—the Influences and Implications for Energy Balance and the High Rates of Overweight, Obesity, and Diabetes in the Community**

### **Introduction**

I visit Rishi's household on a hot July afternoon for our weekly ESL lesson. After a knock on their apartment door, I am greeted by Rishi's daughter-in-law and ushered into a very crowded living room full of Bhutanese neighbors and family members. Rishi is sitting on the floor in the center of the room surrounded by plastic tarps cramming spinach into large two quart plastic containers while his neighbors dump bags of spinach into a mountain in front of him, some of which they grown themselves and some they had purchased from a nearby Asian market. The container that Rishi is using is one he had brought home from work and it formerly contained bleach; it is now lined with a grocery bag and is being packed tightly with the spinach greens. Noticing my curiosity about the activity in the room, Rishi's daughter-in-law proudly explains that they are making "pickle," a fermented "cultural" food with special Nepali spices, a food cost they shared with their neighbors. Behind Rishi sit several more large bleach containers that have been packed and sealed, ready to ferment for the next week. A week later I return to Rishi's household to find another flurry of activity as his children and neighbors carefully empty out the now fermented contents of the same plastic containers onto tables in the backyard to dry in the hot summer sun. I am offered tea and moved to a table in the kitchen adjacent to the backyard so that I can teach ESL to Rishi and his wife while they continue to coordinate the food drying process. During the next hour, neighbors and relatives pass through the kitchen to check on the drying vegetables, inadvertently interrupting the study session as they go about their business. At the end of the hour, a rainstorm threatens the drying process and forces everyone to pack the tables up early. The nearly dried pickle is then divided into several bags and distributed between the houseguests. Before I leave, Rishi explains that the pickle will be rehydrated throughout the coming winter to provide a familiar "taste" and reduce food expenses during the colder months. (Excerpt from Fieldnotes, July 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> 2014)

As the above vignette illustrates, food operates as an important anchor-point for cultural identity, social interaction, and a strategy for negotiating the economic constraints of life in the U.S. among Bhutanese refugees. As one side of a healthy energy balance, food, alongside exercise is also an important determinant of nutritional health, and when not carefully managed can contribute to overweight, obesity, and a range of related metabolic diseases (Speigelman et al 2001; Hallin et al. 2006; Kokkinos et al. 2011). A significant body of research has linked unhealthy increases in nutritional status among many refugee communities in the U.S. to changes in the consumption of energy dense foods and the adoption of more sedentary lifestyles (e.g., Himmelgreen et al. 2014; Patil et al. 2009; Satia 2010; Smith et al. 2012). An important mechanism behind these unhealthy changes is the process of resettlement itself (Franzen et al. 2009a), which includes the wide range of sociocultural and structural conditions that refugees must navigate as they familiarize themselves to the new environment (Patil et al. 2009).

Interest in reducing health disparities among refugees shared by public health professionals and anthropologists alike has resulted in a proliferation of research exploring the factors contributing to energy imbalance. However, Bhutanese refugees only recently resettled in the U.S., and, as of yet, very few studies have examined how they are navigating the new environment or what impact this transition has had on their nutritional health (e.g. Kiptiness et al. 2011; Kumar et al. 2014; Bhatta et al. 2014). This chapter explores these questions in a sample of Bhutanese refugees living in Prospect City, U.S. Here, I illustrate how the ethnographic findings presented in chapters three and four comprise the context in which we can better understand how the new environment, with its unique demands on diet and exercise, is being negotiated at the individual, family, and community level, and ultimately, how it is impacting nutritional status among Bhutanese refugees in this study.

**Background and aims:** Throughout this dissertation, I have described the process of integration from an adaptability perspective as an individual's ability to respond effectively to the challenges of his/her resettlement environment, assuming that this unique human-environment interaction is guided by the histories and motivations of the refugees and the structural parameters they must engage to establish healthy, meaningful and sustainable lives. Traditionally, adaptability theorists link human-environment interactions to health as a means of gauging one's "success" at responding to local opportunities and constraints (Crooks et al. 2007; Wiley et al. 2004). The use of health as a measure of success derives from an evolutionary framework where the ability of an organism to establish optimal physiological wellbeing has implications for its survival and, ultimately, its fitness (Wiley 1992). Where adaptability theory branches away from strict evolutionary questions is in its focus on examining short-term tradeoffs to health that arise as we respond to environmental pressures. This type of analysis is important because it provides a framework for understanding the contexts and behaviors which produce health disparities in human populations (Goodman et al. 1998; Schell et al. 2007; Crooks et al. 2007). In this chapter, I demonstrate how rising rates of overweight and obesity among refugees in the U.S. warrant this type of attention.

The concept of "success" implies some form of optimal outcome, as is indicated by its relationship to health in adaptability theory; but what is deemed "successful" in social contexts is relative and may not directly align with evolutionary principles. The U.S. Resettlement Program (USRAP), for instance, interprets refugees' "success" in terms of their ability to become economically self sufficient, which it assumes will clear a pathway for them to pursue other integration objectives on their own (Haines 1996; Howell 1996). Unfortunately, the high proportion of refugees living in low-income neighborhoods (Carter et al. 2009; Singer et al. 2006; Hume et al. 2005) and increasing nutritional health problems reported among refugee communities across the U.S. (e.g., Himmelgreen et al. 2014; Patil et al. 2009; Satia 2010; Smith et al. 2012) indicate that other factors must be accounted for before economic stability can even be achieved, much less before refugees can begin to develop positive integration outcomes overall. Some have even suggested that pressuring refugees into financial independence before assisting them through other challenges (i.e. language, education, credentials) may interfere with their access to resources and their ability to establish healthy sustainable lives in the long-term (Finnan 1982; Feeny 2000; Shrestha 2011).

In the previous chapter, I adopted adaptability and political economic frameworks, but my emphasis was not to draw connections between integration and health outcomes. Instead, I wanted to clarify what historical, social, and structural conditions are guiding how Bhutanese refugees navigate the process of integration as they perceive the experience. I also wanted to know how the integration patterns that precipitated out of Bhutanese refugees interactions with post-resettlement conditions would register on a more holistic scale of "success," if we assume that in ideal circumstances this includes the ability to access resources, develop social connections, and establish financial stability, cultural citizenship, and health and wellbeing. My results indicated that Bhutanese refugees in Prospect City were most concerned about reconciling areas where they felt their cultural motivations conflicted with the sociocultural and structural challenges of participating in the American economy. These concerns framed their overall interactions with the new environment, and the strategies they developed in response to these challenges cross-cut each of the dimensions of an "ideal" integration, but reflected a strong dependence on cultural knowledge and prior experiences from Bhutan and Nepal.

Now, in the current chapter, I return to the issue of health. Using adaptability and political economic theories, I seek to identify potential relationships between nutritional status patterns in the Bhutanese community and processes of integration by examining how variable responses to sociocultural and structural post-resettlement conditions by members of the community relate to energy balance. The political economic perspective that I apply to this analysis builds on my findings from Chapters Three and Four, and assumes that refugees' diet and exercise behaviors exist

within the gaps of U.S. resettlement policies that prioritize economic self sufficiency as the fountainhead of other integration successes. In other words, without being made an explicit priority, I assume that diet and exercise behaviors are emerging through more indirect pathways as Bhutanese refugees draw upon their prior health experiences and cultural knowledge to access resources and respond to more pressing economic concerns.

The specific goals of this chapter are to: (1) report post-resettlement nutritional health patterns (overweight, obesity, and diabetes) for a sample of Bhutanese refugees from Prospect City to compare against other U.S. refugee populations; (2) identify physical activity and dietary patterns in the community, including the type and quality of commonly consumed foods; and (3) examine where these activity patterns and foods appear within the ethnographic context as Bhutanese refugees negotiate sociocultural and structural conditions in the resettlement environment.<sup>39</sup> Finally, I explore potential age, caste, and gender related differences in diet and exercise behaviors that participants perceive to exist among their parents, siblings, and fellow community members to better understand how these sociodemographic factors may relate to different interactions with post-resettlement conditions. While I do not explore *direct* relationships between health behaviors (diet and exercise) and nutritional status outcomes in the community, I do intend to interpret nutritional status patterns in the Prospect City sample using diet and exercise related ethnographic findings that speak to issues of energy balance and nutritional health.<sup>40</sup>

## Methods: Brief Review

This study used a mixed methods design, including both anthropometric and ethnographic data to: (1) identify nutritional status in a Bhutanese refugee community; (2) compare these data with other U.S. refugee populations; and (3) explain these nutritional status outcomes ethnographically, in light of relationships between post-resettlement conditions and diet and physical activity patterns in the community.

**Data collection:** Height, weight, and percent body fatness (% BF) were collected from a sample of 104 Bhutanese refugees in Prospect City, ages 6 to 82. Height (cm) was measured using a standard portable anthropometer. Weight (kg) and %BF were measured on a portable Tanita foot-foot bioelectric impedance analyzer and scale. Body Mass Index (BMI) was then calculated for adults and children from height and weight data. The percentage of body fat was determined by an internally programmed regression equation based on a multi-ethnic sample that accounts for age, sex, height, and weight (Nunez et al. 1997). Socio demographic and health characteristics were also collected including age (years), time in the U.S. (years), sex (male or female), caste position (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishnya, or Sudra)<sup>41</sup>, employment status (employed or unemployed) and type of employment, and the highest education attained in Nepal and/or the U.S. In addition, participants were asked if they had ever been diagnosed with diabetes by a medical doctor. These methods are explained more fully in Chapter Two.

Ongoing observations and 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted in a separate sample of Bhutanese refugees from the Prospect City community to identify the salient post-resettlement sociocultural and structural challenges, food related experiences, and physical activity patterns that may help explain nutritional status in the anthropometric sample. Specifically, interviews and observations were used to (1) compile an inventory of the types and quality of

<sup>39</sup> Pseudonyms are used for names of participants, local job sites, and geographical locations to protect the identities of study participants.

<sup>40</sup> Direct relationships are not explored because the anthropometric and interview samples do not overlap completely.

<sup>41</sup> The Nepali caste system is far more complex than indicated by these four categories. However, these are the categories that participants identified when explaining caste during interviews. It is possible that they simplified the system for me, an outsider, for explanatory reasons.

foods consumed by community members, (2) gather information on the important sociocultural and structural conditions shaping food behaviors relating to the foods listed on the inventory, (3) gather basic information on physical activity patterns in the community, and (4) determine whether demographic differences within the community explain differences in these food related behaviors and physical activity patterns.

**Anthropometric Data Analysis:** Adult BMIs were grouped according to World Health Organization (WHO) (de Onis 2008; WHO 2016) nutrition status cutoffs for underweight (BMI < 18.5), normal weight (BMI 18.5 ≤ 24.9), overweight (BMI 25 ≤ 29.9), and obese (BMI ≥ 30). Child and adolescent BMIs were converted to z-scores and percentiles using WHO Anthro Plus software (WHO 2015) and grouped into nutrition status categories for underweight (<5<sup>th</sup> percentile), normal weight (5<sup>th</sup> to < 85<sup>th</sup> percentile), overweight (85<sup>th</sup> to < 95<sup>th</sup> percentile), and obese (≥ 95<sup>th</sup> percentile). Participants were then grouped into nutrition status categories (underweight, normal, overweight, obese) based on %BF according to age and sex categories outlined by Gallagher et al. (2000) and McCarthy et al. (2004). All anthropometric and demographic data from the anthropometric sample were then entered into Minitab17 statistical software (Minitab 2015) for analysis.

Basic anthropometric descriptive statistics were calculated for the sample and summarized in Table 5.1. Z-tests were then conducted to evaluate for significant differences between the proportions of overweight/obesity and diabetes in the current sample and proportions reported for the general U.S. population (Ogden et al 2014; CDC 2015) and other refugee samples in the U.S. (Njeru et al. 2015; Fu et al. 2012; Kumar et al. 2014; Asgary et al. 2011; Taylor et al. 2014). WHO derived BMI cutoffs have been shown to under-predict overweight/obesity in Asian populations (Clarkin 2008; Pan et al. 2004; Chang 2003; Deurenberg et al. 2002) (see Chapter Two for more information).

To evaluate for differences in the way that BMI and %BF classified overweight/obesity in the current Bhutanese sample, BMI and %BF overweight/obesity outcomes were compared independently against the samples/proportions drawn from the recent literature. Moreover, Non-Asian and Asian refugee samples (including Bhutanese) were included in these comparisons to determine if BMI classified overweight/obesity in the current sample more similarly to Asian rather than non-Asian refugee samples. All z-test results comparing the current sample against the recent literature are summarized in Table 5.4 along with citations and relevant sample and nutritional status proportions of the selected studies.

Finally, statistical analyses were conducted to determine relationships between nutritional status and socio-demographic characteristics in the sample. Ordinal logistic regression analyses were run to investigate whether age predicts BMI and %BF nutritional status categories for the sample as a whole and for males and females separately (Table 5.5). Chi-square tests of independence were then calculated comparing the frequencies of underweight, normal, overweight, or obese in the sample by education status, vegetarian status, and caste position to determine if significant differences in nutritional status outcomes exist based on these factors. Additional Chi-square tests of independence were also calculated to determine if significant differences in nutritional status exist between employed and unemployed Bhutanese adults age ≥ 20 (Tables 5.6).

**Ethnographic Data Analysis:** All interviews and field notes were transcribed and entered into NVivo 10 (QSR 2015) for ethnographic analysis. Foods observed throughout the research period and/or endorsed by interview participants as part of their diet or their family's diet were coded and compiled into a food inventory.<sup>42</sup> Each food item was categorized into food groups

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<sup>42</sup> The inventory is *not* a standard food frequency table, nor is it intended to represent individual or household level consumption patterns. It is only a means of approximating the general importance and nutritional quality of foods consumed in the community which can then be used to provide insight into the nutritional quality of foods associated with different food related strategies.

(vegetables, fruits, grain, protein, dairy, snacks, oils, and beverages) and tallied as to the number of times observed/endorsed to provide a general understanding of breadth of diet in the community. Each food item was further categorized as red, yellow, or green according to the “Traffic Light Diet” based on its recommended role in a healthy diet (Epstein et al. 2001). Interviews and field notes were coded for ethnographic examples associated with highly observed/endorsed foods on the inventory and included in the analysis to provide contextual information regarding consumption patterns in the community (Table 5.8). To determine the overall quality of diet in the community, the food inventory was then converted to tables of relative proportions which enabled comparison of relative importance and quality between food groups (Tables 5.9, and 5.10).

Interviews and field notes were then coded for salient sociocultural and structural factors impacting participants’ food behaviors and practices. Food related strategies used to address post-resettlement conditions were identified when participants explained how they adjusted their food choices and shopping, preparation, or consumption patterns to accommodate environmental pressures or to take advantage of food related opportunities. Demographic differences in food related strategies and consumption patterns were identified when participants spoke about differences in food patterns in their families and community based on age, caste position, language ability, gender, prior experiences, wave of U.S. arrival, and/or employment/education status. The foods listed on the inventory associated with these conditions and strategies were noted in the contexts where they came up. Finally, interviews were coded for participant descriptions of physical activity patterns before and after U.S. resettlement (Table 5.11). Demographic influences were also noted with regards to physical activity when participants discussed differences in their families or community based on age, caste position, language ability, gender, prior experiences, wave of U.S. arrival, and/or employment/education status.

## Anthropometric Findings

**Descriptive Statistics for Anthropometric Sample:** Anthropometric descriptive statistics are shown in Table 5.1. Tables 5.2 and 5.3 summarize descriptive statistics pertaining to socio-demographic and education/employment characteristics in the same sample.<sup>43</sup> According to BMI, 42% of participants were overweight or obese with the majority being overweight. In contrast, based on %BF, 73% of participants were classified as overweight or obese with the majority being obese.<sup>44</sup> Post-hoc z-test of proportions revealed significant differences between %BF and BMI in the proportion of the sample classified as overweight/obese ( $z=-4.522, p=0.000$ ), with a significantly lower proportion based on BMI. Follow up z-tests were also conducted to determine if there were significant differences in overweight/obesity by sex based on BMI and %BF. No significant differences were found, however.

**Table 5.1.** Anthropometric (height and weight) and Weight Status (overweight or obese) findings from the anthropometric sample as a whole, and for men and women separately, and by age group

	n=	Anthropometrics					Weight Status Categories			
		Height (cm)	Weight (kg)	% Body Fat	BMI	Diabetes (%)	Overweight		Obese	
							BMI (%)	%BF (%)	BMI (%)	%BF (%)
Overall	104	Mean (SD) 156.99 (10.53)	Mean (SD) 59.56 (13.07)	Mean (SD) 30.99 (10.94)	Mean (SD) 23.937 (4.146)	9.6	(%) 32.4	(%) 32	(%) 9.6	(%) 41
Sex										

<sup>43</sup> For sample characteristics of the 21 interview participants, which correspond with the qualitative results presented in this chapter, please refer to Table 4.1 in the previous chapter.

<sup>44</sup> Many participants in this study were already familiar with their BMIs having gone through refugee and work-related health screenings and were under the impression that they were of normal weight until being classified as overweight/obese based on percent %BF readings.

**Table 5.1. Continued**

	n=	Anthropometrics				Weight Status Categories				
		Height (cm)	Weight (kg)	% Body Fat	BMI	Diabetes	Overweight		Obese	
		Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	(%)	BMI (%)	%BF (%)	BMI (%)	
Female	55	151.75 (7.4)	56 (11.68)	37.59 (8.16)	24.117 (4.252)	12.7	27.3	37	10.6	40.7
Male	49	162.87 (10.46)	63.55 (13.52)	23.24 (8.45)	23.735 (4.058)	6.1	38.8	26.1	8.2	41.3
<b>Age (years)</b>										
6 – 19 *	15	145.8 (17)	42.47 (15.19)	21.69 (13.14)	19.29 (3.88)	0	20	13.3	0	6
		-1.223* (1.03)	†	†	-1.131* (1.132)					
20 – 39	60	158.62 (7.26)	61.96 (9.81)	32.87 (9.8)	24.63 (3.718)	5	36.6	30	8.3	51.6
40 – 59	22	159.42 (8.93)	63.39 (12.45)	30.91 (10.45)	24.85 (3.847)	22.7	31.8	36.3	18.2	36.3
≥ 60	7	159.36 (7.88)	63.53 (6.97)	31.30 (11.82)	25.09 (2.98)	28.5	28.6	57.1	14.3	14.3
Adults ≥ 20	89	158.87 (7.67)	62.44 (10.26)	32.25 (10.04)	24.72 (3.66)	11.2	34.8	33.7	11.2	44.9

\* WHO z-scores for age  
† z-scores unavailable

**Table 5.2. Demographic and Sociocultural Characteristics for the Anthropometric Sample**

Demographic characteristics	Mean	Range	SD
Age (years)	33.7	6 - 82	15.53
Household Size (#)	5.65	2 - 16	2.815
Years in U.S.	4.56	1 - 7	1.543
	(n=)		(%)
Male	49		47.12
Female	55		52.88
Caste Positions			
Brahmin	46		44.23
Kshatriya	33		31.73
Other	25		24.03
Vegetarian†	22		21.15
No Beef	104		100*

\*One participant mentioned that his children consume beef on occasion.

† Strict vegetarianism is usually associated with the Brahmin caste position, but abstinence from beef is expected for all caste levels.

**Table 5.3. Primary Jobs (secondary jobs not listed) for Adults and Highest Educational Attainment for Anthropometric Sample**

Primary Job Type (n=94 adults 18 and older)	Total (n=)	Gender		Total (%)
		Female (n=)	Male (n=)	
Unemployed	37	28	9	39.36
Custodian	13	5	8	13.83
Housekeeper	12	8	4	12.77
Cashier	9	4	5	9.57
Assembly Line	7	0	7	7.44
Lab Assistant	5	0	5	8.77
Nursing Aid	2	1	1	2.13
Interpreter/Translator	2	0	2	2.13
Convenience Store Owner	2	0	2	2.13
Case Worker	2	0	2	2.13
Restaurant	1	0	1	1.06
Receptionist	1	1	0	1.06
Insurance Agent	1	0	1	1.06



	Total (n=)	Gender		Total (%)
		Female (n=)	Male (n=)	
Highest Degree Attained (n=104)				
Received No Education	37	18	19	35.58
Nepal High School Degree	33	21	12	31.78
Nepal Higher Education Degree	10	4	6	9.62
U.S. In High School or Below	14	9	5	9.62
U.S. Higher Education Degree	8	1	7	7.69
U.S. High School Degree	2	2	0	5.77

Table 5.4 summarizes z-test of proportion results comparing overweight/obesity (%BF and BMI) and diabetes for the adults (age  $\geq 20$ ) in the current sample against rates reported for adults (approximately age  $\geq 20$ ) in recent literature for the general U.S. population and other refugees (citations, proportions, and samples sizes are included in the table). Based on %BF, the proportion of adults classified as overweight/obese in the current sample is significantly higher than rates reported for the U.S. population and for other U.S. refugees. Meanwhile the proportion of overweight/obesity was significantly lower in the current sample when BMI was used for the same comparisons, with the exception of Bhutanese refugees (Kumar et al. 2014) and Vietnamese Refugees (Fu et al. 2012), where no significant differences were found. No significant differences were found between the proportion of self reported diagnoses of diabetes and the general US population or rates reported for other refugees in the U.S. Finally, differences in obesity based on BMI were approaching significance when the current sample was compared against rates of obesity reported among U.S.-bound Bhutanese refugees between the years of 2008 – 2011 (CDC 2014).

**Table 5.4.** Results of z-test analysis of overweight/obesity and diabetes proportions against the current refugee literature (2011-2015)

	n=	Proportion Reported	(z)	(p=)
Does the proportion of overweight/obesity (%BF) in the current sample differ significantly from rates reported in current literature				
Current Bhutanese sample age $\geq 20$	89	78.6%	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Ref.</i>
US Population age $\geq 20$ (Ogden et al 2014)	5181	69.0%	-1.94	0.052
Somalian Refugees age $\geq 18$ (Njeru et al. 2015)	1007	67.8%	-2.11	0.034
Vietnamese Immigrants/Refugees age 23- 53 (Fu et al. 2012)	703	39.5%	-6.68	0.000
Bhutanese Refugees age 18-84 (Kumar et al. 2014)	66	52.0%	-3.22	0.001
Refugees of Mixed Origins age $\geq 19$ (Asgary et al. 2011)	100	64.0%	-1.92	0.055
Does the proportion of overweight/obesity (BMI) in the current sample differ significantly from rates reported in current literature?				
Current Bhutanese sample age $\geq 20$	89	46%	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Ref.</i>
US Population age $\geq 20$ (Ogden et al 2014)	5181	69.0%	4.63	0.000
Somalian Refugees age $\geq 18$ (Njeru et al. 2015)	1007	67.8%	4.16	0.000
Vietnamese Immigrants/Refugees age 23- 53 (Fu et al. 2012)	703	39.5%	-1.18	0.238
Bhutanese Refugees age 18-84 (Kumar et al. 2014)	66	52.0%	0.74	0.459
Refugees of Mixed Origins age $\geq 19$ (Asgary et al. 2011)	100	64.0%	2.48	0.013
Does the proportion of diabetes among adults (age $\geq 20$ ) in the current sample differ significantly from rates reported in current literature?				
Current Bhutanese sample age $\geq 20$	89	11.2%	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Ref.</i>
US Population age $\geq 20$ (CDC 2015)	5000*	12.3%	-0.31	0.757
Somalian Refugees age $\geq 18$ (Njeru et al. 2015)	1007	12.1%	-0.25	0.803
Iraqi Refugees age 18-65 (Taylor et al. 2014)	366	16.0%	-1.14	0.254
Bhutanese Refugees age 18-84 (Kumar et al. 2014)	66	14.0%	-0.52	0.603
Does proportion of obesity (BMI) among children and adults (age $\geq 15$ ) in the current sample differ significantly from rates reported among U.S.-Bound Bhutanese refugees in 2011?				
Current Bhutanese sample age $\geq 15$	97	10.2%	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Ref.</i>
U.S.Bound Bhutanese Refugees age $\geq 15$ (CDC 2014)	4537	5.7%	1.877	0.060

*Italicized numerals indicate that results are significant or approaching significance*

\* Sample size of 5000 is an estimate. CDC did not provide sample size information along with its estimate of diabetes prevalence in the US population. I tried the analysis with a sample of 100 up to 5000 and results remained insignificant.

**Analysis of Nutritional Status based on Socio Demographic Characteristics:** Shown in Table 5.5 are the results of ordinal logistic regression analyses conducted to examine the impact of participant age on BMI and %BF nutritional status outcomes (underweight, normal, overweight, and obese) for the sample and independently by sex. For BMI, as age increased, participants were more likely to be overweight or obese, both for the sample as a whole, and for males and females independently. However, according to %BF, overweight/obesity increased significantly with age only for females, and was marginally significant for the sample.

**Table 5.5.** Results of Ordinal Logistic Regression Analyses Determining if Age predicts BMI and %BF Weight Status Categories (underweight, normal, overweight, obese) for the Sample and by Sex

	n=	%BF		z=	Significance (p ≤ .05)	Odds Ratio	95% Confi- dence Interval	
		Regression Coefficient	SE Coefficient				Low- er	Up- per
Do %BF nutrition status categories vary by age for...?								
Entire Sample	104	-0.0214068	0.0127611	-1.68	0.082	0.98	0.95	1.00
Male	49	-0.0023960	0.0170775	-0.14	0.888	1.00	0.96	1.03
Female	55	-0.0623782	0.0231849	-2.69	0.007	0.94	0.90	0.98
Do BMI nutrition status categories vary by age for...?								
Entire Sample	104	-0.0458467	0.0129699	-3.58	0.000	0.96	0.93	0.98
Male	49	-0.0379072	0.0173542	-2.18	0.029	0.96	0.93	1.00
Female	55	-0.0585596	0.0204121	-2.87	0.004	0.94	0.91	0.98

Reported in Table 5.6 are the results of Chi-square tests of independence for the sample as a whole and independently by sex comparing the frequencies of normal and combined overweight/obese by categorical variables including employment status, education status, vegetarian status, and caste position. Post-hoc analyses to further describe the directionality of group differences for significant Chi-square test results are presented in Table 5.7 and discussed in the subsequent paragraphs. When analyzing BMI for the sample, the proportion of overweight/obesity was significantly different based on location of education but not significant when looking at employment status, vegetarian status, or caste position. In contrast, when analyzing %BF for the sample, the proportion of overweight/obesity was significantly different based on location of education and vegetarian status, and the difference approached significance for employment status. No significant differences were found between nutrition status categories for males or females when examining BMI. When analyzing %BF for females, significant nutritional status differences were found based on employment status and education status but not for vegetarian status or for caste position. When analyzing %BF for males, significant nutritional status differences were found based on location of education, vegetarian status, and caste position, but not for employment status.

**Table 5.6.** Results of Chi-square Analyses comparing Nutritional Status (underweight + normal, and overweight + obese) against Employment Status, Education Status, Vegetarian Status, and Caste Position for the Sample and independently by Sex

	%BF				BMI		
	n=	(df)	X <sup>2</sup>	Significance (p ≤ .05)	(df)	X <sup>2</sup>	Significance (p ≤ .05)
For the sample, does nutritional status vary by...?							
Employment Status (ages ≥ 20)	89	1	3.190	0.074	1	1.002	0.317
Education Status (U.S., Nepal, None)	104	2	11.081	0.004	2	6.116	0.047
Vegetarian Status (yes, no)	104	1	4.119	0.042	1	0.676	0.411

**Table 5.6. Continued**

	%BF				BMI		
	n=	(df)	X <sup>2</sup>	Significance (p ≤ .05)	(df)	X <sup>2</sup>	Significance (p ≤ .05)
Caste Position (high, low)	104	2	4.481	0.106	2	0.353	0.838
For Females, does nutritional status vary by...?							
Employment Status (ages ≥ 20)	47	1	5.603	<i>0.018</i>	1	1.320	0.251
Education Status (U.S., Nepal, None)	55	2	6.374	<i>0.041</i>	2	3.011	0.222
Vegetarian Status	55	1	0.463	0.496	1	0.174	0.667
Caste Position	55	1	0.000	1.000	1	0.179	0.675
For Males, does nutritional status vary by...?							
Employment Status (ages ≥ 20)	42	1	0.151	0.697	1	0.788	0.378
Education Status (U.S., Nepal, None)	49	2	6.742	<i>0.034</i>	2	3.772	0.152
Vegetarian Status	49	1	4.686	<i>0.030</i>	1	0.930	0.335
Caste Position	49	1	4.350	<i>0.037</i>	1	0.097	0.755

*Italicized numerals indicate significant findings*

**Table 5.7. Results of z-test analysis of nutritional status proportions for significant chi-square findings**

	Normal Weight		Overweight		Overweight/ Obese		Obese	
	(z)	(p=)	(z)	(p=)	(z)	(p=)	(z)	(p=)
Comparing Nutrition Status For Sample								
By Location of Education								
No Education vs. U.S. Education	-3.03	<i>0.002</i>	1.297	0.193	2.136	<i>0.032</i>	1.677	0.093
Nepal Education vs. U.S. Education	2.75	<i>0.006</i>	-0.263	0.795	2.754	<i>0.006</i>	2.846	<i>0.004</i>
No Education vs. Nepal Education	-0.44	0.653	1.869	0.061	-0.621	0.535	-1.411	0.159
By "Vegetarian" vs. "Non Vegetarian"	-2.01	<i>0.044</i>	1.223	0.222	2.106	<i>0.035</i>	0.746	0.453
Comparing Nutrition Status For Females								
By "Employed" vs. "Unemployed" (age≥20)								
	-2.38	<i>0.038</i>	0.000	1.000	2.38	<i>0.038</i>	1.708	0.087
By Location of Education								
No Education vs. Nepal Education	-1.57	0.116	1.087	0.276	1.822	0.069	0.129	0.897
No Education vs. U.S. Education	2.51	<i>0.012</i>	-0.053	0.960	2.511	<i>0.012</i>	2.194	<i>0.029</i>
Nepal Education vs. U.S. Education	-1.26	0.208	-0.998	0.317	1.262	0.208	2.183	<i>0.029</i>
Comparing Nutrition Status For Males								
By Location of Education								
No Education vs. Nepal Education	0.70	0.483	1.657	0.097	-0.777	0.435	-2.195	<i>0.028</i>
No Education vs. U.S. Education	-1.91	0.056	1.982	<i>0.048</i>	1.908	0.056	0.058	0.952
Nepal Education vs. U.S. Education	-2.48	<i>0.013</i>	0.661	0.509	2.539	<i>0.011</i>	1.964	0.050
By "Vegetarian" vs. "Non Vegetarian"	-2.19	<i>0.029</i>	2.643	<i>0.008</i>	-2.572	<i>0.010</i>	-0.261	0.795
By "high caste" vs. "low caste"	-2.03	<i>0.042</i>	1.381	0.168	2.032	<i>0.042</i>	0.710	0.478

*Italicized numerals indicate significant findings*

Post hoc analyses were conducted using z-test of proportions to further explore the directionality of significant relationships between nutritional status categories and socio-demographic factors reported during chi-square analysis. The results are summarized in Table 5.7 and described in the following paragraphs.

For the sample, the proportions of normal weight were significantly higher and combined overweight/obesity significantly lower for participants with U.S. education compared to those with no education or who were educated in Nepal. The proportion of participants who were obese was significantly higher for participants educated in Nepal vs. the U.S., but, there were no significant differences in nutritional status between uneducated participants and those educated in Nepal. Meanwhile, the proportion of combined overweight/obesity was significantly higher for vegetarians than for non-vegetarians, and the proportion of normal weight was significantly lower for vegetarians than for non-vegetarians. No significant differences were found when comparing the proportions of overweight or obesity separately between vegetarians and non-vegetarians.

The proportion of overweight/obese unemployed women (age≥20) was significantly higher than employed women, and normal weight was significantly lower. However, no signifi-

cant differences were found when comparing the proportions of overweight or obesity independently between employed and unemployed women. The proportion of overweight/obese women (all ages) was significantly higher and normal weight significantly lower for women with no education compared to women educated in the U.S. Meanwhile the proportions of obesity for uneducated women and those educated in Nepal were significantly higher than women educated in the U.S. No significant differences were found when comparing nutrition status proportions between women with no education and women educated in Nepal.

The proportion of obesity was significantly higher for men educated in Nepal than uneducated men. But the difference in proportions of overweight approached significance between uneducated men and those educated in Nepal, with a higher proportion of overweight among uneducated men. The proportion of overweight was significantly higher for uneducated men vs. men educated in the U.S. The proportions of normal weight and overweight/obesity approached significance, with greater overweight/obesity among uneducated men and greater normal weight among U.S. educated men. Men educated in Nepal were significantly more overweight/obese, with most being overweight, than U.S. educated men. The difference in proportions of obesity approached significance, with greater obesity among men educated in Nepal than in the U.S. The proportions of overweight/obesity and overweight were significantly higher for vegetarian men than non-vegetarian men while normal weight was significantly lower. No significant differences were found between the proportions of obesity for vegetarian and non vegetarian men. Finally, high caste men were significantly more overweight/obese than lower caste men.

## Ethnographic Findings

**Food Inventory:** Table 5.8 summarizes common foods and ingredients in the community's diet coded from interviews and observations with ethnographic descriptions of highest ranking food items (see appendix C for complete inventory). All foods are grouped according to their Traffic Light Diet colors (red, yellow, green) and ranked from highest to lowest based on the combined frequencies that each item was endorsed and/or observed during the research period. Summarized in Table 5.9 are the relative proportions of the foods items in each traffic light category (green, yellow, red) for each food group (vegetable, fruits, proteins, etc.). Table 5.10 summarizes the relative proportions of foods from different food groups in each traffic light category.

**Table 5.8.** Summary of Food Inventory grouped according to Traffic Light Color with Ethnographic description of consumption patterns surrounding high ranking food items

Food Groups	Traffic Light Color			Ethnographic summary of common consumption patterns associated with the food group
	Green	Yellow	Red	
Vegetables	Tomato	Spinach*	Potato *	Vegetables were an important component of the daily diet. Many participants had vegetable gardens outside their houses or participated in community garden programs. Potato was considered a staple vegetable in the daily diet by many participants. As one explained: <i>"The potato is most important for us...haha. Whatever we mix with potato, cauliflower, whatever we cook, we mix potatoes"</i> . Participants emphasized their preference for "fresh" vegetables, however cucumber was the only vegetable that I observed being eaten raw. Several participants described the <i>"American salad"</i> as a new concept for them after arriving to the U.S. The majority of vegetables were prepared as a stir-fry in oil. All of the leafy greens were cooked in this manner. Or, vegetables were diced and mixed with a salt brine (water or oil based) to ferment them for <i>"pickle."</i>
	Cucumber	Cabbage *	Pumpkin *	
	Daikon Radish	Mustard Leaf *	Yam *	
	Mustard Leaf	Okra *		
	Broccoli	Chili Pepper *		
	Okra	Bitter Melon *		
	Ginger	Cauliflower *		
	Squash	Broccoli *		
	Carrot	Squash *		
	Avocado	Onion *		
	Egg Plant	Bamboo *		
	Pumpkin	Egg Plant *		
	Leaves	Pumpkin		
	Lambs Quarters	Leaves *		
	Purslane			
	Pokeberry			

**Table 5.8. Continued**

Food Groups	Traffic Light Color			Ethnographic summary of common consumption patterns associated with the food group
	Green	Yellow	Red	
Fruits	Apple Limes Grapes Mango Oranges Pear Peach Grapefruit	Banana Jackfruit in can Pineapple Pear in can Peach in can		Fruits were identified by participants as an important part of their daily diets, and were often taken to work for lunch, or used to supplement other prohibited food sources during periods of religious fasting. As one participant explained: <i>"At least every day I get at least one banana, apple, oranges, if the oranges are available in all seasons."</i> Apples and bananas were the fruits mentioned most by participants and observed with greatest frequency. Participants explained that fruit was expensive and difficult to access in Nepal, but is more affordable in the U.S., which they tied to an increase in their consumption of fruits after resettlement. Participants preferred eating fresh fruits, but sometimes ate canned fruit for convenience.
Grains	Parboiled Rice Full Grain bread	Spaghetti Cheerios Rice Crispy	White Rice White Bread Spaghetti * Kix (sugar)	Rice was a significant grain source for community members. Participants indicated that it is normal to eat rice multiple times a day with each meal. For example, one participant explained that for her family: <i>"Rice is most important. Just rice. Then vegetables for when we make a curry. Every time in my house we eat rice and a curry."</i> Many participants preferred white over brown rice. Based on medical recommendations from doctors and health information acquired at work, some participants made the transition to parboiled rice. However, the majority of participants disliked the texture or flavor of parboiled rice and continued to eat white rice on a daily basis. <i>"We never eat the brown rice... we don't like. We only like white rice. Brown rice, it look like, I just don't like it. And it doesn't cook the same. It's I think good for health, brown rice. But I don't like it. In Bhutan and Nepal, everything was white rice. Our tongue goes to white rice."</i>
Meat Protein	Goat Fish Turkey Pigeon	Chicken thigh Pork	Pepperoni	Non-beef meats were important sources of protein for lower caste community members, and for some high caste members who concealed these behaviors from their families. Goat meat was preferred by those who consumed meat and was often prepared as a curry or stew. Pork was considered a "prohibited" food item, much like beef, by most participants. Only two admitted to eating it on occasion because they liked the flavor. Fried chicken purchased at fast food establishments was also mentioned frequently by participants, but was often described as a snack food, and was categorized as such. Lentils, as with rice, is a culturally valued food item for all community members, vegetarian and non-vegetarian alike, and were often cooked in the form of <i>dhal</i> to accompany rice among other more flavorful ingredients in a typical meal. Though this is not reflected in the numbers on this inventory, even among non-vegetarians, non-meat proteins were described as a more common part of the daily diet than meats: <i>"Like, most of the time we like rice, and beans... bean soup... We eat less meat, only like 2 times a week. Goat meat. We eat fish also"</i>
Non-Meat Protein	Lentils Kidney Beans			
Dairy		Whole Milk Butter Full Fat Yogurt		Cow's milk is sacred and revered in Hindu culture and is found in many foods as a result. Often dairy products were consumed in the form of butter, yogurt, or as an ingredient in other foods or drinks like <i>Kasaar</i> (sweet milk ball) or <i>Tsia</i> , a sweet tea brewed in milk. Participants expressed a general aversion to the flavor and watery texture of reduced fat milk and used whole milk instead, consuming it multiple times per day in different forms: <i>[We drink] whole milk only, we don't like other milk. Cause whole milk in our community, in our culture, we make our own yogurt from the milk, so that the whole milk is pretty good. So for drinking we use the same milk because it's easier. And I could say every family home, they will have yogurt every day and it is considered healthy to have a glass of yogurt mixed with water at every meal. Several</i>

**Table 5.8.** Continued

Food Groups	Traffic Light Color			Ethnographic summary of common consumption patterns associated with the food group
	Green	Yellow	Red	
Dairy				participants also indicated that vegetarians eat more dairy products than non-vegetarians, and add more <i>ghee</i> (clarified butter) to most meals to compensate for less protein.
Snack Food			Pizza Crackers Potato Chips Fried Chicken French Fries Fried Roti Kasaar Fried Samosa Gold Fish Cheetos Lady Fingers	Snack foods accounted for a significant proportion of the red light foods on the inventory but were less important overall than other food sources in the daily diet. Most of the readymade foods were novel to participants and had been introduced to their diets after arrival to the U.S. Participants did not consider these foods to be a proper "meal." Readymade foods with the most endorsements involved fast-foods (including pizza, fried chicken sandwich, and french fries), and were eaten away from home. Potato chips and fries were new on arrival, but fit within a pre-existing dietary preference for potatoes and many participants incorporated them into their normal diets.
Spreads, Oils, Sauces, Sugar		Vegetable Oil Peanut Butter Mustard Oil	Sugar	Vegetable oil was an important ingredient in most dishes, used to cook vegetables and curries. Oil was added to contribute flavor to the dish: " <i>When I cook, bitter gourd, I will put more oil and make some fried food, no water. I will put more oil so that it taste good.</i> " Measurement of oil was uncommon: " <i>We don't measure, because we see how much curry we need and we know if we add this much, its good. Just oil to this much curry, we put that way. We see. We never measure.</i> " Mustard oil had a pungent smell and flavor that participants used to " <i>change the tongue</i> " or flavor of foods they were eating. Mixed with salt, mustard oil was also a base for fermenting vegetables and citrus fruits for long term storage. Aside from being consumed in <i>tsia</i> (sweet tea) during the day, sugar had little role in the typical daily diet. Other foods that were sweetened with added sugar were usually reserved only for special events (weddings, parties, and celebrations).
Beverages, Condiments	Tomato Pickle Radish Pickle Okra Pickle Grn. Chili Pickle Pumpkin Pickle	Tsia Lime Pickle	Soda Tang Chana Chatpate Lime-aide	<i>Tsia</i> was the most common beverage observed/endorsed during the study. Black tea is brewed in whole milk and sweetened with sugar. Participants drank <i>tsia</i> as a common activity in their households. It is also customary to give <i>tsia</i> to guests as a welcome. As one participant explained: " <i>If you go to any Bhutanese house the first thing they will ask is 'have you had tea?' People drink, like my wife, my brother's wife, and a lot of people they say if they don't drink tea they say they have headache. So I would say twice a day, morning and afternoon, they will drink it. Like every morning it's like mandatory. They will start their day with a cup of tea.</i> " Aside from <i>tsia</i> , sodas and sugary drink mixes were also common beverages offered to houseguests. "Pickle" was a fermented condiment made in water or oil brine. It was consumed as a small side dish at each meal to add flavor to rice or curry.

\* Stir-Fried in oil (observed or endorsed as preparation practice)

**Table 5.9.** Table summarizing the relative proportions of foods items in each traffic light category (green, yellow, red) for each food group

Food Groups	Traffic Light Colors			Total
	Green	Yellow	Red	
Vegetables	38%	40%	22%	100%
Fruits	74%	26%	0%	100%
Grains	17%	25%	58%	100%
Meat Protein	59%	41%	<1%	100%
Non-Meat Protein	100%	0%	0%	100%
Dairy	0%	100%	0%	100%
Snack Food	0%	0%	100%	100%

**Table 5.9.** Continued

Food Groups	Traffic Light Colors			Total
	Green	Yellow	Red	
Spreads, Oils, Sauces, Sugar	0%	68%	32%	100%
Beverages, Condiments	30%	33%	36%	100%
Total	35%	34%	31%	100%

**Table 5.10.** Table summarizing the relative proportions of food groups, and the relative proportions of food items from different food groups in each traffic light category

Food Groups	Relative Proportion of Food Groups	Relative proportion of food groups classified under individual traffic light colors		
		Green	Yellow	Red
Vegetables	29%	30%	32%	20%
Fruits	11%	23%	8%	0%
Grains	9%	4%	7%	18%
Meat Protein	7%	11%	8%	<1%
Non-Meat Protein	6%	18%	0%	0%
Dairy	7%	0%	21%	0%
Snack Food	11%	0%	0%	38%
Spreads, Oils, Sauces, Sugar	4%	0%	9%	5%
Beverages, Condiments	16%	14%	15%	19%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

**Table 5.11.** Themes related to post-resettlement changes in exercise and nutritional health (weight status and diabetes) that emerged during interviews

Exercise Related Themes	Endorsed Theme		Did not Discuss	
	n=	%	n=	%
Reported having no concept of health benefits of physical exercise prior to resettlement	5	23.8	16	76.1
Associated physical activity with occupational activities	13	61.9	8	38
Engaged in physical activity for health purposes after resettlement	3	14.2	18	85.7
Reported increases in physical activity after resettlement	3	14.2	18	85.7
Reported decreases in physical activity after resettlement	10	47.6	11	52.3
Associated post-resettlement decreases in physical activity with diabetes in their family/community	3	14.2	18	85.7
Associated post-resettlement decreases in physical activity with weight gain in their family/community	4	19	17	80.9
Reported age and gender differences in physical activity opportunities in their family/community	8	38	13	61.9

**Changes in physical activity:** Summarized in Table 5.11 are the themes that emerged during interviews related to pre- and post-resettlement physical activity and health patterns. Twenty four percent of participants indicated that prior to U.S. resettlement they had little concept of the health benefits of regular physical activity. These ideas were introduced to the community through mandatory health screenings after U.S. arrival and as more individuals in the community interacted with healthcare providers as a result of health problems. However, because community members had little exposure to this information prior to resettlement, rather than viewing “exercise” as an activity in and of itself, 62 % of participants associated physical activity with their occupation. And only 14 % reported engaging in physical activity solely for health purposes. Below, Chandra, a 27 year old male participant, foregrounds the overlap between work related physical activity and “exercise” in his community.

[I get exercise at work], walking around, moving heavy stuff and lifting things. Work is our exercise. We don't do like any professional, like going to the gym or swimming or anything like that.

More broadly, the link between exercise and occupation is important for understanding what impact participants perceived U.S. resettlement to have had on their opportunities for exercise. For instance, 14 % of participants associated resettlement with increases in physical activity. Interestingly, these were women. In Bhutan and Nepal, women were expected to stay at home and take care of the family rather than find employment. This expectation changed after coming to the U.S. causing more Bhutanese women to work outside the home where they could also be more physically active. In contrast, 43 % of participants (men and women) felt that physical activity levels had decreased for themselves and/or their community after coming to the U.S., reporting less walking, biking, and manual labor overall. Dal, a 27 year old male participant, explains these changes in a broad structural sense.

I think in Nepal, because of the poor, they have agricultural food, not industrial food. Here we have industrial food and we do a lot of exercise there, the farmers have to do a lot of work, and the exercise is their work. It's just a part of the day. And they walk a lot, like the people in the hilly regions they have to go up and down and up and down. It's a lot of exercise there. Here we work too and get a different kind of exercise. At [my old restaurant job] it was a lot of standing as a dishwasher. And lot of back and forth, like "bus cart, bus cart!" or "back to the line!" or "Sauce pan, pick it up quick!" Haha. Yeah. But it's not the same as in Nepal.

Another discussed these changes in terms of transportation differences.

People are getting much less exercise here. Cause when we were in refugee camp the only transportation was your legs. So where ever you go you had to walk. But here, if you want to go somewhere you have a car. A car will take you door to door. (Devi, male, age 28)

Importantly, 14% of participants linked the decreases in activity they experienced after coming to the U.S. to rising rates of diabetes in their community and 19% linked these changes to weight gains they observed in themselves and among their family members. As an example, Dal, one of the participants from above, reiterates some of the post-resettlement changes in exercise and describes the increases in weight status he has observed in his own body.

In Nepal, like every time no buses, we have the bicycles, there were more bikes, bicycles. Over there... everything we have to walk. We had to walk everywhere. So we had a more exercises over there I think. But here, we are everywhere getting the bigger [points to his belly], so this is the product of living in the United States. So now rather than walking or going there on bike I use my car.

While I have already mentioned the role that gender may be playing in shaping differences in exercise in the community, 38% of participants specifically cited differences in exercise opportunities based on age and gender. In all cases, these differences were linked to occupation. Some suggested that older community members in particular were getting the least amount of exercise after coming to the U.S. As one younger participant explained to me, "*My parents get less exercise than Nepal, but it's the same for us [younger family members].*" For younger community members, physical activity was considered to be higher because they had greater access to work activities and to school sports. However for older men and women, finding employment was a challenge, which limited their opportunities to exercise. For older men, this was blamed on poor language skills and/or a lack of education needed to find employment. For women, particularly older women, the lack of exercise was tied to their traditional roles as household caretakers. Two participant comments are useful for illustrating these types of gender differences and their potential influences on activity.

Traditionally the men, the head of the house, they will be out working the field as a farmer or with a company. For moms, or the ladies back in our country, they prepare to stay home. So now maybe they [women] stay home and they getting constant weight...traditionally work outside is for the dad, and



managing the house is for the women, taking care of the kids...they still work, but not too much like the dad. (Chandra, male, age 29)

I look at my mom, she sometime works in the garden, but she just stay home all day, and my grandpa he just sleeps all day cause he can't get a job. So people get less exercise. (Bishnu, male, age 25)

The roles of age and gender in shaping exercise opportunities were confirmed in my observations. Most Bhutanese households were occupied during the day by infants, toddlers, several women (young and old) and older, unemployed men. The women prepared meals and swapped roles taking care of the children. Usually the youngest did the most work, while older women observed and offered instruction. Meanwhile, older men were in the living room talking or napping as other household members would come and go from their jobs and school.

***Bhutanese food beliefs/experiences and the American Food Environment:*** Interviews revealed a range of structural and sociocultural conditions that facilitated and interfered with Bhutanese refugee's abilities to access food resources and maintaining cultural food practices (see Tables 5.12 and 5.13).

**Table 5.12. Structural Factors Impacting Food Access and Practices, and Associated Refugee Food Choices and Strategies**

	Impact on Preferred Diet		Interacting Variables	Refugee food related strategies to respond to structural facilitators/barriers		Impact on Diet					
	Endorsed as Facilitator n=	Endorsed as Challenge n=		Individual Level Strategies	Family Level Strategies		Community Level Strategies				
Timing of US Arrival											
First Wave in US	2	9.5	2	9.5	17	80.9	Age, Language	Seeking agency support, food choice accommodations (selection of similar foods) Learning city layout, Acquiring personal vehicle, Learning Public Transportation Seeking knowledge/resources from prior arrivals	Resource Pooling, Knowledge sharing, Cultural food preparation for newcomers	Community Infrastructure, Knowledge Sharing, Nepali Grocery Store	Novel diet, Reduced consumption
Financial Aid offered to Refugees											
Food Stamp Program	7	33.3	2	9.5	12	57.1	Age, Language, Employment Status	Applying for aid, Learning aid regulations	Resource pooling,	Classes to improve financial aid literacy	Traditional Diet
Resettlement Agency Support											
Case Support	3	14.2	*	*	18	85.7	Ω	Ω	Ω	Ω	Traditional Diet
Community Gardens	14	66.7	*	*	7	33.3	Ω	Applying for garden plot, Food cost savings, Growing fresh food, Means of establishing cultural citizenship/belonging, Maintain access to preferred foods	Use of Family Gardens when application failed, Seed sharing	Ω	Traditional Diet
Work and School Health Incentive Programs	5	23.8	*	*	16	76.1	Age, Language, Employment status	Seeking jobs that provide health benefits and information, Implementing nutritional health knowledge learned at work	Ω	Dissemination of nutritional health knowledge through community	Dietary Quality

**Table 5.12.**  
Continued

	Impact on Preferred Diet				Refugee food related strategies to respond to structural facilitators/barriers			Impact on Diet		
	Endorsed as Facilitator n=	%	Endorsed as Challenge n=	%	Individual Level Strategies		Community Level Strategies			
					Did not Discuss n=	%				
Foods Available	6	28.5	7	33.3	8	38	Homemade lunches, Careful menu selections, Experimentation of foods within cultural parameters, Experimentation of foods outside cultural parameters, Avoidance of unfamiliar foods	Pooling of dietary resources, Dependence on literate family members to assist in selecting appropriate foods, Homemade lunch	Ω	Novel Diet, Flexible Traditional Diet
Time Use (structure of work day/week)	*	*	7	33.3	14	66.6	Age, Language Experimentation of foods within cultural parameters, Experimentation of foods outside cultural parameters, Homemade lunch, Restructuring religious diet practices around work	Planning family meals around work, Someone always home to make food, Buying canned food,	Community Events planned to accommodate work schedules	Novel Diet
US Food System										
Food Labeling	15	71.4	*	*	6	28.5	Age, Language, Caste Using food labels to identify culturally appropriate foods, Avoiding foods without labels	Interpretation of food labels for illiterate family members	Ω	Flexible Traditional Diet
Abundance of Food Supply	13	61.9	*	*	8	38	Prior Exp w/ food deprivation, Increased consumption of cultural foods, Increased experimentation with non-Bhutanese foods	Ω	Ω	Traditional Diet, Over consumption
Distribution of Food Supply	*	*	8	38	13	61.9	Age, Language, Learning store locations, Acquisition of personal vehicle, Learning public Transportation	Shopping multiple locations, Buying bulk	Knowledge sharing of where to find foods	
Food Cost	7	33.3	9	42.8	5	23.8	Joint Family Shopping multiple stores to get best price Preparing food at home to cut cost	Couponing, Shopping Multiple stores, Gardening, Resource Pooling, Maintaining aid benefits	Knowledge sharing of low cost foods, Resource pooling	Over consumption
* Indicates an influence that did not receive endorsements (facilitator or barrier) from participants										
Ω No strategies were identified for this specific factor										

**Table 5.13.** Sociocultural Factors Impacting Food Access and Practices, and Associated Refugee Food Choices and Strategies

	Impact on Diet		Interacting Variables		Refugee food related strategies to respond to sociocultural facilitators/barriers		Impact on Diet
	Endorsed as Facilitator		Did not Discuss		Family Level Strategies		
	n=	%	n=	%	Individual Level Strategies	Community Level Strategies	
<b>Mainstream Society</b>							
Mainstream Dietary Norms	7	33.3	12	57.1	2	9.5	Meat Novel Diet
					Age Language Caste	Increased consumption of meats, Experimentation with meats, Careful selection of foods within cultural parameters, Avoidance of new foods and restaurants,	Community education on food and caste related issues
						Parental cultural flexibility, Family mealtime	
<b>Work and School</b>							
Colleagues and Peers	5	23.8	*	*	16	76.1	Novel Diet Traditional Diet
					Age language	Avoidance of Food related social contexts, Food experimentation, Sharing cultural food practices	Ω
<b>Bhutanese Community and Family</b>							
Perceptions of Healthy Diet	*	*	5	23.8	16	76.1	Traditional Diet
					Prior Exp.	Implementation of health knowledge in personal dietary practices, Checking expiration dates	Dissemination of health knowledge to community
Food Deprivation	*	*	9	42.8	12	57.1	Over consumption
					Prior Exp	Implementation of health knowledge in personal dietary practices	Dissemination of health knowledge to community
Cultural food knowledge	*	*	7	33.3	14	66.6	Traditional Diet
					Age, Caste	Implementation of health knowledge in personal dietary practices	Dissemination of health knowledge to community
Community Leadership	2	9.5	*	*	19	90.4	Flexible Traditional Diet
					Age Language Caste	Ω	Classes on American Culture, Efforts to promote cohesion and limit caste discrimination



Tables 5.12 and 5.13 represent the most fine-grained analysis of food-related sociocultural and structural challenges and facilitators from the ethnographic data. Included beside each condition are interacting sociodemographic characteristics (i.e. age, gender, language, caste, etc.), related food strategies, and the impact each factor had on food dietary behavior. To best capture the complex relationships between these conditions and factors, the findings presented below are organized into three broader interactions between the diet/cultural backgrounds of Bhutanese refugees and the American food environment: Hinduism and the American food environment, the transition from food deprivation to abundance, and the joint family as an integration strategy. Below, I hope to clarify the primary pathways shaping continuity and changes in the traditional Bhutanese diet and what these changes mean for the Bhutanese refugees diets (quality and consumption). When they arise, I illustrate differences in food behaviors that participants described between themselves and other community members based on age, gender, caste, language, education which may explain variable food behaviors.

### *Hinduism and the U.S. food environment*

In our culture, mostly people in our community are Hindu and mostly some Hindu people, we don't eat pork or beef. Some of us are vegetarian... I am vegetarian. Like I don't eat any kind of meat, or egg, or anything besides milk that comes from an animal. (Pita, age 35 male Brahmin)

I used to go to the granite high school to get some ESL classes and at that time they used to provide food to their students. And I didn't have any options, I couldn't get my white rice and dal, so I saw everyone was joining the line and the teacher told me I could go and join and get food too. So the first day I tried pizza, I tried pepperoni, and that's not good for me because I don't eat beef. And I talk to the guy who serve the food, and he said its pepperoni, and I'm like "what's pepperoni?" so I ask the guy, can you explain me the meaning of pepperoni? And he said its beef and pork... and I said, "Oh I did a great mistake." (Chandra age 29 male)

According to Hindu beliefs, the cow is a sacred animal, and there are strong prohibitions against consuming it. Other animals are ranked by purity alongside the caste hierarchy and have corresponding dietary prohibitions. When viewed through the prism of caste, the U.S. food system represented a dietary opportunity for some Bhutanese refugees and a constraint for others. For instance, 57% of interview participants viewed the wide availability of beef and non-beef meats in the U.S., particularly at work and school, as a socio-religious problem for either themselves or members of their community, while 33% of participants spoke positively about their new access to non-beef meats and were not threatened by the popularity of beef. When discussing these differences, participants noted that the community members who were most threatened by the presence of meats were of higher caste, older, and had lower English proficiency.

Language was important for following up about the ingredients in foods purchased away from home. While it was rare for participants to use food labels to determine nutritional quality of the foods they consumed, 71% of participants described labels as a useful method for determining if meat was in the readymade foods they bought at restaurants, work, or school. As one participant explained, "*We are not bothered by all the beef in the U.S. because we can see the ingredients on the food label. And if we see beef we will just skip it and get something else.*" Unfortunately many older community members were never given the opportunity for education and were unable to read or speak English (see Chapter Four). Below, Tika, a 27 year old female participant elaborates on the challenges older people in her community face distinguishing food ingredients, and how she and her husband who can read English, assist them.

For an older person it is hard to distinguish [food ingredients], like let's say they want to eat pizza or something like that, some people they eat too, when they are new, they don't know what these things are or what things are mixed with that one you know. They eat them and then after a couple of days they

say “oh I eat that things” and when we say like, “oh” like, “that is the thing it is made of meat” or something like that, and they say “Oh no!!!!” [Tika laughs]. Me and my husband, we know how to read labels. But for the older people, it’s hard. So we have to help them.

The ability to read labels allowed community members like Tika to experiment with novel foods without having to worry about accidentally consuming beef products. More often, the novel foods that community members experimented with were fast foods (french fries and fried chicken) and pizza learned from friends and colleagues at work. As an example, Leela, a 27 year old female participant, describes the gradual process by which she tried her first American food.

**Leela:** In the beginning, I don’t like any food that is made outside, you know. And I just used to close my nose... it smelled so bad to me. I used to select only the food that I know from my home country. But the time passes, I began to try everything. Now I like pizza and any American food. I love it!

**Interviewer:** When was the first time you tried American food?

**Leela:** Pizza, I got it at the [nearby] pizza restaurant. I have an American friend from work and she used to take me to work. And when I start work she took me there, and it was...I didn’t eat, even then. She told me like, let’s go have lunch. So I went. And she told me it’s so delicious, you have to eat, you have to try! This is America, you have to stay here! So you have to try American food! So she just encourage me a lot. So I think ok, so I go, and I try just a little piece and I didn’t like it at first. But now I love it!

The ability to speak and read English is important to navigate these types of circumstances. Unfortunately, not all foods are labeled in the U.S., especially in restaurants, which made it more difficult to maintain a meat or beef free diet in these contexts. Higher caste participants had greater dietary restrictions altogether and were more hesitant to eat away from home for these reasons. To address the prevalence of meats in the U.S. they used a combination of careful food/restaurant selection and/or avoidance of contexts where accidental contact with meat could occur. As Pita, a 35 year old Brahmin participant illustrates below, these types of efforts were successful in preventing accidental meat consumption, but also influenced where and what he ate.

**Pita:** In our culture, mostly people in our community are Hindu and mostly some Hindu people, we don’t eat pork or beef. Some of us are vegetarian... I am vegetarian. Like I don’t eat any kind of meat, or egg, or anything besides milk that comes from an animal.

**Interviewer:** Do you ever eat at restaurants?

**Pita:** Not usually. But I very rarely have gone to American restaurants. There are some Indian restaurants that have vegetarian food over there. But we don’t really go and when we go to shop something, sometime we buy readymade food. A kind of Indian or Nepali food mixed together. And if I eat American food, sometime I go and buy vegetarian pizza.

To address the problem of consuming inappropriate foods at work and school, participants packed their own lunches or returned home during the day to eat between shifts. This strategy helped ensure that the foods they consumed aligned with their caste related dietary needs, but they also helped to save money and fit within broader joint family approaches to the overall process of integration (see chapter four). Ryam, a 48 year old Brahmin (high caste) parent touched on some of these strategies as he explained how he has instructed his children to deal with eating lunch at school.

**Ryam:** Beef is common at school. Most of the sandwiches even are beef. So some people don’t have any other choice but to eat it. It’s a school practice around the country. But especially for higher caste, we can’t eat food at school because beef is in all the food, it’s everywhere.

**Interviewer:** Do kids in your community eat at school anyway?

**Ryam:** Some kids do, but not everyone. My kids don't eat foods from school. Sometimes they take their lunches and sometimes I give them money and they can go get something they like during lunchtime. Most of the time I give them money and they take, but sometime they buy there. Usually I prepare them all food they like.

In general younger community members with greater English proficiency did not feel as threatened by foods served at work and school, despite the prevalence of beef. Recognizing this in his own children, Ryam sometimes allowed them to buy their own foods outside the school, knowing that they would be able to get more appropriate foods in other locations. This is not always what they did, however. Twenty eight percent of participants viewed the food at work and school as an opportunity to experiment with novel foods. Some younger participants were also more willing to try non-beef meats despite their caste restrictions, and the prevalence of meat at work and school provided them with this opportunity out of view of other community members. As I will discuss later, the consumption of non-beef meat is a growing source of intergenerational conflict for some vegetarian families.

In contrast to the challenges faced by high caste community members, lower caste Kshatriya participants, who described themselves as non-vegetarian, experienced an improvement in their meat related dietary options as a result of U.S. resettlement. In Nepal, Bhutanese refugees from the Kshatriya caste were allowed to eat mutton, chicken, and fish but recall being “vegetarian by compulsion” as a result of poverty and the limited supply of meats around the camps. Resettlement in the U.S. immediately relaxed these pressures, and it was not unusual for non-vegetarian participants to describe their first experiences in the U.S. in terms of the meats they consumed.

When we got to [Prospect City] we were like oh I want meat, meat, meat, meat! Because we hadn't had any meat for a long time. And I wanted the meat! Oh man I wanted it. So we directly came to aunt's house, and there was meat there. She cooked us Nepali meat. Mutton! (Dal, male, age 27)

Dal's experience was improved by having family members who were well established in the new environment and had mutton on hand to prepare for him the day he arrived. Mutton was by far the most preferred meat among non-vegetarians, which I saw being prepared very frequently in Kshatriya households, but it was much less abundant and more costly than other meats available in Prospect City. To accommodate the cost difference, and maintain this preferred food in the regular diet, families have located where they can buy a live goat outside the city to be slaughtered and divided across several families to reduce the price. Non-vegetarian participants like Dal claimed to eat mutton and other non-beef meats on a weekly basis, which contrasts with their very infrequent access to meats in Nepal. They also buy fried chicken sandwiches and pizza from the local fast food stores to add diversity to their diets, or “change the tongue,” as some described it, illustrating a very different set of constraints shaping the food habits between vegetarian and non-vegetarian castes.

Finally, for 33 % of participants, perceptions of healthy foods were directly and indirectly structured around caste restrictions and cultural knowledge rather than the nutritional content of foods they were consuming. As an example, when asked to identify what foods are “most healthy” to eat, one participant responded: “*our cultural foods...because we like them!*” Meanwhile, in response to what an “unhealthy” diet would look like, an older Kshatriya man exclaimed “*chicken or pork!*” which he clarified by adding



Some kinds of meat are bad. I eat fish and goat meat, but I don't eat chicken and pork for religious reasons. So the things I eat I think are healthy. But other people eat the things I don't eat, and they also think their food is healthy. So it is hard to tell. (Ganga, male, age 60)

In sum, participants demonstrated a strong preference for traditional foods, which some associated with dietary health. Traditional preferences stemmed from caste related food beliefs that had important implications for food choices. Higher caste (vegetarians) were constrained by the prevalence of beef and non-beef meats in the American environment, while lower castes (non-vegetarians) were limited only by beef and had a wider range of novel foods they consumed. As a result, vegetarians are more limited in the types of environments and foods they experimented with. Both vegetarian and non-vegetarians were experimenting, however. Often these foods were fast foods like french fries, pizza, fried chicken sandwiches.

Age and language interacted with community members' abilities to experiment with new foods while maintaining their caste restrictions; greater English proficiency increased the ability to experiment while lower English proficiency decreased experimentation. Because age and language proficiency are closely related among Bhutanese refugees, it is possible that without giving up caste as an organizing logic, lack of English proficiency may slow the process of dietary change for older individuals and limit the adoption of convenience foods. Those who are not equipped to navigate the prevalence of beef and meat through language have developed their own strategies to avoid contexts and foods where the ingredients are unknown; these strategies further reinforce traditional diets.

### *Food deprivation to abundance*

Food wasn't as abundant in Nepal as here. And fruits were seasonal and we didn't have refrigerators to keep food longer. Now we can store food and have access to all sorts of fruits and vegetables all year. (Jhuma, age 40 female)

At the beginning no one help us shopping. Later we heard there was a Chinese market. And we went there and asked how we could get to other stores that offered more food like ours. And they tell us there is one Pakistani store and some Indian stores. But we have a problem to take the bus and go there, to these stores. It was kind of difficult and we had to carry all the things we bought even from [the nearby store], like 7 or 8 blocks back to our apartment. (Lal, age 30 female)

In the refugee camps, Bhutanese refugees had no electricity or means of food storage, which limited the types of foods the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations could provide. As a result, participants recall receiving very "insufficient" food rations, which included 15kg of rice and lentils every half month for a family to share. "Perishable" foods like fruit and vegetables were a luxury provided on more rare occasions. Rations often ran out before the end of each cycle, and families had to wait for the next shipment to eat again. Making neighborly visits was a strategy some participants described using to take advantage of hospitality in their community when they were hungry. Some entered the forests surrounding the camp and dug out tree stumps to sell for firewood to supplement food for their families, but competition with Nepali citizens over the wood resulted in several violent altercations. Others found work illegally in the nearby tea gardens. These sources of income allowed people to buy the occasional apple or mango, and participants remember splitting a single piece of fruit into thin slivers to share with their families and "change the tongue" of their routine diets. The influence these experiences had on Bhutanese refugees' perceptions of the food supply in the U.S. cannot be overstated.

Unlike goat meat, as discussed in the previous section, participants noted that most other staples in the Bhutanese diet (i.e. rice, vegetables, and lentils) were highly accessible in Prospect City, leading 62% to describe the U.S. foods supply as more abundant than Nepal. By and large, participants' perceptions that food was more "abundant" in the U.S. stemmed directly from the

juxtaposition between their experiences with food deprivation in Nepal and the affordability and sheer diversity, quantity, and lack of seasonality of the foods being sold in markets and stores across Prospect City. Timing of arrival interacted with these perceptions, however. Earlier arrivals to the U.S. encountered more difficulties finding preferred foods due to a lack of transportation and poor familiarity with store locations. To accommodate, they made compromises in their food choices by adopting new foods or making substitutions for ingredients that were not readily available. Later arrivals enjoyed the benefit of entering a more established community that could show them where to find specialty foods. Community member's perceptions of the differences in food experiences between early and later arrivals are illustrated well in the quotes below, as is the strong emphasis newcomers place on finding familiar cultural foods.

A day or two after we arrived we got food stamps and we went to the market and we don't know which types of food are the ones we like, even though we know English but we don't know these foods. Like we have cabbage in Nepal, and some kind of lettuce, and some kind of spinach, so we were familiar with these kind of items so we just bought that one, the ones we knew. And we just collect that one and cook it... And when we didn't find the rice we just took flour and just take the flour in the bag you know, and making little pieces of our own and eating that. (Hem, male, age 27)

It was really hard for us [first wave arrival], but it was easier for them to come later because we were here already. We help them do the shopping and go to the grocery store, because we already knew were the stores are. And we help them to find the right foods we like, because we already saw them. (Lal, female, age 30)

After community members located stores where they could buy their foods, the constraints on the traditional diet diminished significantly. As one participant explained, people from all caste positions were able to access more foods that fit within their specific dietary regimens.

The non-vegetarian, you know they can eat lots of things and they don't feel that they have to eat just one kind of meal. They have different choices. Culturally, they are not allowed to take beef and pork, especially. But now, people to practice cheaper way of life. To find goat meat, its costly here, but they don't have problem to take meat because there are all kinds of other meat, and they don't have the reservation of only being able to take goat meat... Those who are vegetarian, they have now good system and can find all kind of vegetables from the old world and they started taking new kind of vegetable. There, I think, are not many problem, except people choosing their vegetables and the price and everything. People for vegetables every meal has some kind of potato curry. Potato was very expensive in Nepal, but not here. People eat more potatoes now, they are so cheap here, and they last a long time. (Ryam, male, age 48)

Thirty three percent of participants felt that the cost of food in the U.S. was more affordable than Nepal which contributed to perceptions that food was also more abundant. As is suggested by the quote above, however, this does not mean that food cost was not an important consideration in participant's food shopping strategies. Forty three percent of participants were receiving food stamps to offset the cost of foods. Sixty seven percent attended community gardens provided by local resettlement agencies to grow their favorite vegetables and to save money. Gardening was both a cost saving strategy and a significant source of cultural citizenship/belonging and pride for some community members, which I will discuss further in the section on joint families. Meanwhile 43% of participants described travelling to multiple stores in a single trip and using coupons to get the foods they wanted at the lowest price. Dal, a 27 year old male participant describes the complexity of his own food shopping patterns while illustrating how cost, quality, distance, and taste preferences guide these behaviors.

First we go to the store just down the road. And then there is the NPS store, the wholesale store, and then there is the Indian market and Chinese. The good thing is that we have to be the saver, how do we

save the money, how do we choose the things... mostly we do like that; we choose the things carefully to save the money. Selecting the items...only the good things. Especially we don't choose the junk food... none, we only buy rice. We buy the rice at Costco, because we like it there and it is cheaper. And mostly we buy the vegetables from like MexMart... we go to MexMart because it's cheaper. Sometimes Wal-Mart too. Sometimes the quality is a little different. But the vegetables are good at MexMart. Also, right now there is the Nepali store.. it's new. Before that we used to go to the Shop-n-Go, on south street... sometimes we go to the Asian Mart in South City. That is a big one, and it is cheaper than these closer Chinese stores, but we still have to drive all the way down [9 miles] south.

Information about which stores had the best sales was shared between community members on an ongoing basis to cobble together the best deals on their favorite foods. Wholesale store memberships were also acquired by community members to buy staple Bhutanese foods in bulk quantities, like rice and lentils, which was useful for accommodating the food needs of larger joint families that most community members lived in. To better understand the relationship between cost and food preference I asked participants if they bought the cheapest rice they could or if they disregarded cost in favor of their favorite rice. Their responses indicated that cultural food preferences determined *what* foods people buy while cost influenced *where* they purchase them. For instance,

You know the Basmati rice? It taste good, but it is much more expensive than other rice. We could buy less expensive rice but it's not good. [My family] choose basmati rice all the time. (Duka, female, age 23)

Most people eat jasmine rice now which is little expensive here. And some Asian rice from the Indian store. They are expensive. But because of the taste we don't mind spending extra money. And jasmine rice keeps good flavor and smells, and we like that. (Ryam, male, age 48)

Given the abundance of preferred foods in Prospect City, when asked what the biggest changes to their diets have been since resettlement, most participants identified an increase in the consumption of preferred foods rather than changes in the types of foods they were consuming. For example, one explained: *"I think it just go up! Cause over there [Nepal] it's too difficult to buy, it's too expensive, too difficult to eat. But over here, it's cheap. I can eat whatever. Whatever we want we can eat over here. We eat more food over here!"* Binge eating was a particularly common initial response to the copious amounts of foods Bhutanese refugees encountered in grocery stores when they first arrived to the U.S. As an example, Duka, a 23 year old female, describes her bemusement at the bins of apples and vegetables she saw during her first grocery store visit, which she responded to by eating "six or seven."

Like when we come here, I go after like 2 days I go to [the local grocery store], and I so surprised to see the things you know. First I go to the apple, and when I see too much apple I go "Oh my gosh." And at that time I eat too much. Like that day I ate like 6 or 7 apple. Yeah, now I'm like, "oh my gosh I don't eat apple." But I was so surprised, I was like oh my gosh, I found tomato over here, and oh my gosh I find cauliflower over here. I am so surprised at that time you know, that I could get so much stuff here. And my brother in law, he helped buy that day. He buy lots of food that day from my country, for only \$48! I never forget that day.

Again, we see how cost differences between the U.S. and Nepal plays a role in shaping community members' perceptions of abundance. Duka was new to the U.S., so she didn't have a job, but she was on financial aid the time. Her brother-in-law did have a job and was able to buy as much food as Duka wanted, at what she thought was a low price. Increases in disposable income, whether through financial aid and/or employment are clearly influences on access to food and perceptions of food abundance. Also illustrated in Duka's reaction is a specific food choice which stemmed from the lack of access to fruits she had in Nepal. Fruits and vegetables in partic-

ular saw a heavy increase in consumption by community members during the initial stages of resettlement. However, given greater access to foods in general, increases in the daily consumption of rice, lentils, and meats were described, which some participants linked to unhealthy patterns of weight gain and diabetes in their community.<sup>45</sup> Below, Romisha, a 35 year old female participant makes this point with regards to increases in meat consumption by linking it to the trends in diabetes she has heard about in her community.

We have overeating here. People will take like the juice, or take the meats, because they don't have the meat there, in Nepal. And because of that, people, because of overfood, they suffer from diabetes.

While Romisha, thought overconsumption might be contributing to health problems in her community, among 43% of participants prior experiences with food deprivation seemed to contribute to perceptions that eating more food was better for the body. In Nepal, this type of health knowledge was adaptive given the health impacts of food scarcity, but in the U.S. where food is abundant, these types of perceptions contributed to the unhealthy patterns of overconsumption described above. Only recently has this type of health knowledge been challenged as more community members are diagnosed with diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol. For the most part, health information about overconsumption and lack of exercise is being acquired *retrospectively* as community members encounter health complications and seek medical attention, several years after U.S. resettlement. As the participant below points out, the concept of differentiating between foods based on nutritional quality was new to the Bhutanese community when they arrived to the U.S. partly because the problem of overeating was irrelevant.

We never really thought about it [nutritional health] in Nepal. In the refugee camp there weren't many options, it was just rice, rice, and more rice. We had so little food that whenever we go the opportunity to eat, we ate. And didn't think about whether it was healthy or not. (Ganga, age 60 male)

Aside from learning about the problems of overconsumption on a trial and error basis, health incentive programs at work have become another important source of dietary health information for some community members. Hospitals in Prospect City are an important employer of refugees and immigrants, and many offer paycheck incentives to employees who participate in monthly health activities. This has contributed to free health check-ups, nutritional counseling, body composition monitoring, and blood-sugar tests. At the conclusion of one anthropometric visit, for instance, an excited participant who worked at a local health care facility pulled out his most recent health incentive record to compare against the body composition reading I provided and to ask questions about some of the words on the document. Community members with this type of access are learning valuable information that they then share with their families and friends. Mixing parboiled brown rice with white rice to reduce the glycemic index of the typical meal was one strategy that I encountered with several participants who had learned it through a friend who worked at a local hospital. This strategy has been only mildly effective, however, because it changes the preferred flavor and texture of foods, and, thus, makes them less palatable.

### *Joint family as a food strategy*

When we eat together we will just talk about our food and we will just teach the same thing to our kids, like this is what we used to eat, and it is important, you know, and it will be like sharing you know, everything is sharing...idea sharing, food sharing, everything is sharing. That is really important, and that

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<sup>45</sup> Regarding portion sizes: During observations I shared many meals with participants and their families. It was common to see people eating large portions of rice and dal, to which smaller portions of curry and pickle were added for "taste." Second and third helpings were also normal, hinting to a pattern of overconsumption in the community which corroborates participants' descriptions of eating more food in general.

makes us like, you know, kind of close to each other. Like if you don't eat together, if you don't eat at the same table, our relations seem a little far apart. (Ram, male, age 35)

My family is very lucky that we have a nice schedule for everybody. That every night we get to get together by 8 o'clock and we have our dinner at that time. So every day we eat together. And I would like to keep doing this for longer period so that there aren't any big issues in brothers and sisters. So we would like to be in same family. Living together as a big family is helpful in so many ways, like for the rent, for the utilities, and taking care of the kids...and the other part is happiness, being together. (Chandra age 29 male)

Family is an important source of cultural identity and a high functioning post-resettlement strategy that facilitates integration in all five domains (access to resources, social connections, financial stability, cultural citizenship/belonging, and health and wellbeing). The joint family, above all, offered participants stability, which was achieved through the sharing of labor, resources, expenses, and cultural knowledge. Food sits at the nexus of these functions as a medium through which relationships are nurtured, identities are negotiated, and economic constraints are navigated. Not surprisingly, 72% of participants identified ways that living in a joint family influenced their access to dietary resources and ability to maintain cultural food practices. Below I examine how the acquisition, production, consumption, and sharing of preferred cultural foods within joint families is balanced against constraints coming from the resettlement environment and the families themselves and consider what this means for food consumption patterns.

As I have mentioned in previous sections, participants felt that their cultural foods were abundant in Prospect City, and many of the staple foods (particularly rice and lentils) were available in bulk at low costs in several local wholesale stores. Interestingly, this did little to diminish participants' interest in reducing food costs. Instead, cultural foods were quickly incorporated into broader joint family strategies as an easy method to diminish net financial burdens (i.e. low-wages, rent, utilities, and etc.) while maintaining highly privileged cultural practices. The combined advantage of using food as a low cost method for meeting financial and cultural objectives is illustrated in the comments below made by two participants. In the first, the cultural foods themselves are recognized for being inexpensive, which when coupled with the act of sharing, provides a financial advantage over buying readymade foods. In the second, sharing is explicitly discussed as a cultural practice with cost saving capacities, but in the U.S. it also operates as a strategy for avoiding foods and contexts that contradict the participants' vegetarian caste restrictions.

We spend about \$200 for food and vegetables for seven people for an entire week. Big bag of rice and big bag of lentils, a variety of lentils and vegetables, fruits. We get spices too and just cook... and if you just round it all up, you end up just spending \$15. But if you go to a convenience store or Burger King for a meal or you have to spend at least \$11. Like, somewhere between \$7 and \$11... If you get like a hamburger fries and a combo it would be several dollars or something, and a medium drink... [Bishnu laughs]. That's \$10 or \$11 for a single person! But for us, it is just, for a full meal for seven people. We spend \$20 at most (Bishnu age 25 male)

Why I do not go and eat out is that we have a culture of making and preparing at home, and also it saves money. Buying bulk and preparing a little at home will save money, and what we have learned is that is helpful. Make our food and cook at home with family is what we learned growing up...you know? But that doesn't mean that we should never eat outside. But I don't like it. Mostly for me, most of the foods are mixed with meat, and I don't like it. And If I like to eat some food, I need to go and find pure, non-meat food. (Pita, age 35 male, Brahmin)

Sixty seven percent of participants were also involved in community gardens which fit within joint family strategies to lower food costs and access culturally preferred vegetables on a

more regular basis. Dal, a 27 year old male participant makes these benefits clear as he emphasizes the financial, cultural, and personal gains he and his wife enjoy from the activity.

Last year we had a garden in the [Highland] community garden, and it was so good! A lot of vegetables! So good. And this year I have too. And I have planted a lot of vegetables. We plant the vegetables like onion and garlic... we like the spinach, and mustard, the collard greens, the cucumber so good, and tomatoes and okra... they call lettuce finger in Nepal...I think [Gardening] gives a kind of joy, that we become happy, and that it supplies a lot of vegetables. Like last year for three, four months, I didn't bring any tomatoes from the market! A lot of bush bean, pole bean, cucumber, tomatoes.... It brings a lot of joy. Because we had been doing these things from our father's fathers, you know. Ha ha. And we save a lot of money. A lot of money.

Community garden plots were highly competitive, however, and people with whom I spoke were always uncertain if they would receive one. Home gardens became an important strategy to circumvent this unpredictability. Families shared seeds between each other and grew vegetables in container pots and small patches of soil surrounding apartment buildings and nearby parking lots. Meanwhile larger joint households that owned houses converted their lawns into vegetable gardens full of mustard greens, cucumber, marigolds (for religious uses), among many other vegetables. It was also common to see plants being cultivated that are considered "weeds" in the U.S., including purslane, lambs quarter, and pokeweed.<sup>46</sup> These types of plants are not permitted in community gardens, which is a source of ongoing conflict between garden managers and refugees. In this way, household gardens served important cultural, financial, and personal functions, allowing Bhutanese refugees more flexibility to grow what they wanted while supplementing their household food supply with inexpensive food sources.

Aside from the financial incentives associated with producing and/or buying large amounts of food for low cost, having access to large quantities of food was necessary to accommodate the larger household sizes and all of the members conflicting work schedules. During one interview I was conducting in a larger household, the father of the participant came barreling through the garage door with an entourage of family members each carrying 50lb bags of rice. Seeing the surprise on my face over the quantity, the participant explained: *"One bag last for a week, and probably 4 bags last for a month, or month and a half. So probably one 50lbs bag a week for our family size, so it depend on family size too."* The same household had a large backyard that had been converted to a highly productive garden. What became clear through my observations and participant descriptions was that, in joint households, food was being produced, purchased, and prepared on an ongoing basis, and access was generally unrestrained. To illustrate this point, below, Chandra, age 29, explains how these food conditions impacted consumption in his family while also referencing their prior experiences with food deprivation in Nepal.

Food supplies are higher now, because we have family and we share. Haha, our belies are getting bigger, and sticking out now! And our daily diets are increasing too now, they are, like, back in our country we were used to eat less, and our stomachs were small. But here we have got sufficient food and our now our stomachs are bigger. Haha

Where joint families succeeded in maintaining the traditional diet was in their capacity to utilize the availability of foods in the local food environment and shift the food production and preparation tasks onto available labor in the household to accommodate the other financial and time constraints of American life. What emerged from these strategies are two contrasting food environments that Bhutanese refugees interact with throughout the day. Within the home are traditional foods and outside of the home are novel foods. In many cases, joint families aimed to

<sup>46</sup> Pokeweed is not native to Western State and is poisonous without careful preparation. Surprised to see this plant growing in a container behind a participant's apartment, I asked where it came from. I was told that a family member from Virginia saw it growing in their yard, recognized it from Nepal, and sent the seeds by mail to all their relatives.

limit consumption of novel foods, both for cultural and cost saving purposes. While these agendas were not always successful, it was made clear in the way that participants described their family's food production strategies. Tara, a 41 year old father living with his wife, brother, sister in law, parents, and three children articulates very clearly how his family has distributed labor specifically to maintain greater access to cultural foods around other life pressures (i.e. education, work, family care).

**Interviewer:** Are convenience foods ever appealing to you with your busy work schedule?

**Tara:** No. We don't work more than 8 hours a day, and we will not send everyone to work at the same time so that we always have someone home to take care of the kids, prepare our cultural food, and tend to the home, and to ensure that meals will be prepared in the morning, noon, and in the evening. So, even when we have complicated work schedules we just manage to have at least one person home. For husband and wife with children, we just look for certain jobs that if one is working, the other can be home. If one works in the morning, the other works in the evening. So we are always at home. We prepare food and feed all the kids and let them go to school, and then they come back and get the chance to eat again. And then there is someone again. We just manage that. It is a cultural practice. That is very common in our culture.

Nevertheless, 33% of participants mentioned how time constraints from busy work and school schedules interfered with their ability to maintain cultural food practices and preferences. In viewing these cases, we see how variations in the joint family structure can differentially impact food access and food strategies at the individual level. Below, Ram, a 35 year old male participant discusses how work-related time constraints stemming from his two jobs sometimes forced him to eat convenience foods and interfered with his ability to eat with his family.

Sometimes we have some compromises for the food we eat because of the job. We didn't get time to go and get the food that we want, so it becomes a compulsion to buy food there and eat it. Like when I used to work at the airport and then part-time at [the resettlement agency], that time, I work all night at the airport and then all day over there at [the resettlement agency], and I didn't even get time to sleep, so I didn't care about the food. So when I would go to [the agency] from the airport, I would go to Burger King, or sometimes McDonalds, and go there and just get one or two things, like French fries or something. And they were also the new food for us.

He then went on to explain how time constraints limited his ability to eat with his family.

Usually when we were in the country, we, especially the dinner time. We were together, and would eat dinner together the food and things like this. But here, I have the one schedule and my wife has her schedules and we don't get the time to sit together and eat you know. Only sometimes we get to be together. Otherwise I eat alone, my wife eat alone, my kids eat alone. That is due to the schedule.

Ram's and Tara's different food experiences illustrate how variation in household composition and size can shape broader joint family strategies that, in turn, begin to moderate individual interactions with the new food environments. When I interviewed Ram, he was living in a smaller household with his wife and children. His parents and extended joint family also lived in Prospect City, but had moved to a larger house just outside of town to accommodate more people. While Ram contributed financially to this broader family structure, the distance between households isolated him from some of the time-saving benefits of sharing labor. Bhutanese refugees with whom I spoke often felt obligated to provide for their families (see "advancement", Chapter Four). In the U.S., many older Bhutanese refugees are physically capable of working but are unemployed as a result of poor English proficiencies. In the absence of their financial contributions, family members who do have jobs feel pressure to increase their financial productivity, leading many to take second jobs. In households with more employable members, like Tara's, it was easi-

er to share domestic *and* economic tasks which reduced individual workloads and helped ameliorate external pressures on the traditional diet. Meanwhile, Ram had the financial burdens of a joint family without the supplemental labor to help him accommodate the associated time constraints, and we see how this led him to adopt unhealthy convenience foods.

The distribution of domestic/wage labor by gender is another important dimension of the joint family that shaped the traditional vs. novel food environments to which Bhutanese refugees in Prospect City were exposed. Participants indicated that gender roles were changing in their community and more women were entering the workforce to alleviate financial strains (see Chapter Four). Nevertheless, Table 5-3 demonstrates the number of employed Bhutanese men still greatly outnumbered women. According to participants, language and age were important factors shaping employment for both men and women, but men had a strong cultural motivation to “be productive” and overcome employment challenges (see Table 4-1). Among younger English speaking women, employment status appeared to be shaped by cultural expectations surrounding motherhood, which is made evident in the trend among younger women who recently married to halt or postpone their careers to stay at home and focus on starting families.

My husband is working and work for the money and I am not working so I can stay home and be with the baby. But when I was working, we used to, like, for making lunch or dinner, whoever is free would cook. So he used to help in that way. (Leela, age 27 female)

My husband cooks but not that much equal. We mostly cook the women, and the guys work outside and we also work outside but my husband this time is very busy full time work and full time college. He is doing general studies right now. He is almost done...and I used to work, but it is really hard now with three kids. (Lal, age 30 female)

Once in the home, formerly employed women quickly returned to traditional roles of caring for family members' needs and preparing foods that would facilitate the wider integration agendas of the household. Women's traditional roles were referenced by men and women whom I interviewed. As one example, a young husband explained: “*My wife and my mom and my sister in law they prepare [food for the household] by themselves. We never buy food from the grocery store readymade...we always prepare at the home.*” As a result of the cultural patterns shaping employment in joint families, women and men were exposed to distinct food environments. In general, women occupied traditional spaces where there is an overabundance of cultural foods that could contribute to overconsumption. Men, more often, were negotiating both novel and traditional food environments (due to their employment opportunities). The work related time constraints they encountered became an important pathway by which Bhutanese refugees who worked outside the home began to adopt convenience foods. Very often these foods were french fries, chicken sandwiches, and pizza which were readily available across Prospect City.

There were signs that the food agendas of the joint family were not representative of all the household members, however. While many participants viewed the joint family as an anchor point for maintaining their cultural food practices, 33% of participants described intergenerational conflicts in their families over the maintenance of caste-related food restrictions. Parents whom I interviewed were sometimes discouraged by the fact that children no longer liked the cultural foods they prepared. One parent illustrated how school was an important influence on these changes as he commented: “*My kids don't actually like our food now you know? Haha, they like their school food. And they want the same kind of food at home. They don't like the rice and things*” Children's changing food preferences interfered with sharing foods as a joint family, as they refused to eat what had been cooked and begged for other options. To accommodate these new demands and maintain the ability to eat as a family, big or small, some parents became more flexible in allowing their children to eat what they wanted, regardless of dietary restrictions. While rare, in some cases this included the consumption of beef, as is seen below.



They want burger, and pizza, fries, something like, you know, junk food...They don't like the curry, the vegetables, the rice. You know? Maybe it's just the taste. So whatever they want, I just give them. They like the pepperoni pizza, but there is beef in the pepperoni. But I don't give them that restriction. They will say, I want pepperoni, and I say ok, if you want pepperoni then you can have it. (Ram age 35 male)

Gradually some parents are also allowing the new food preferences of their children to change their own dietary patterns. While cheese was not a common food in Nepal, it is a dairy product and conforms to Hindu dietary restrictions. Consequently, cheese pizza is one of the most common novel food additions to the family diet brought in by younger members. A recent high school graduate illustrates this as he describes how his mother has adopted some of the American foods that he and his siblings have grown to love:

I like McDonalds and pizza! But my parents don't. My brothers and I tried bringing it home for them to eat it but they were like "oh that's so disgusting." Now my mom wants to eat it more, like pizza, but still doesn't like the McDonalds. (Amir, age 18 male)

More frequently, however, the new food preferences brought into the home from work and school posed too great a contradiction to older family members' dietary beliefs, and became a source of conflict. Out of fear and respect, this compelled several participants to consume caste restricted foods away from the home. No participant whom I interviewed admitted to secretly eating beef, but eating chicken sandwiches at fast food establishments became a common strategy for concealing the consumption of other meats from Kshatriya and Brahmin parents with more rigid viewpoints on caste:

In our culture we are not supposed to eat any kind of meat, except goat. Goat is ok for some people. But my parents don't eat meat. And we bring home and they bothered, because when we bring some chicken home and prepared in the kitchen they got really mad. And it was gonna be a big problem so I prepare all outside. And now I will just go out to McDonalds and eat a spicy chicken over there and come back. (Indra, male, age 20)

[According to Hindu caste restrictions] we classify, the chicken is the lower animal. The goat is in the higher group but the chicken is in the lower group. So it is not ok to eat chicken for some people, including my family. Beef is provided we are not supposed to eat, it is sacred. But the pig, some people, not the Hindu, but Mongolian...they eat pig. Even I do. But my parents, they don't allow me to eat because of our caste... but I do sometimes without telling them! (Chhali age 22 female)

Most caste related dietary infractions involved consumption of chicken and mutton among higher caste youth. It was far more unusual to hear someone say that they ate pork, as in Chhali's case above. However, not all meats were equally accessible to higher caste members who wish to consume them. Mutton was a specialty food sold only in a few locations and required lengthy preparation. This made consumption of mutton inconvenient and difficult to conceal. Most often those who violated caste related dietary restrictions opted for more convenient meats sold at fast food establishments that could be eaten quickly and discretely. Of these foods, the deep fried spicy chicken sandwich was identified most often. What this suggests is that more often traditional Bhutanese foods are being replaced by other unhealthy foods. For the time being, however, traditional foods appear to be primary food sources.

## Discussion

Resettlement can lead refugees to unhealthy changes in diet and physical activity that result in an energy imbalance and contribute to high rates of overweight, obesity, and related metabolic diseases. As a recent refugee population in the United States, Bhutanese refugees have re-

ceived little research attention in this regard. But they have unique cultural beliefs, dietary practices, and recent histories which may articulate with the American dietary environment differently from other refugees, which, in turn, may result in unique nutritional outcomes. In this chapter, I combined adaptability and political economic theories to understand nutritional health among Bhutanese refugees living in Prospect City, as they use these backgrounds to navigate varying structural and sociocultural conditions in the post-resettlement context. In the paragraphs that follow, I attempt to explain the high rates of overweight and obesity I observed for the sample as a whole in light of salient sociocultural and structural conditions that appear to be shaping dietary patterns, food related strategies and physical activity patterns in the community. And I conclude by exploring sociodemographic differences in dietary patterns and nutritional status as signs of variable adaptability within the community

**Nutritional Status and Diabetes in the Community:** Overall, this study reports unhealthy nutrition status patterns for the current sample of Bhutanese refugees from Prospect City but average rates of diabetes. Analysis of nutrition status based on %BF revealed that overweight and obesity in the sample exceeded rates in the general U.S. population (Ogden et al. 2014) as well as other refugee populations (Njeru et al. 2015; Fu et al. 2012; Asgary et al. 2011; Kumar et al. 2014). As I will discuss later, these findings correspond with ethnographic evidence pointing to unhealthy diet and exercise patterns in the community. The average rates of diabetes were unexpected, however, given rates of diabetes found among other U.S. refugee populations, including Bhutanese refugees elsewhere (Njeru et al. 2015; Taylor et al. 2014; Kumar et al. 2014). As I reported in my findings, however, I may have underestimated the prevalence of diabetes in the community. Eight community members who were present during anthropometric visits declined to participate in the study because they had been recently diagnosed with diabetes and were aware of their weight status. Had they been included in the estimate, the prevalence of diabetes would have exceeded averages for the U.S. (CDC 2015) and other refugee populations. Given the potential implications of these discrepancies for interpreting long term health trajectories among Bhutanese refugees, more research is needed to confirm/disconfirm the lower rates of diabetes I report for this community.

Without longitudinal data to provide a baseline measure of nutritional status or diabetes for the current sample, it is difficult to claim with certainty that these health trends are products of conditions encountered after U.S. resettlement. As a loose reference point, a report by the CDC (2014) showed that diabetes and obesity among U.S.-bound Bhutanese refugees in 2008 through 2011 were very low compared to U.S. averages. The difference between these estimates and the current sample were approaching significance ( $p \geq 0.060$ ), which, suggests that unhealthy increases in nutritional status and diabetes may have occurred since resettlement. Before exploring this hypothesis further, it is important to note that CDC (2014) evidence for diabetes was based on self-reports of diagnoses coming from refugees who had not yet received post-resettlement health screenings. Prior to U.S. arrival, participants in the current study had little access to healthcare and very limited knowledge of the disease or its symptoms. This might explain why self-reports of diabetes among U.S.-bound Bhutanese refugees from the CDC (2014) study were so low. Moreover, obesity was measured using WHO BMI cutoffs which have been widely critiqued for *underestimating* overweight and obesity among Asian populations (Deurenberg-Yap et al. 2003; Deurenberg et al. 2002; Wen et al. 2009; Pan et al. 2004; WHO 2009).

When comparing %BF and BMI, I found a similar discordance in nutritional status classifications in the current sample. Interestingly, when proportions of the current sample classified as overweight/obese according to BMI was compared against other refugee populations in the U.S. (Njeru et al. 2015; Fu et al. 2012; Kumar et al. 2014; Asgary et al. 2011; Taylor et al. 2014), significant differences were only found between the current sample and non-Asian populations. In contrast, when %BF classification for the current sample were compared against the same sample proportions, the differences were most significant between the current sample and other Asian

refugees. While certainly not definitive, this comparison suggests that BMI may under classify overweight/obesity among Bhutanese refugees as it does among other Asian populations (Deurenberg-Yap et al. 2003; Deurenberg et al. 2002; Wen et al. 2009; Pan et al. 2004; WHO 2009). This finding is particularly troubling given that BMI is the standard for assessing body composition for incoming refugees to the U.S. (CDC 2013) and among health care professionals, which may further diminish the attention given to nutritional health problems among Asian refugee populations. As a more direct measure of body fatness, %BF may be a better tool for assessing body composition, especially in populations where BMI is known to underestimate body fatness. For the duration of this discussion, I use %BF to discuss overweight/obesity in the Bhutanese community.

**Contextualizing Post-resettlement Nutritional Status:** The lack of longitudinal data to demonstrate that post-resettlement nutritional status changes have occurred in the Bhutanese community is a study limitation. Even so, my ethnographic evidence suggests that the high rates of overweight and obesity found in the current sample are at least partly due to conditions Bhutanese refugees encountered after U.S. resettlement. Foremost, participants described two potentially unhealthy changes to their diets that have clear implications for imbalance of energy which can promote overweight and obesity: overconsumption of familiar Bhutanese foods, and addition of energy-dense novel foods to their diets for experimentation or to accommodate post-resettlement pressures. At the same time, physical activity appears to have decreased after resettlement. Exercise was viewed by participants as a byproduct of their occupation rather than an activity in and of itself. Very few participants were familiar with the health benefits associated with regular exercise. Community members reported becoming more sedentary in the U.S. because their jobs are less physically demanding. Also, better transportation in the U.S. reduced their need to walk or bike, as they did in Nepal. Consequently, participants reported that they had gained weight as a result of resettlement and were also surprised upon their arrival to observe weight gain among relatives who had arrived prior. In the next paragraphs, I explore the major sociocultural and structural influences which could explain these changes to diet and exercise.

**Dietary Quality:** According to the traffic light diet (Epstein 2001), there was very little difference in nutritional quality between most traditional Bhutanese foods and the fast foods participants in the current study were consuming. This finding contrasts with prior studies that show, refugees and immigrants in the U.S. and other developed countries may experience unhealthy weight gain as they replace *healthier* traditional diets with more energy-dense readymade foods that are lower cost and more convenient (Renzaho 2006; Renzaho et al. 2008; Rondinelli et al. 2011; Colby et al. 2009; Burns 2004; Sukalakamala et al. 2006). In contrast, some studies have also reported that while many refugees and immigrants undergo dietary changes after resettlement, they do not always correspond with changes in nutritional quality (Lee et al. 1999). Clearly, there is variation with regards to the nutritional quality of preferred foods among immigrants and refugees prior to their arrival to the U.S. Those with healthier diets prior to arrival may undergo a transition towards less healthy foods after resettlement (Rondinelli et al. 2011). Meanwhile, those with unhealthy, energy-dense diets only replace one unhealthy food for another. In the latter case, changes in the quantity of consumption may be the most significant influence on nutritional status. In terms of the changes in dietary content documented in the current Bhutanese sample, traditional foods appeared to be as energy dense as many of the “American” foods participants incorporated into their diets.

White rice and fried potato, which are yellow and red light foods, were the foundation of most traditional Bhutanese meals that participants described. And with the exception of fruits,

most of these foods were stir fried in oil or butter.<sup>47</sup> This cooking method was also used for vegetables, which greatly increased their energy density. Meanwhile, as would be predicted based on prior research, most novel foods that appeared on the food inventory were unhealthy convenience foods like pizza, fried chicken, french fries (e.g. Renzaho et al. 2006; Colby et al. 2009; Himmelgreen et al. 2007; Rondinelli et al. 2011; Franzen et al. 2009; Patil et al. 2009), and were classified as red and yellow according to the traffic light diet. Of these, pizza was the most common. Patil et al (2009; 2010) reported similar findings among Liberian, Somali, and Bhutanese refugees, showing that pizza is often incorporated into post-resettlement diets more readily than other novel foods. In the current study, cheese pizza was particularly well suited to the strictest of caste related dietary restrictions and quickly became a preferred novelty food among the community members who were willing to experiment with non-Bhutanese foods. French fries were also quickly adopted, as these foods also aligned well with the traditional Bhutanese diet.

*Sociocultural and structural influences on energy balance:* The ability of Bhutanese refugees to maintain former dietary preferences to the point of overconsumption is interesting in light of prior research that has shown that refugees often encounter difficulties accessing preferred foods due to poor transportation and/or the high cost and limited availability of these foods in the U.S. (Hadley et al. 2006; Franzen et al. 2009b; Smith et al. 2012; Patil et al. 2009; Colby et al. 2009). As a consequence, refugees find themselves making compromises in their food choices, selecting foods that are less preferred but more available. Interestingly, the availability of cultural foods was not reported as a significant problem by participants in the current study. Rather, my ethnographic findings suggest that availability of cultural foods was heavily mediated by timing of U.S. arrival, with the greatest challenges experienced by the earliest arrivals. Poor access to transportation and limited knowledge of the city layout interfered with the ability to find cultural foods, but over time, they were able to acquire personal vehicles and become familiar with public transportation and store locations. Gradually resources and knowledge were pooled among families in the community, and later arrivals experienced far greater access to cultural foods as a result of these efforts. After living in Prospect City for several years, most participants felt that cultural foods were both more abundant and accessible than they had been in Nepal.

The perception that food was more abundant in the U.S. was also influenced by structural differences between the food systems in the U.S. and the Nepali refugee camps which mediated food access. Participants frequently referenced experiences with food deprivation in Nepal, and noted that a lack of refrigerated storage had made fresh food more expensive and difficult to acquire.<sup>48</sup> After arriving in the U.S., they were amazed that they could buy fresh fruits and vegetables all year at any of the local stores. They also felt that these foods were far more affordable in the U.S., which many associated with general increases in consumption of specialty traditional foods. This finding is inconsistent with prior studies which show that cultural foods are often less abundant and more expensive for refugees and immigrants after resettlement, leading them to adjust their food preferences towards mainstream diets (e.g. Renzaho 2006; Satia et al. 2000; Patil et al. 2009). Patil et al. (2010) have suggested that refugee groups may vary in their opinions on the affordability of foods after resettlement. Inevitably, some refugees' food preferences align more closely to the U.S. dietary environment than others, making cost less of an issue. This appears to be the case for Bhutanese refugees in the current sample whose staple foods (i.e. rice, potatoes, lentils, and vegetables) are available at normal prices in many U.S. stores. Meanwhile,

<sup>47</sup> As a milk product, clarified butter's association to the cow also gave it an added religious significance in the traditional diet. Some participants indicated that vegetarians tended to consume more butter than non-vegetarians to compensate for lack of meat in the diet. If this is accurate, there may be differences in the consumption of these products in the community.

<sup>48</sup> This may explain the diverse types of fermented foods that appeared on the food inventory, as these foods have far longer shelf-lives at room temperature than other foods. With lack of storage these foods and their dietary utility became a critical component of Bhutanese cuisine. One participant held up a bottle of fermented limes in his kitchen that had been sitting in his cabinet for 2 years, calling it "Nepali Gatorade." The combination of citrus and brine helped them remain hydrated on hot days in Nepal. They would then use the limes year round for cooking, even when they were out of season.

after resettling in the U.S., many Bhutanese refugees transitioned from being unemployed to employed causing substantial increases in disposable income which may have further bolstered their perceptions that foods were more affordable.

Food costs were still an important influence on Bhutanese refugees' food shopping and acquisition strategies. Community members frequented multiple stores throughout the week, used coupons, grew foods in community gardens, and sometimes traveled far to access the lowest-cost specialty foods, particularly mutton. These types of shopping behaviors are consistent with prior studies (e.g. Hadley et al. 2006; Kiptinness et al. 2011; Patil et al. 2009; Patil et al. 2010). For the current sample, these strategies were made possible by wider community efforts to share information on store locations and to identify which stores had the best prices. It is also noteworthy that most staple foods in the traditional diet (i.e. rice, lentils, and potatoes) were available in bulk at larger wholesale stores in Prospect City. Once identified, these stores were quickly incorporated into family shopping routines. Combined with the strategy of sharing household expenses, overall food costs were described as being very low and access to food high, which some participants linked to patterns of overconsumption, and weight gain in their families. Binge eating was also reported by participants as a common response to having sudden access to foods that had been unaffordable in Nepal after arriving in the U.S. These consumption patterns have tapered down over time, but participants suggested that food consumption remains high overall when compared retrospectively to what they ate in Nepal.

The tendency among Bhutanese refugees in Prospect City to live in joint families also seemed to reinforce traditional food preferences. Within joint families the beliefs and practices of elders, particularly male elders, hold a privileged status and tend to set the standards by which all social and cultural matters are negotiated within the household (Chadda 2013; Chekki 1996; Mulatti 1995; Mandelbaum 1948). In the current sample, these functions and power structures culminated in the prioritization of elders' more traditional food preferences which oriented household diets and provided accountability for maintaining caste related food restrictions. There was certainly conflict in this regard, particularly as children brought new food ideas into the home. However, as an example of the power elders wielded with regards to household food preferences, many of the high caste participants who began to eat meat despite their restrictions felt the need to conceal these behaviors. Interestingly, their efforts to escape the surveillance of older family members caused them to consume fast foods (usually the chicken sandwich) which were more convenient than preparing meats like mutton that were more preferred in Nepali culture. It is also worth noting that household elders were more likely to be unemployed. As a result, they were often the ones who remained home to prepare foods for the family which only further reinforced their control of what foods were available in the household.

As has been noted as a function of the joint family in India and Nepal (Chekki 1996; Raina 1989; Sethi 1989), this living arrangement in the current sample also seemed to diminish overall expenses and food costs for each household member while simultaneously making food more abundant and available. All participants who spoke about living in joint families identified these types of advantages. But several participants also linked these same benefits to patterns of overconsumption and subsequent weight gains among their family members after resettlement. Traditional foods were purchased in bulk to lower overall costs, as I have already mentioned. Then they were prepared in large quantities each day to accommodate increasingly complex work and school schedules. This strategy successfully buffered family members from the time constraints which have been shown to impinge on the refugee's abilities to prepare traditional meals (e.g. Himmelgreen et al. 2004; Patil et al. 2009; Franzen et al. 2009a; Sealy 2010). It also helped employed family members to save money by eating home cooked meals rather than purchasing more expensive readymade foods available at work and school. But the food security that was established by living in joint families also provided constant and potentially unhealthy access to foods throughout the day, particularly among unemployed household members who remained at home.

According to prior studies, the time constraints and social influences associated with work and school are major post-resettlement pressures that interfere with refugees' abilities to maintain former diets, forcing them to make other dietary choices which can impact nutritional health (Satia et al. 2000; Vincenzo et al 2000; Patil et al. 2010; Vue et al. 2011; Rondinelli et al. 2011). Time constraints compete with the preparation of traditional foods, while social interactions and food availability outside the home introduce refugees to new and often unhealthy foods (Colby et al. 2009; Himmelgreen 2004; Rondinelli et al. 2011; Sealy 2010). Over time and subsequent generations, the result is a gradual replacement of traditional foods with convenience foods that are more suited to the sociocultural and structural demands of an American lifestyle (Popkin et al. 1998; Gordon-Larson et al. 2003; Franzen et al. 2009b; Kukaswadia et al. 2014). Living in a joint family, as I explained above, seemed to buffer Bhutanese refugees from these influences. However, there was also ethnographic evidence to suggest that food choices, shopping strategies, and consumption patterns were still being reshaped by sociocultural and structural conditions encountered outside the home coming from busy work schedules, community leaders, and interactions with peers at work and school, among others. But, participants indicated that the impact these influences had on diet *varied* in the community according to caste and age related sociodemographic differences, which mediated their exposure to these conditions and how they responded to them.

***Caste position and Age related influences on energy balance (diet and exercise):*** Caste related dietary variation existed within the community prior to arrival (COR 2007) and, according to my ethnographic findings, appeared to be one of the most significant sociocultural factors moderating how well the U.S. environment aligned with preexisting food preferences as well as participants' willingness to experiment with foods. All castes have restrictions against consuming beef. But highest caste members were required to abstain from all meats. While this requirement was not always adhered to, participants perceived high caste member's lifestyles to be at greatest odds with mainstream dietary trends in America.

The BCO attempted to adjust caste related food beliefs to diminish social disparities and to assist people of all castes in the process of resettlement. For example, the BCO and others advocated abandoning caste related dietary restrictions altogether. Nonetheless, many maintained these beliefs and practices, leaving higher caste members little option but to avoid unlabeled foods as well as food venues and social contexts where meat or beef was present. Although some higher caste participants have begun to selectively consume novel foods that fit within their dietary restrictions, the avoidant strategy aimed at maintaining these restrictions seemed to limit experimentation with novel foods compared to lower castes. Meanwhile other high caste members concealed meat consumption from their families, which introduced new foods into their diets, but at a more limited rate than was possible for individuals from lower castes with fewer restrictions.

Overlaying caste was age, which seemed to further moderate opportunities for physical activity and the speed with which novel foods were incorporated into participants' dietary routines. This was because age predicted educational and employment opportunities in the community, thereby shaping physical activity and exposure to novel foods. According to my ethnographic findings younger participants were more willing to try novel foods (e.g. fast food and pizza), including foods that contradicted caste related dietary restrictions. Upon arrival to the U.S., Bhutanese children were immediately exposed to non-Bhutanese foods through school friends and highly structured school curriculum and schedules which promoted physical activity. They also had the least amount of prior exposure to Bhutanese traditions in their community, potentially making them more susceptible to post-resettlement influences.

Similar conditions were reshaping diets and exercise patterns among middle age community members who, aside from managing their own schedules and social influences, were also managing the new influences coming from their children's activities outside the home. Meanwhile, the oldest participants were often unemployed and thus isolated from external dietary in-

fluences. They were also more sedentary than young children or employed adults. Often older individuals were unable to read, which prevented them from being able to understand food labels to identify which foods had meat which contradicted their caste related dietary restrictions. This may explain why we see the strongest emphasis on traditional, caste related diets among older community members and greatest experimentation among younger members.

***Variations in diet, exercise, and nutritional status and signs of mixed adaptability:***

While rates of overweight and obesity were high across the community, there was important sociodemographic variation in nutritional status which corresponds with the ethnographic findings I summarized above. For instance, overweight/obesity increased with age among women in the current sample. While this is surprising in light of prior studies where being *younger* has been associated with higher rates of overweight/obesity among refugees (Roshania et al. 2008), ethnographically, this finding makes sense. Because “exercise” was tied to occupation, unemployed community members were the most sedentary. Given this finding, it is not surprising that women who were older were more overweight or obese, as these women were typically uneducated and unemployed and remained at home to care for children and prepare food for the household.

Traditional Bhutanese gender roles and an inability to speak English appeared to only further limit employment options for uneducated/older women and reinforced their domestic role in the home. But for women who were educated in Nepal and could speak English, remaining home was deliberately chosen over pursuing a career in the effort to start a family. Meanwhile, the proportions of overweight/obesity were significantly lower among women who were employed or who were receiving an education in the U.S. This may be the product of higher levels of physical activity and fewer opportunities to eat during the day compared to women who remained at home, especially in cases where food options away from home were limited by a preference for traditional foods or caste related dietary restrictions. It is also possible that women who received education in the U.S. are more cognizant of nutritional health issues. Thus, the differences between women in nutritional status outcomes may be due to interactions between age, education, and employment status along with food access, physical activity, and life course stage.

The nutritional status differences between males based on educational backgrounds are also interesting in light of my ethnographic findings. Uneducated men were more likely to be unemployed and remain home during the day. Their exposure to physical activity was lower compared to educated and employed men because exercise was often linked with occupation in the community. This may explain why a greater proportion of uneducated men were overweight, compared with educated men.

The higher proportion of obesity among males who were educated in Nepal is more difficult to explain, however. Educated men typically found employment soon after arriving in the U.S., and, with their greater energy expenditure, would be expected to have lower rates of obesity than uneducated men. Instead we find the highest proportion of obesity among men educated in Nepal. One potential explanation for this finding is that their employment status and income generating roles in their families afforded them greater dietary status in their households which contributed to greater likelihood of food overconsumption. Meanwhile, away from home, they were also consuming more energy dense convenience foods as a result of time constraints. In reviewing the ethnographic data from Chapter Four, it appears that being “productive” and “providing” for one’s family was a culturally valued male role. While the current study was not designed to assess potential links between the cultural expectation for productivity among males and its link with diet this may be an interesting area for future studies to explore.

An unexpected finding in the current study was that overweight /obesity was highest among *vegetarian* and high caste men. Prior studies have linked unhealthy weight gain among refugees to increases in meat consumption after resettlement (Peterman et al. 2010). Common sources of meats for refugees come from fast food establishments which are convenient and less costly, but also energy dense (Colby et al. 2009; Himmelgreen et al. 2007; Renzaho et al. 2006).

To further explore these unexpected findings in the current sample, post-hoc analyses were conducted to examine whether males who maintained their vegetarian status were also more likely to be older and unemployed, and therefore more sedentary. These analyses revealed that neither employment nor age were significantly associated with differences in overweight/obesity between vegetarian and non-vegetarian males.

Alternatively, it is possible that vegetarian males had more obesogenic diets than non-vegetarians. This would be surprising given that vegetarians were less likely to consume food away from home for fear of meat contamination, limiting their intake of fast foods. However, according to the food inventory, vegetarian Bhutanese foods were cooked in ways that made them energy dense, and in many cases matched the red and yellow traffic light ratings of non-Bhutanese, convenience foods. Moreover, some participants suggested that vegetarians in their community consume greater amounts of high-fat dairy products and oils than non-vegetarians, suggesting that non-vegetarian dietary practices may be less obesogenic. Clearly, more ethnographic research is necessary to confirm these types of dietary patterns and determine if they are contributing to overweight/obesity among vegetarian males.

Nutritional status variation speaks to differences in adaptability within the community, resulting from shifts in diet and exercise that occur as individuals differentially articulate with and negotiate post-resettlement conditions. Recall how I described “successful” refugee integration as the ability to access dietary and monetary resources, develop and maintain new or old social connections, and achieve financial stability, health/wellbeing, and cultural citizenship. I derived this concept from a definition of human adaptability outlined by Crooks et al. (2007) because refugee integration is contingent upon finding a successful balance among these domains.

Food related strategies often simultaneously incorporated responses to challenges coming from one or more of the integration domains, but without also weighing the importance of health and wellbeing in these strategies, nutritional health was sometimes compromised, illustrating that adaptations (whether genetic, physiological, or behavioral) are not always “cost free” as Andrea Wiley (2004) has argued. The joint family is one example of this, which promoted dietary access and economic security, but also contributed to unhealthy patterns of overconsumption. Clearly, as components of health and wellbeing, good nutrition and physical activity are similarly positioned in delicate balance with other domains of integration. Making Bhutanese refugees aware of the potential consequences associated with their food choices and physical activity patterns through nutritional health education should be the next step in promoting positive integration outcomes in their community. In my concluding chapter, I will discuss specific recommendations based on these findings, and actions I have already taken in this regard.

## **Conclusion:**

Clearly, processes of resettlement are complex and dynamic, as are the factors shaping nutritional and physical health under these circumstances. Understanding the interactions between current resettlement conditions and refugees’ historical and cultural backgrounds becomes critical in any interpretation of how refugees and their communities negotiate unfamiliar contexts and the implications these negotiations might have for shaping health and wellbeing at the individual as well as community levels. The same goes for understanding nutritional status outcomes. Food is a biological resource necessary for maintaining human health, but it is also a culturally laden construct that acquires meaning and power through shared historical and social contexts and experiences. These meanings and contexts are often dislocated from each other as refugees find themselves distributed around the globe through processes of third country resettlement, making them irrelevant or obsolete given the new social, cultural, and economic pressures, unless specific actions (or strategies) are taken to reestablish or maintain them. Therefore, how refugees negotiate food as a biological and cultural resource in the resettlement environment is a useful optic for considering how health and wellbeing are shaped as former cultural beliefs and backgrounds ar-



ticulate with the new social, cultural and economic demands of life in the U.S. By focusing on food, this chapter has illustrated where these beliefs, experiences, and conditions intersect in shaping high rates of overweight and obesity in the Prospect City Bhutanese community.

## Chapter 6: Health in the Gaps: Integration Agendas, Nutritional Health, and Next Steps for the Prospect City Bhutanese Community

### Introduction

Compared to U.S. averages, rates of overweight and obesity were very high across the sample of Bhutanese refugees in the current study. Similar rates have recently been reported among Bhutanese refugees living in other U.S. states (Bhatta et al. 2014; Bhatta et al. 2015). These findings contrast those of studies conducted among U.S.-bound Bhutanese refugees that showed overweight and obesity were far lower than U.S. averages (CDC 2014). Taken together, these findings suggest that nutritional status has *increased* to unhealthy levels among Bhutanese refugees as a result of being in the U.S. Participants in the current study also report increases in nutritional status for themselves and their families after U.S. resettlement. Drawing on my ethnographic findings, I conclude this dissertation by raising two main points that add to a more comprehensive understanding of factors contributing to high rates of overweight and obesity in the current sample and for other U.S. refugee groups. The first point speaks to the secondary position that health is given in the integration priorities of the U.S. Resettlement and Placement program (USRAP) and among refugees. Building from these priorities, I can, in the second point, better explain what prior experiences and motivations may guide the interactions between Bhutanese refugees and their environments that relate to their unhealthy changes in energy balance.

### Integration priorities: guideposts for the refugees/post-resettlement interaction

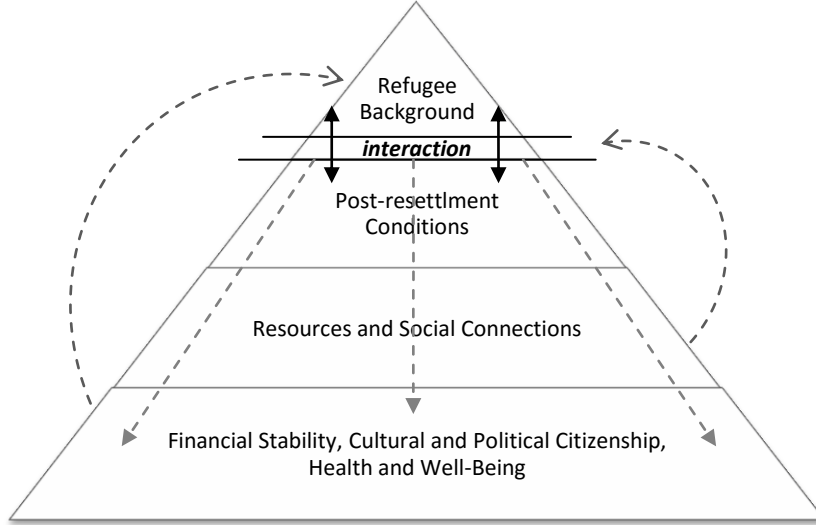
Throughout this dissertation, I used a biocultural approach, combining political economic and adaptability theories to capture how *history* and *agency* orient processes of integration for a sample of Bhutanese refugees in Prospect City and the impact on energy balance and nutritional status. The theoretical premise guiding this research was that the outcomes of integration could be understood by examining the unique interactions occurring between refugees and their resettlement contexts. This required historical analysis to be conducted for both the refugees and the environment they were entering in order to understand the underlying frameworks guiding their interactions (Goodman et al. 1998). This approach provided insight into the conditions refugees perceived to challenge or facilitate their integration and how they responded to these conditions to produce nutritional health.

Figure 6.1 provides a model of the process of refugee integration where the outcomes (the two bottom layers of the pyramid) are predicated on the interactions that develop between refugees and conditions they encounter in the resettlement environment. Importantly, this interaction is contingent upon how successfully Bhutanese refugees are able to articulate their unique motivations and historical backgrounds against conditions in the resettlement environment. In the model, this interaction shapes access to resources and social connections, which can recursively impact future interactions. These interactions shape financial stability, cultural and political citizenship, and health and wellbeing, which become the new standards by which refugees assess and interact with future opportunities and constraints in their environment.

For Bhutanese refugees, the preservation of cultural identity appears to be an enduring motivation with significant implications for their integration. It compelled them to leave Bhutan in the first place, which demonstrates its historical precedence as an organizing logic within their community, but it was also reinforced as a form of political capital during their time in the camps. Bhutanese refugees' access to resources and educational opportunities through the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations hinged upon their legal designation as “refugees”, a title which gained legitimacy under international law based on the disjuncture in political and cultural identities that emerged out of the discriminatory policies of the nationalization movement in Bhutan. Acceptance of this title by Bhutanese refugees provided them the resources to survive, but it also

served as a reminder of their tenuous social, cultural, and political positionality and lack of economic opportunity. Over time, the dream of reconciling the dissonance between these identities became a powerful motivation, which they carried into resettlement contexts.

**Fig 6.1.** Model for Process of Refugee Integration



Given their recent history, it is not surprising that the Bhutanese refugees whom I interviewed for this study overwhelmingly cited the religious, political, and economic freedoms afforded to them through U.S. resettlement as primary reasons for first applying to the U.S. for resettlement. These freedoms aligned with their motivations to preserve cultural heritage while providing for their families and participating in society—rights which participants felt had been taken from them during their exile from Bhutan. The decision to apply to the U.S. for resettlement was, in this sense, a deliberate and highly strategic effort to acquire cultural citizenship where cultural citizenship/belonging, economic possibilities, and political rights align. This finding is important because it reveals how cultural motivations have become the lens through which Bhutanese refugees interpret and respond to the opportunities and constraints in their new environment.

Despite the freedoms Bhutanese refugees gained through U.S. resettlement, the transition out of the refugee camps represented a dramatic change to the political and economic paradigm under which they were expected to access resources and survive. In the refugee camps, they lived for 20 years under a humanitarian system isolated from the local economy and dependent on international aid. Comparatively, the U.S. government operates on more neoliberal, free-market principles that view economic independence as a core American value and is highly suspicious of “entitlements” and “welfare” (Holman 1996). The U.S. resettlement program (USRAP) is not immune to these philosophies, and its policies have become an important mechanism for incentivizing their adoption by refugees (Ong 2003; Holman 1996; Ong 1995). This is achieved through financial aid stipulations that pressure refugees to find employment before focusing on other integration interests (i.e. health, education, and cultural citizenship/belonging).

What is essential to clarify about the general integration agendas of the refugees and USRAP is that health is not a direct priority in either case, and by its omission, is made *subsequent* to other priorities which have less clear connections to health.<sup>49</sup> For instance, USRAP as-

<sup>49</sup> Health is not explicitly described in the Refugee Act of 1980, as economic self-sufficiency is. This is not to suggest that health is not an integration concern, however, just that it receives far less priority and attention. USRAP provides medical screenings to refugees upon their entry. Most emphasis is placed on preventing transmission of communicable diseases, but data on nutritional health

sumes that prioritizing refugee's economic independence will make them more resilient when navigating other integration challenges (Haines 1996). Presumably, this includes health. But in order for this to happen, refugees must arrive in the U.S. with information relevant to the U.S. context, or be able to acquire this information very quickly. The food landscapes are very different between the two contexts, i.e., food deprivation in the camps vs. over-abundance of food in the U.S., plus the addition of new and unfamiliar foods. Given this, we cannot assume that Bhutanese refugees are informed about how to establish healthy diets, or even the necessity to do so, in this new context. I will return to this issue shortly when I discuss changes to policy that could substantially improve the refugee health during integration.

**Resettlement Challenges:** At the beginning of resettlement, the types of challenges participants described were largely practical in nature, stemming from obvious incongruities in the knowledge they carried with them from Bhutan and what they needed to know to survive in their new environment. These initial challenges included difficulties navigating the city layout, understanding traffic signals, learning public transportation, overcoming language barriers, and learning where to find culturally appropriate foods. First wave arrivals appeared to bear the greatest of these burdens. With no formal knowledge of the local environment and no support network, the first Bhutanese refugees to arrive to the U.S. were forced to engage unfamiliar conditions directly in order to find food, work, and earn a living. Their efforts to learn the “system” cleared the path for subsequent arrivals, improving everything from access to culturally appropriate foods and resources to mobility and sense of community.

The differences in experience between first wave arrivals and those who arrived in subsequent waves illustrate an obvious area where improvements can be made to the U.S. resettlement system. Focusing greater state and federal resources on facilitating the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge about the local environment among first wave arrivals could have important positive influences on integration for the community as a whole. As some participants in this study recall, these orientation tasks are often placed upon overburdened caseworkers who have too little time to provide all of the support that refugees need during this initial period of adjustment. Identifying key players in existing social networks *within* refugee groups prior to resettlement to educate and use as “founders” for the resettlement community may also help to facilitate more rapid transmission of this knowledge as more community members arrive.

The initial challenges that Bhutanese refugees encountered upon arrival quickly gave way to the more burdensome task of finding employment. The emphasis placed on “rapid self sufficiency” by USRAP policies intensified the sense of urgency participants felt to achieve this. In response, some decided to forgo higher education for the sake of a low-wage job. While taking these positions alleviated the pressure to find work, many regretted not going to college because it prevented them from building credentials needed to be successful in the U.S. and find more sustainable, higher paying careers. This observation is important because it demonstrates how policies that pressure refugees into finding immediate work may limit their true economic potential and contribution to society. Although economic sustainability is the ultimate goal behind these policies, they seem to have the opposite effect, inserting refugees into the lowest tier of the U.S. workforce and providing few opportunities to grow out of these positions. There is a need for future research to examine the long-term economic outcomes of these policies, measuring whether the pressure to find work rather than pursue educations in the first years of resettlement actually contributes to greater self-sufficiency vs. welfare dependence.

Initially, participants viewed the ability to work and earn money in the U.S. as an opportunity to “advance” and provide futures for their families. This perception stemmed directly from

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patterns are also collected, and medical treatments are offered. Refugees often arrive to the U.S. with micronutrient deficiencies and are below average for overweight and obesity as a result of *under nutrition* prior to arrival. The same attention is not given to preventing chronic health problems that arise in populations in the U.S. over time through overconsumption and sedentary lifestyles, resulting in overweight and obesity.

their recent experiences in Nepali refugee camps where they were prohibited from economic participation.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, the structure of work in the U.S. contrasted with the lifestyles they hoped for, which was interpreted as evidence of deeper ideological divisions between their cultural values and the lifestyles mandated by the American economy. The relationship between time and income in the U.S. was seen as an individualizing force which required participants to make compromises between the time they could spend with family and their ability to provide for their family's needs. This pressure was intensified by the financial strain of earning low wages, which drove many to take on more work hours and second jobs.

On top of these economic pressures, participants discussed the challenges of reconciling their caste-related social and dietary needs with the U.S. food system and the deeper ideology of equality that underlies the U.S. constitution. As Hindus, the majority of Bhutanese refugees are prohibited from eating beef, and many of the higher caste community members are complete vegetarians. The unprecedented position of beef, meats, and meat products in the U.S. food system made it difficult to maintain these caste-related dietary restrictions and in some cases even began to limit the types of jobs community members were willing to take, e.g., in Chapter Four one participant described how high caste community members initially rejected employment that involved contact with caste restricted substances. At the same time, participants expressed their concern that caste practices might be looked upon as discriminatory in the U.S., given the ideology of social equality. Some even felt that caste divisions might be illegal, leading them to conceal caste practices in the privacy of their homes. These perceptions interfered with community member's sense of social and cultural citizenship/belonging in the new context, and in some cases were blamed for causing depression in the community.

***Refugee strategies and implications for adaptability:*** The reestablishment of the joint family was the most common generalized strategy for reconciling the competing economic and cultural pressures of U.S. integration. What is important about the joint family with regards to adaptability is that it shifted the pressures of resettlement off of individuals and onto a larger social unit, making economic stability and cultural citizenship/belonging more attainable for everyone in the household despite individual variability in the capacity to achieve these goals on their own. For instance, older Bhutanese refugees were not educated in Bhutan or Nepal and spoke little if any English, which made it difficult to find employment in the U.S., and women often found jobs more readily than did men. Outside of a joint family, these individuals might have struggled to become financially self sufficient. Within the joint family, their cultural knowledge contributed to a sense of cultural citizenship/belonging, and their domestic contributions enhanced other household members' capacities to earn incomes. In this way the division of domestic and economic labor between members was critical to the success of the larger household unit.

At a more individual level, the strategies Bhutanese refugees used to accommodate perceived cultural differences and economic challenges ranged from highly flexible to completely avoidant of new ideas, beliefs and behaviors. Age, and its association with education, was an important factor that influenced who adopted particular strategies. Many of the younger Bhutanese refugees received educations in Nepal, where they learned to speak English. Because of this skill, they were better equipped to navigate the American social, cultural, and economic landscapes and their integration strategies were often more flexible for this reason. On the other hand, older community members were unable to attend school in Nepal, and many arrived to the U.S. with very little exposure to English. Their lack of education and inability to speak English made navigating the city and interacting with non-Bhutanese people more difficult, which many of them responded to by avoiding these contexts as much as possible.

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<sup>50</sup> As stated in Chapter 3, some were able to find work in Nepal, but this was difficult and rare given the policies within the camps and the Nepali government to limit their interactions with the surrounding native communities.

Avoidant and flexible strategies also varied by caste position in the community. Lower caste members were far more “flexible” in their willingness to adopt or at least engage with new ideas, beliefs, and behaviors while higher caste individuals tended to be more avoidant of these circumstances. These strategies make sense in light of the cultural norms and expectations associated with caste rankings. The caste hierarchy is based on a person’s spiritual status in *Samsara*—the Hindu cycle of life, death, and rebirth. Higher castes are believed to have acquired greater spiritual and material “purity” (Mines 2005; Dumont 1980; Daniel 1983). The social and dietary requirements of their caste position are designed to protect this status from contamination (Mines 2005; Daniel 1983). Lower castes are “less pure” and therefore require fewer social and dietary prohibitions. It is not surprising given these differences, that high caste members were more avoidant of unfamiliar ideas, beliefs, and behaviors than lower caste members, because engaging these conditions could jeopardize their place in *Samsara*.

Interestingly, differences in age interacted with the adoption of flexible and avoidant strategies by high caste community members. Being of older age seemed to reinforce the adoption of avoidant strategies among higher caste members, whereas younger high caste members were more educated, and therefore more equipped to be flexible and seek compromises without endangering the underlying norms and expectations associated with their spiritual status. Vegetarian dietary prohibitions serve as a good example. Older, high caste community members were not proficient in English and, therefore, were unable to read labels or follow up with food servers about the ingredients in the foods they purchased. To limit the accidental consumption of meat, they avoided eating foods outside of their homes. In contrast, younger high caste members, with their greater language abilities, were more comfortable going to restaurants and buying foods away from home because they could read labels and ask questions.

Beyond having fewer prohibitions to adhere to, the adoption of flexible strategies by lower caste Bhutanese refugees could also be viewed as a counter response to a history of subordination and discrimination. In Nepal and India, where society is structured around the Hindu belief system, people of low caste have little recourse but to abide by the norms and expectations of their birth status. This is not the case in the U.S., however, where society is structured around the ideologies of independence and equality. The tendency among lower caste members to be more flexible in their post-resettlement strategies may reflect an underlying movement to abandon their subordinate status. The concern mentioned by higher caste participants that lower caste community members were converting to Christianity further illustrates this point. The implication of this finding is that perceptions of the U.S. range from opportunity to constraint based on a person’s caste position. In turn, this impacts how they go about interacting with the new environment.

In terms of adaptability, the significance of these individual and family level strategies for integration is how they mediate the contexts community members are exposed to, and thereby impact access to resources, social connections, financial stability, cultural citizenship/belonging, and health and wellbeing. Avoidant strategies aimed to *limit* exposure to non-Bhutanese contexts, and in so doing, they remained dependent on the knowledge and experiences that were acquired in Bhutan and Nepal. Meanwhile more flexible strategies actively engaged new contexts and with these contexts came new ideas and behaviors some of which related to food and others to physical activity. In many respects, the avoidant strategy only exists as a viable post-resettlement option given the broader cultural emphasis placed on collectivism and joint families within Bhutanese community, which provides the cultural space for community members to maintain their cultural beliefs and practices.

### **Mechanisms shaping energy imbalance that contribute to overweight and obesity**

The high rates of overweight and obesity that I recorded in the Prospect City Bhutanese community likely stemmed from overconsumption of energy-dense foods and limited physical activity. The causes of these changes are complex and interrelated, but must first be understood in

the absence of policies that aim to prevent refugees from developing chronic nutrition-related diseases. That is, attention to health is obscured by more urgent concerns as refugees negotiate their own agendas against the demands of a political economic system that interacts with them on the basis of their time, economic value, and labor. The specific mechanisms driving unhealthy changes in diet and exercise among Bhutanese refugees involve the articulation of these economic conditions against (1) the default health knowledge and behaviors Bhutanese refugees brought with them from Bhutan and Nepal, and (2) the primary cultural motivations that inform how they make food choices and develop food-related strategies in the new context. Differences in age, gender, employment, and caste position within the community seemed to best explain how prior knowledge and integration agendas were utilized to negotiate these broader post-resettlement conditions, which contributed to variable exercise opportunities and dietary patterns.

**Default Diet and Exercise Behaviors:** In Nepal, Bhutanese refugees were unaware of the health consequences associated with food overconsumption and lack of exercise. Their traditional diets were largely vegetarian, but revolved around energy dense staple ingredients like white rice and potatoes. The majority of dishes were stir fried in oil as curries, which contributed even greater energy density. Meanwhile, coming from an agricultural background, physical activity was viewed as part of work or transportation rather than a health related activity, and was not deliberately pursued. In other circumstances, these types of diet/exercise patterns (i.e., consumption of energy dense foods, lack of intentional physical activity) have been linked to overweight, obesity, and metabolic diseases (Popkin et al. 1998; Uljaszek 2007). However, food deprivation was a chronic condition in the Nepali refugee camps. In the context of the camps, consumption of energy dense foods, increases in food consumption when possible, reductions in energy expenditure, and, hopefully, resulting increases in nutritional status were all viewed as having important health benefits and became routine components of Bhutanese refugees' underlying survival strategies.

In the U.S., the conditions shaping a *healthy* energy balance are reversed. Bhutanese refugees were immediately confronted by an abundant supply of culturally appropriate foods, easy access to public transportation that decreased potential physical activity opportunities, and work environments that were less physically demanding. In this new context, food consumption and exercise *must be deliberately managed* in order to maintain a healthy energy balance (Spiegelman et al. 2001). In the absence of direct intervention by U.S. integration policies to orient refugees through the long process of establishing healthy diet and exercise patterns, Bhutanese refugees resorted to using their most recent experiences in Nepal as a guide. In the first days and weeks of resettlement, participants described binge eating foods that had been difficult to acquire in Nepal, illustrating how prior food experiences shaped initial reactions to the new dietary context. These consumption patterns declined over time; however, overall level of food consumption remained high, and exercise levels declined further as community members became increasingly familiar with public transportation or acquired personal vehicles.

**Cultural Motivations, Food Choice, Food Access, and Exercise:** Bhutanese refugees applied to resettle in the U.S. to preserve their culture and way of life, which they derived from their ethnic ties to Nepal and their Hindu beliefs and traditions. This motivation had two important implications for the types of diet and exercise behaviors that they established in the resettlement context. First, the Hindu belief system is deeply intertwined with food practices (Mines 2005; Dumont 1980). A strong desire to adhere to this system among Bhutanese refugees reinforced the position of cultural foods in their post-resettlement diets. Second, with its myriad social, cultural, and economic functions, the reestablishment of the joint family in the post-resettlement context also had important impacts on diet and exercise, reinforcing the position of cultural foods in the typical diet, and unevenly shaping exercise opportunities for employed and unemployed community members.

There is a strong socio-religious link between diet and the Hindu belief system among Bhutanese refugees. For instance, dietary prohibitions within the Hindu caste system serve both spiritual and social functions, punctuating the social hierarchy and providing cues for social etiquette within and between caste rankings (Mines 2005). Much of the diversity within the traditional diet of Bhutanese refugees is predicated on caste-related food prohibitions. Nevertheless, the underlying motivation to preserve Hindu traditions as an organizing cultural logic among Bhutanese refugees translated into the preservation of these dietary practices after resettlement for many. This effort was facilitated by the fact that many of Bhutanese refugees' traditional foods are readily available at bulk prices in Prospect City. Once store locations were identified, participants had little difficulty maintaining their preferred diets. As a consequence, the daily consumption of these foods and flavors has become a particularly important strategy for reestablishing sense of cultural citizenship/belonging.

As discussed in the previous section, several participants responded to the new food environment by binge eating when they first arrived to the U.S., given the more abundant food supply. Stepping back to view the broader context of resettlement, it is also possible that binge eating related to cultural citizenship/belonging. Community members who arrived to the U.S. in the first wave of resettlements felt isolated and depressed by the social and cultural differences they observed between the U.S. and Nepal. Cultural foods, which were readily available, were one of the few familiar aspects of this new environment. Binge eating these foods may have been a dietary response to the observed cultural differences. Future research is needed to more thoroughly explore this relationship.

The second cultural mechanism that contributed to unhealthy diet and exercise patterns in the community came from the social organization and security of living in joint families. Participants described living in a joint family as a source of cultural citizenship/belonging and a key strategy for accommodating economic pressures in the U.S. Food and finances were shared to cover basic living, and labor was distributed to maximize household income while ensuring that someone was always available to tend to the more immediate domestic needs of child care and food production. Usually, these divisions corresponded with traditional gender roles and by age; however as indicated earlier, sometimes women entered the workforce before men. Nevertheless, women and older individuals were more likely to remain home, while young adult males (and some females) found employment to generate the household income.

Unhealthy patterns of food overconsumption developed within joint families as food production was restructured to accommodate the time constraints of work in the U.S. Because joint families typically consisted of multiple employed family members, each of whom were working extra hours or multiple jobs, work schedules often conflicted. To accommodate the constant flow of people entering and leaving the household throughout the day, food was produced in large quantities on an ongoing basis. Moreover, because older unemployed family members were responsible for preparing food for the family, the food was typically more traditional. The consequence of this strategy was an overall increase in the availability of energy dense foods during the day, which several younger participants blamed on unhealthy weight gains in themselves and among their parents, and siblings.

The division of labor within the joint family also had important implications for exercise opportunities. Recall that physical activity was viewed as either "work" or "transportation" as opposed to a health related activity. This mentality seemed to derive from their agricultural background in Bhutan, where work was very physical and pursuing "exercise" for health purposes was unheard of and unnecessary. Unfortunately, this meant that exercise was not actively pursued after resettlement. Instead, exercise was an unintentional byproduct of type of employment. Because the domestic and non-domestic labor is divided in joint families, unemployed individuals who remained at home to care for the household had fewer exercise opportunities. This may explain why older and unemployed individuals particularly women, had higher rates of overweight and obesity in the Prospect City community.



## Making preventative health recommendations for U.S. resettlement policies

If self-sufficiency is indeed the goal of USRAP policy, it is important to seriously examine how the tools, resources, and incentives that we provide to refugees through policy ultimately impact their capacities to achieve it in the long-term. This study has shown that because nutritional health is a lower USRAP policy priority than economic issues, the demands placed upon refugees to find work tend to overshadow the urgency of preventing chronic nutritional health problems like overweight, obesity and diabetes that can arise unnoticed during the transition into more food abundant environments. It appears that, because of this oversight, Bhutanese refugees in Prospect City have had to acquire nutritional health knowledge on a reactive, trial and error basis, as they encounter health complications and seek medical attention. To better illustrate this point, awareness and concern about nutritional health issues have only begun to emerge in the community after living in the U.S. for over five years. The retroactive approach by which Bhutanese refugees have gained relevant health knowledge represents a missed opportunity on the part of USRAP to prevent adverse, chronic health outcomes earlier in resettlement and to, therefore, place refugees (in general) on a positive health trajectory. Rather than individualizing health responsibility by placing it in the hands of refugees, conscientious policy changes could be made that utilize existing structural parameters to promote positive health outcomes that may improve self sufficiency in the long-term.

At the most basic level, an important and simple area for making policy change is the instruments we use to screen refugees for healthy body composition. Like other studies involving Asian refugee and immigrant populations have already shown (Clarkin 2008; Pan et al. 2004; Chang 2003; Deurenberg et al. 2002), this study demonstrated a wide and alarming discrepancy in the classification of overweight and obesity between BMI and %BF in the Bhutanese sample. According to BMI the majority of the sample was classified in a healthy nutritional status range, while %BF demonstrated that over three quarters of the sample was overweight or obese. Despite these discrepancies, BMI remains a standard measure of body composition for refugees used by UNHCR, WHO, CDC, and health professionals in the US alike. Indeed, having attended medical appointments prior to this study, some participants in the current study were aware of their BMI and were surprised by the higher %BF readings that placed them in the overweight/obese categories. The standard use of BMI for refugee health screenings in the U.S. is problematic in its ability to adequately capture body composition among diverse populations, which refugees are, and has potentially devastating implications for preventing unhealthy trends in body composition in these populations. At the very least, multiple measures of body composition would be a better, more effective approach to assessing nutritional status among refugees.

It is alarming that after more than five years in the United States, Bhutanese refugees are only now beginning to become aware of the high rates of overweight, obesity, and diabetes in their community. Unfortunately, this unhealthy nutritional status pattern is reflected across many U.S. refugee populations (Franzen et al. 2009a; Himmelgreen et al. 2007; Patil et al. 2009), which illustrates the problems associated with a policy program that individualizes health by placing priority on economic self-sufficiency. No longer should it be acceptable to assume that refugees arrive to the U.S. prepared to make the types of lifestyle changes that are required to live healthy lives in the new context, all while balancing the demands of a challenging economic system. Coupled with body composition instruments that do not capture meaningful changes in nutritional status at the initial stages of resettlement, there is a recipe for unhealthy trends to quickly emerge while being completely unnoticed. To correct this pattern, *health must be given equal incentive* to “economic self-sufficiency” within USRAP policy priorities for incoming refugees. Studies investigating post-resettlement health among U.S. immigrants and refugees consistently implicate length of time as an important factor in the negative health changes refugees undergo

(Himmelgreen et al. 2004; Franzen et al. 2009a, 2009b). Significantly lengthening the health monitoring period for refugee newcomers after U.S. arrival by providing free regular health check-ups would catch unhealthy changes in their early stages. But monitoring alone is not a solution. To live healthful lives, refugees must be made aware of the constraints to health in this new environment. Health checkups must be accompanied with relevant and culturally digestible health education tailored to the specific needs of the refugee population.

### **Moving forward retroactively on existing diet and exercise issues with the community**

While attending a wedding of a Bhutanese friend I met through this study, I encountered a young man who had participated in the anthropometric component of the project who proudly informed me while flexing his bicep that he had joined a gym and changed his diet to become healthier as a result of my visit. Throughout my research, I encountered many similar statements, from former participants, and I was asked frequently by older individuals if I could provide blood sugar readings to screen for diabetes in the community. What these conversations illustrate is that the community is hungry for health information, and to make changes that will promote healthier lives in the long-term. This leads me to conclude that while unhealthy patterns of overweight/obesity have already become well-established in the current sample, raising awareness about nutritional quality and the importance of exercise and portion control may still benefit the current generation of Bhutanese refugees and is certainly a worthy cause for creating a foundation of health for future generations. As a researcher and anthropologist, the opportunity to make a positive contribution to health and wellbeing is a rewarding endeavor.

At the conclusion of my data analysis, I reopened communication with the Bhutanese Community Organization (BCO) to share my findings and offer my insights on how to nurture healthier diet and exercise behaviors in their community. My recommendations included: (1) addressing the health literacy gaps in the community in context of past experiences in Bhutan and Nepal and present-day circumstances in the U.S., and (2) providing potential strategies for translating new knowledge into actionable health behaviors, given the community's social, cultural, and economic priorities.

***Filling the Health Literacy Gaps:*** The first step in any effort to improve health outcomes among refugees should focus on filling in knowledge gaps regarding nutritional health and its relationship with long-term chronic illness. Bhutanese refugees arrived to the U.S. from an environment where “eating more food” had health benefits and exercise was an occupational rather than health activity. In this context, long-term health concerns associated with energy balance and nutritional quality were irrelevant given the urgency of hunger and its more immediate and visible impacts on growth, development, and day to day functioning. However, in the U.S., where food is abundant and lifestyles are more sedentary, the rules that guide a healthy energy balance are reversed, and nutritional health concerns must consciously be shifted from meeting short-term needs to the active development of long-term, sustainable lifestyle behaviors that diminish risk for chronic illness.

For Bhutanese refugees, significant areas of concern regarding energy balance included the high energy density of traditional foods, the overconsumption of these foods, and the general lack of understanding about the health benefits of exercise. Nutritional health education should focus on teaching community members how to differentiate foods based on nutritional quality. In the U.S., the use of food labels requires some level of English proficiency, and for most community members, this is not a problem. Older community members who do not read or speak English could benefit from learning how to differentiate nutritional quality by understanding the structure of nutritional labels and where to look for information on calories, fat, carbohydrates, etc. (Willis et al. 2007). The most important message, however, is that *not all foods are nutritionally the same*, and some should be consumed less frequently. In an environment where food is readily

accessible, it is easy to meet and exceed daily energy needs. Managing energy intake by managing food consumption (e.g., through portion control, or through more healthful preparation techniques) and managing energy expenditure by getting regular exercise is critical to maintaining long term health.

***Translating Nutritional Knowledge into Action:*** Improving health literacy among Bhutanese refugees in Prospect City is a necessity. As demonstrated by previous diet related interventions among refugees, in order for this knowledge to translate into actionable behavior, it must be tailored to accommodate their specific needs and motivations (e.g., Renzaho et al. 2010; Weiland et al. 2012; Frye 1995). Many Bhutanese refugees are Hindu, and within the Hindu belief system, food—as substance—holds an important link between a person’s social and spiritual status. In resettlement contexts, food has also taken on new functions as an anchor point for identity and cultural citizenship/belonging in an otherwise unfamiliar environment, and many community members share a motivation to preserve their food beliefs for these reasons. Considering the importance food holds for Bhutanese refugees, dietary recommendations that aim to improve nutritional quality of the traditional diet will likely be ineffective if they do not also accommodate the deeper meanings that Bhutanese refugees attach to foods. Therefore, recommendations for dietary change may be more successful if they address *portion control*, which has little impact on the types of foods Bhutanese refugees consume, and recommendations that offer *culturally acceptable substitutions* for energy dense food staples in the traditional diet.

Portion control is an important area for making health improvements to the post-resettlement diet for several reasons. Foremost, it would directly address the unhealthy pattern of food overconsumption that may be contributing to overweight and obesity. But, more importantly, it requires no changes in the types of foods being consumed, while offering a relatively simple strategy for reducing energy density in the diet. One approach could be to reduce the amount of food consumed at each meal to the recommended quantities for a healthy diet (based on age, gender, weight, and exercise level). However, as nutritional literacy improves, this broader approach could be supplemented with a more targeted reduction of the proportions of energy dense ingredients (e.g., potatoes, rice, oil) used during meal preparation. As an example of how this could be achieved, Krusemen et al. (2003) provided workshops to refugees from former Yugoslavia where they helped them create their own strategies to reduce oil intake and reported significant improvements in six month follow ups. It is likely that a rapid adjustment in oil use would impact the flavor of the dish; but gradually reducing the proportions of energy dense foods over a period of time may be the best approach to achieve this without radically disrupting flavor preferences.

Another strategy for improving nutritional quality would be to seek culturally acceptable substitutions for prominent energy dense foods in the traditional diet. Potatoes, white rice, and oil are staple ingredients in nearly every dish that I observed during my research. There have already been efforts by some community members to replace white rice with brown rice based on medical recommendations. This effort has had moderate success when brown rice is blended with the white rice in increasing proportions over time. This strategy could be extended to using substitutes for potato. For instance, pumpkin and other squashes are lower in energy density, have higher nutritional quality, cook similarly to potato, and are already well-established in the traditional diet. Replacing or reducing potato with these other ingredients would be another relatively easy approach to improving energy density. Finally, soy lecithin sprays have no nutritional value, are vegetarian, and could be used to replace or greatly reduce the amount of oil needed to make stir-fry dishes, also reducing energy density.

The social organization and economic dimensions of food production in the joint family should also be considered when developing strategies to increase health literacy and promote healthy dietary changes in the Bhutanese community. In joint families, large quantities of food are produced by a few individuals each day to accommodate the busy schedules of other household members. This strategy alleviates time constraints and allows people to maintain their tradi-

tional diets, but can also contribute to overconsumption. This finding has two implications for how we approach health education and household level dietary health strategies. First, the people preparing food for the household are important targets for nutritional health education, because their food decisions and preparation practices impact a large audience. Because many of the people at home preparing food are unemployed as a result of poor English proficiencies, nutritional education must be provided in Nepali. It may also be useful to use visual cues when possible to facilitate communication and later recall (Camelon et al. 1998). Second, adjusting the family food environment can be an effective method for tackling overconsumption in non-refugee populations (Hendrie et al. 2013). It would be worthwhile to collaborate with individual Bhutanese families to consider household food production and distribution strategies that could accommodate time constraints while limiting overconsumption.

***Translating Physical Health Knowledge into Action:*** In terms of improving energy expenditure, it is essential to first change the mentality that exercise is work, and to educate community members on its role in a healthy energy balance. It is also important to note that the time people have to participate in exercise exists among other pressures that are seen as more urgent by most community members. For instance, participants frequently discussed the difficulties of balancing their busy work schedules against their ability to spend time with family and community. With this in mind, it is essential to frame exercise as a social, rather than individual activity, otherwise, it could be viewed as another constraint. It is also important to look for ways to integrate exercise opportunities with preexisting cultural motivations. Traditional dancing is one example. Community cultural events often involved dancing and singing. Encouraging traditional dancing lessons as a regular community program may be an effective way of incentivizing dancing as a form of exercise, while providing community members with more opportunities for social contact.

At the family level, unemployed household members appeared to get the least amount of exercise, and stayed at home to care for children and prepare food. Prior studies have demonstrated that incorporating physical activity into existing routines can be an effective strategy for improving physical activity (e.g., Barr-Anderson et al. 2011; Kahn et al. 2002; Guerin et al. 2003). Helping families learn how to integrate exercise opportunities into their childcare strategies would be one approach for increasing physical activity among unemployed household members while also helping children to develop healthy exercise behaviors. Bhutanese refugees in Prospect City tend to live within close proximity to each other. Identifying nearby parks, playgrounds, and fields where families could meet and children could play might provide an added social incentive to making exercise a more routine and sustainable part of the day and week. The popularity of gardening among Bhutanese families may be another plausible outlet for encouraging physical activity with opportunities for socialization and promoting greater consumption of healthy foods. This strategy may be most relevant to Bhutanese families in neighborhoods where they have access to more land and live adjacent to or nearby other Bhutanese households.

### **Study limitations and future research**

The findings of the current study should be interpreted within the context of a few key limitations. This study was cross-sectional in nature. A longitudinal research design would have provided more definitive evidence of the relationship between U.S. resettlement and the high rates of overweight and obesity in the Bhutanese refugee community. Without longitudinal data, I can only rely on retrospective ethnographic evidence that changes have occurred. Greater overlap between the anthropometric and interview samples would have also benefited this analysis, providing more concrete opportunities to explore differences in adaptability between households based on differences in food strategies and nutritional status outcomes. Similarly, individual food consumption data would have benefited this study by allowing for statistical analysis of the rela-

tionships between demographic characteristics in the community, individual food strategies, and nutritional outcomes.

During interviews, many participants independently raised concern over the rising number of suicides being reported in other U.S. Bhutanese communities. By the conclusion of the research phase for this project, one community member from Prospect City had joined this unfortunate and alarming trend. The rates of suicide for Bhutanese refugees in the U.S. are far higher than for the general U.S. population and other refugees (CDC 2013). Clearly, the experience of resettlement for Bhutanese refugees crosscuts other dimensions of health beyond nutrition and exercise which requires attention. It is also possible that mental health impacts Bhutanese refugee's capacity to negotiate other aspects of the integration process, and ultimately has an influence on diet and exercise. In addition, many participants expressed an interest in being tested for diabetes risk during my anthropometric visits. While I was not prepared to collect these types of mental and metabolic health data for this project, future research would benefit from incorporating a broader survey of health outcomes beyond nutrition.

Another productive area of for future research is the potential relationship between establishing a sense of cultural citizenship/belonging and binge eating. As I suggested previously, it appeared that binge eating became a pathway for some participants to experience the "familiar" in an otherwise unfamiliar location. For Bhutanese refugees, this was made possible by the abundance of culturally appropriate foods in the U.S. Future research could explore this potential link in greater depth among Bhutanese refugees. Alternatively, it would be interesting to compare these types of dietary patterns with other refugee populations who did not experience food deprivation before resettlement, or whose preferred foods are more difficult to acquire after resettlement. This would help to clarify which histories or post-resettlement conditions contribute the most to binge eating and overconsumption.

Finally, much of the challenge that Bhutanese refugees encountered after resettlement involved finding and maintaining employment. These demands stemmed from the political economic pressures placed upon all refugees by USRAP policies that aim to limit their dependence on welfare and promote economic self-sufficiency. The assumption behind these policies is that economic self-sufficiency will facilitate refugees' success across other dimensions of integration (Halpern 2008; Ong 2003:83-85). In light of the high rates of overweight and obesity in the current sample it is clear that economic priorities are not promoting health. But several participants in this study also specifically refrained from attending higher education to accommodate the time demands of these policies. It is not clear whether forcing refugees to make this choice is conducive to long-term health given the reported strong relationship between education and health improvements (Winkleby et al. 1992; Ross et al. 1995). Future research should examine whether refugees who are provided the resources to attend school and acquire appropriate skills/credentials fare better or worse economically and health-wise in the long term than refugees who are immediately pressured to find employment.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the high rates of overweight and obesity found in this sample of Bhutanese refugees living in Prospect City reveal a potential missed opportunity to prevent health complications from developing during initial stages of integration. Such health complications may be particularly harmful because they could interfere with refugees' abilities to establish sustainable livelihoods in the long term. It appears that overweight and obesity in the Bhutanese community stem from the overconsumption of energy dense traditional foods and declines in exercise which have occurred since resettlement. These unhealthy changes in diet and exercise stem from the reapplication of prior health knowledge and cultural preferences to a new context shaped by economic conditions which place very different demands on energy balance. Future efforts to address nutritional health in this recent refugee community should focus on health literacy, and

build on their cultural patterns and community strengths by developing diet and exercise strategies that align with their underlying cultural integration agendas. More targeted interventions focused on health in this population could reverse high rates of overweight/obesity and other health problems.

**APPENDIX A. Atlas Map of Nepal and Bhutan**



Source: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3fe47e244.html>



Source: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3fe47e244.html>

## **APPENDIX B: Bhutanese Community Organization of Western State By-laws**

### **BY-LAWS**

#### **Bhutanese Community in Western State**

#### **Preamble**

Cognizant of the need of an organization to help build individual capacity of the members of the community,

Realizing the importance of self-sufficiency and thereby lessening the burden on Government; and,

Pursuant to maintaining national cohesion, promoting team spirit and collective welfare through cooperation, collaboration and partnering with the existing organizations, agencies and government entities;

The Bhutanese Community in Western State agrees to adopt the following By-laws:

#### **Article 1**

#### **NAME, ADDRESS, VISION STATEMENT AND MISSION STATEMENT AND PURPOSE**

##### **Section 1: Name**

The name of the organization shall be Bhutanese Community in Western State (BCO). It is established as a charitable nonprofit corporation in the State of Western State.

##### **Section 2: Vision Statement**

Getting every member of the community to achieving self-sufficiency and full integration into mainstream society.

##### **Section 3: Mission Statement**

Bhutanese Community in Western State is committed to promoting, preserving the ethnicity, culture, tradition, religion and building organizational and individual capacities through case management, education, advocacy, mentoring, sports, collaboration and partnership.

##### **Section 4: IRC 501(c) (3) Purpose**

The purpose of this corporation shall be any purpose which may be lawfully undertaken by a Domestic Corporation (Non profit) organized pursuant to Western State Law and according to Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

##### **Section 5: Specific purpose**



The specific purpose will include, but not limited to, the following

1. To provide interpretation services to new arriving and other Bhutanese who lack English language skills, to get access to the different resources available, and during appointments.
2. To empower and integrate the Bhutanese American and other communities in the mainstream American society through education, advocacy and service.
3. To guide children and youths in socially useful and productive work.
4. To preserve and promote Bhutanese arts and culture.
5. To provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and respect and foster basic human rights.
6. To strengthen cooperation among organization and international forums on matters of common interests, objectives, and purposes.
7. To coordinate with different skill development centers and refugee liaisons to provide job related training and help to make self dependent.

## ARTICLE 2

### MEMBERS

Membership in this organization shall include, but not limited to, all who are 18 years and older and are from Bhutanese origins. Active members are those members who have applied for the membership and have paid their membership dues. Active members have legal and voting rights, and can be elected officials of the organization.

#### Section 1: Membership fee

The yearly membership dues of \$20 for this organization shall be due by 15<sup>th</sup> of December every year. Only those members who have paid the membership fees will have the right to review transaction and investment of all the activities of the organization.

#### Section 2: Membership Database

The Bhutanese Community in Western State shall keep the database containing the name and address of each member. Such database shall be kept by the Secretary.

#### Section 3: Termination of the Membership

The membership of a member shall terminate upon the occurrence of any of the following events:

1. Upon his/her notice of such termination delivered to the president or secretary or the board member of the corporation personally or by mail, such membership to terminate upon the date of delivery of the notice.
2. Upon failure to renew his/her membership by paying dues on or before their due date, such termination to be effective thirty days after written notification of delinquency is given personally or mailed to such member by the secretary. A member may avoid such termination by paying the amount of delinquent dues within a thirty day period following the member's receipt of the written notification of the delinquency.
3. After providing the member with reasonable written notice and an opportunity to heard either orally or in writing, upon a determination by the board of directors that the member

has engaged in conduct materially and seriously prejudicial to the interest or purpose of the corporation.

## ARTICLE 3

### MEETINGS

#### Section 1: Annual Meetings

The annual membership meeting of this organization shall be held on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December each and every year except if such day is a legal holiday, and in that event, the Board of Directors shall fix the day but it shall not be more than two weeks from the date fixed by these By-Laws. The secretary shall cause to be mailed to every member in good standing at this address as it appears in the membership roll book in this organization a notice telling the time and place of such annual meeting.

#### Section 2: Regular Meetings

Regular meetings of the organizations shall be held with the 10 days prior notification of all the members and at the venue arranged by the secretary until the arrangement shall have its office.

#### Section 3: Special Meetings

Special meeting of this organization may be called by the President or any board members when he deems it for the best interest of the organization. Notices of such meeting shall be mailed to all members at their addresses as they appear in the membership roll book at least ten days before the scheduled date set for such special meeting.

Such notice shall state the reasons that such meeting has been called, the business to be transacted at such meeting and by whom it was called. At the request of thirty percent of the members of the Board of Directors or twenty percent of the members of the organization, the President shall cause a special meeting to be called but such request must be made in written at least ten days before the requested scheduled date. No other business but that specified in the notice may be transacted at such special meeting without the unanimous consent of all present at such meeting.

#### Section 4: Quorum

The presence of not less than 51 percent of the Board members shall constitute a quorum and shall be necessary to conduct the business of this organization; but a lesser percentage may adjourn the meeting for a period of not more than two weeks from the date scheduled by these By – laws and the secretary shall cause a notice of this scheduled meeting to be sent to all those members who were not present at the meeting originally called. A quorum as herein before set forth shall be required at any adjourned meeting.

#### Section 5: Order of Business

Order of business of all meetings shall be as follows:

1. Roll call

2. Reading of the minutes of the preceding meeting
3. Reports of committees.
4. Reports of Officers.
5. Old and unfinished business.
6. New business
7. Date for next meeting

### **Section 6: Voting**

In all meetings, business decisions shall be finalized by the voting. Voting can be conducted either by voice or by hand raising.

## **Article 4**

### **Board of Directors:**

#### **Section 1: Number**

The corporation shall have no less than five directors and collectively they shall be known as the Board of directors (BOD).

#### **Section 2: Power**

The Board of Directors shall be the governing body of the corporation. The activities and affairs of this corporation shall be conducted and all corporate powers shall be exercised by or under the direction of Board of Directors.

#### **Section 3: Election**

The Board of Directors shall be elected by members of the corporation who have the membership and paid all dues in their account. Voting for the election of directors shall be by secret ballot. The candidates receiving the highest number of votes up to the number of directors shall be elected to serve the board.

#### **Section 4: Term of the Office**

Each Director shall hold office for a period of two years. A person elected to fill a vacancy on the board shall hold office until the next election of Board of Directors or until his or her death, resignation, or removal from office.

The directors after being elected shall elect one of them as the chairman of the Board. He or she shall chair the Board till the next election unless otherwise, expired, resigned, or terminated.

#### **Section 5: Responsibilities**

It shall be the duty of the directors to:

1. Perform any and all duties imposed on them collectively or individually by law, by article of incorporation, or by these bylaws.

2. Create or update mission and vision statements.
3. Determine the organizations of program and services.
4. Approving the strategic plan.
5. Appoint and remove, employ and discharge, prescribe the duties and fix the compensation, if any, of all officers, agents, and employees of the corporation.
6. Supervise all officers, agents, and employees of the corporation to assure that their duties are performed properly.
7. Approving the annual budget, annual report, etc.
8. Working with and providing support to the executive.
9. Approving major contracts and grants.
10. Soliciting and reviewing program evaluations
11. Fundraising, by directly donating to the non-profit and soliciting donations from others.
12. Documenting policies and decisions to create an organizational memory.
13. Preparing for and attending board meetings.
14. Researching and discussing issues before decisions are made.
15. Advocating for the organization.
16. Troubleshooting as necessary.
17. Meet at such times and places as required by these bylaws.

#### **Section 6: Salaries/Compensation**

Till the financial recourses are explored the Board of Directors shall be liable to run the day to day business voluntarily. Otherwise, any salaries received by the officers and the board of directors will be reasonable and provided in return for services actually rendered to or for the Corporation. All salaries will be approved in advance in accordance with this Corporation's conflict of interest policy as set forth in Article 10 of these Bylaws.

#### **Section 7: Qualification**

The members of BOD should have the following qualifications:

- Community service experience.
- Good communication skills.
- Must be attending Bachelors' Degree in minimum.
- Should pass the state background check.
- Should have no any criminal convictions.

#### **Section 8: Termination/ Resignation**

Members of BOD can resign to the existing chairman, while the chairman can resign to the President of the executive body. The vacancy thus created shall be filled through the election by the members of the corporation.

1. Any members of BOD can be terminated if:
  - He/she is found involved in criminal activities.
  - Found acting against the interest of the BCO.
  - Failed to attend two consecutive meetings, he/she shall first be requested for the written explanations and however, if failed to attend three consecutive meetings shall be given termination letter. (Reference Code-2).

## **Section 9: Non-liability of Directors**

The directors shall not be personally liable for the debts, liabilities, or other obligations of BCO.

## **Section 10: Insurance for corporate agents**

Except as may be otherwise provided under provisions of law, the Board of Directors may adopt a resolution authorizing the purchase and maintenance of insurance on behalf of any agents of BCO (including a director, officer, employee, or other agent of BCO) against liabilities asserted against or incurred by the agent in such capacity or arising out of the agent's status as such.

## **Section 11: Board Performance Review**

The Board collective shall review or evaluate their performance annually. Evaluating the work of the Board shall be done using questionnaire agreed upon by Board.

Elements of review shall include, but not limited to, of the following:

1. The Board's need to review the bylaws;
2. The board members' understanding of their responsibility and duties;
3. The members' commitment to the Board;
4. The Board's use of its committees and the quality of the committees' terms of reference;
5. Board members' understanding of their fiduciary duties;
6. The diversity of the Board's composition and the board's ability to accurately represent its stakeholders;
7. The quality of the relationships between board members, as well as between the board and the organization;
8. The quality of the communication between the board and the organization;
9. The Board's policies and procedures;
10. The efficiency of the Board meetings, decision making processes, and Board member participation;
11. The quality of the Board's written work plan;
12. The Board's ability to address conflict effectively and openly; and
13. The Board's use of resources.

## **Article 5**

### **Officers**

#### **Section 1: Designation of Officers**

The officers of BCO shall be a president, a vice president, a secretary, an assistant secretary, and a treasurer and assistant treasurer. Any member may serve as an officer of BCO.

#### **Section 2: Election and term of office**

Officers shall be elected by the Board of Directors and each officer shall hold office for a term of two years.

### **Section 3: President**

The president shall perform the following duties:

1. Be the chief executive officer of BCO and shall, subject to the control of the Board of Directors, supervise and control the affairs of BCO and activities of the officers.
2. He/she shall perform all duties incident to his/her office and such other duties as may be required by law, by the articles of incorporation, or by these bylaws, or which may be prescribed from time to time by the Board of Directors.
3. He/she shall preside all the meetings of the Board of Directors and at all meetings of the general meetings.
4. Except as otherwise expressly provided by law, by the articles of incorporation, or by these bylaws, he/she shall, in the name of BCO, execute such deeds, mortgages, bonds, contracts, checks, or other instruments, which may from time to time be authorized by Board of Directors.
5. Shall establish meeting agenda.
6. Shall work to build bridges with other non-profit organizations and agencies of government.
7. Shall promote the image of the organization.
8. Shall serve as spokesperson and public relation for the organization.
9. Shall ensure compliance with state laws and regulations.

### **Section 4: Vice President**

The vice president shall in the event of the absence or inability of the President to exercise his/her office become acting President of the organization with all the rights, privileges, and powers as if he had been the duly elected President. Vice President is entrusted with all the responsibilities aforementioned under President's role to run the corporation and work very closely with President.

### **Section 5: Secretary**

The secretary shall keep the minutes and records of the organization in appropriate books. It shall be his duty to file any certificate required by any statute, federal or state. He shall give and serve all notices to members of this organization. He shall be the official custodian of records and seal of this organization. He may be one of the Officers required to sign the checks and drafts of the organization. He shall present to the membership at any meetings any communication addressed to him as secretary of organization. He shall submit to the Board of Directors any communications which shall be addressed to him as secretary of the organization. He shall attend to all correspondence of the organization and shall exercise all duties incident to the office of secretary.

### **Section 6: Assistant Secretary**

Assistant Secretary is responsible to assist the secretary and work as the secretary in his/her absence from duty.

### **Section 7: Treasurer**

The treasurer shall have the care and custody of all money belonging to the organization and shall be solely responsible for such monies and security of the organization. He shall cause to be deposited in a regular business bank or trust company a sum not exceeding \$5000 and the balance of the funds of the organization shall be deposited in a saving bank except (Unless) the Board of Directors may cause such funds to be invested in such investments as shall be legal for a non-profit corporation in this state. He must be one of the Officers who shall sign checks or drafts of the organization. No special fund may be set aside that shall make it unnecessary for the treasurer to sign the checks issued upon it. He shall render at stated periods as the Board of Directors shall determine a written account of the finances of the organization and such report shall be physically affixed to the minutes of the Board of Directors of such meeting. He shall exercise all duties incident to the office of treasurer.

### **Section 8: Assistant Treasurer**

Assistant treasurer assists the treasurer at work and will have full authority as a treasurer in his/her absence from work.

### **Section 9: Termination/Resignation**

1. Any officer can resign to the President while the President can resign to the chairman of the BOD. The vacancy thus created shall be filled by the BOD.
  2. All the matters of business for officers should be properly handed over to the new officers with proper documentations.
- 
1. Any officers may be removed by the BOD with or without cause.
  2. Any officers may be terminated if
    - He/she is found involved in criminal convictions.
    - Found acting against the interest of BCO.
    - Failed to attend two consecutive meetings, he/she shall first be requested for the written explanations and however, if failed to attend three consecutive meetings shall be given termination letter. (Reference Code-2).

## **Article 6**

### **Advisory Board**

Advisory board shall be formed by the BOD. The number of members and the tenure for this board shall remain unlimited, unless otherwise the Advisory Board Member resigns.

The so formed Board will be responsible to inspect and advise the board of directors, officers, and other committees in their activities for the better functioning and services to the community and provide necessary comments and suggestions if required.

## **Article 7**

### **Committees:**

All committees of this organization shall be formed by the BOD and their term of office shall expire along with the expiration of the tenure of BOD if not dismissed earlier. The permanent committees of this Corporation are as follows:

**Section 1: Cultural Committee:** Comprising five members formed by BOD in consent with all BCO members.

This committee will be responsible to organize and conduct all religious and cultural activities during festive occasions, public gatherings and help upcoming generations regarding culture, tradition and religion.

**Section 2: Women and children Committee:** Comprising of five members formed by BOD in consent with all BCO members.

This committee will be responsible to advocate to the issues related to women and children and provide resources in coordination with the BOD and empower them. Help the children to solve school related problems and conduct literacy classes related to Health, Banking, Financing and employment.

**Section 3: Youth and Sports Committee:** formed of five members nominated by BOD in consent with all BCO members.

This committee will be responsible to conduct and facilitate sports related programs. Suggest, engage and direct the youths towards productive and responsible duties in community services. Conduct anti-drug awareness programs, encourage and help them to attain higher level of education.

## Article 8

### Amendments and dissolution:

#### Section 1: Amendments

Except as may otherwise be specified under provisions of law, these bylaws or any of them, may only be altered, amended, or replaced and new bylaws may only be adopted by an affirmative vote of two thirds of the Board.

#### Section 2: Dissolution

The Bhutanese Community of Western State (BCO) may be dissolved by resolution taken by three quarters majority of the active members. Upon dissolution, BCO's assets will be distributed for any exempt purposes specified in section 501(C)(3) of the internal revenue code as amended or supplemented, or shall be distributed to the Federal Government or to a State or Local Government for a public purpose which the Board, at the time of dissolution shall determine. Any such assets not so disposed off shall be disposed off by the District court of the county in which the principal office of BCO is located, exclusively for such purposes or to such organization or organizations, as said court shall determine which are organized and operated exclusively for such purposes.



## Article 9

### Records, Reports and Seal

#### Section 1: Periodic Report

The board of directors shall cause an annual or periodic report required under law to be prepared and delivered to an office of this state to be so prepared and delivered within the time limit set by law. It is hereby acknowledged that as of the date of these Bylaws, the corporation is required by law to file an Annual Report/Renewal with the State of Western State Department of Commerce, Division of Corporation and Commercial code, by December 15 of each year.

#### Section 2: Corporate Records

The corporation shall keep at its principal office:

1. Minutes of all meetings and committees of the board of directors indicating the time, place, the purpose type and the attendance of the members present.
2. Accounting records of properties and business transaction, receipts, disbursements, gains and losses.
3. Copies of Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws as amended to date.
4. Copies of resolutions of the board of directors.

#### Section 3: Seal

The organization shall have a seal whose design and structure shall be determined by a committee formed by the Board of Directors. The board of directors may adopt, use and at will alter a corporate seal. Such Seal shall be kept at the principal office of the corporation. However, failure to affix the Seal shall not affect the validity of any such instrument.

#### Section 4: Inspection Rights

Every director shall have the right at any responsible time to inspect any copy of all books, records and documents of every kind and to inspect the physical properties of the corporation.

## Article 10

### Policies and Procedures

Section 1:

- BCO shall have only one bank account.
- The final decision for the utilization of the approved budgets for any projects by BOD is vested in the president of the Executive Body.
- The approval for the payment or reimbursement shall be made by the Chairman of BOD or the President of executive body, depending on the nature of the expenses. The checks shall then be signed by the treasurer or by secretary when needed.
- The financial accounts for each and every projects, programs and unrestricted expenses should be maintained and reported separately.

## Section 2:

- There should be a written complaint from member of BCO with evidence. The same procedure adapted for the submission of the resignation applies for the complaints also.
- BOD chairman and/or President of executive body shall call for the discussion meeting for the complaints and to verify the evidences. The procedure adapted for power sharing applies to this also.
- If the complains and evidences are verified and agreed upon by the majority of the discussion meeting, a termination letter will be given.
- If the complains and evidences are not verified and/or are not agreed upon by the majority,
- He/she shall continue assuming his/her office.

## Section 3:

- Under the conditions for which elections cannot be held in time, the tenure of the body can be extended for some months with the consensus of BOD, Officers, and Advisory board by calling a mass meeting.
- If the meeting of the BOD, Executive Body, Advisory body and the majority of the members feels that the existing board can work for the next tenure.

## Article 11

### Conflict of Interest and Compensation Approval Policies

#### Section 1: Purpose of Conflict of Interest Policy

The purpose of this conflict of interest policy is to protect this tax-exempt corporation's interest when it is contemplating entering into a transaction or arrangement that might benefit the private interest of an officer or director of the corporation or any "disqualified person" as defined in Section 4958 (f)(1) of the Internal Revenue Code and as amplified by Section 53.4958-3 of the IRS Regulation and which might result in a possible "excess benefit transaction" as defined in Section 4958(c)(1)(A) of the Internal Revenue Code and as amplified by Section 53.4958 of the IRS Regulations. This policy is intended to supplement but not replace any applicable state and federal laws governing conflict of interest applicable to nonprofit and charitable organizations.

#### Section 2: Definitions

53. **Interested Person:** Any director, principal officer, member of a committee with governing board deleted powers, or any other person who is a "disqualified person" as defined in Section 4958(f)(1) of the Internal Revenue Code and as amplified by Section 53.4958-3 of the IRS Regulation, who has a direct or indirect financial interest, as defined below, is an interested person.
1. **Financial Interest:** A person has a financial interest if the person has, directly or indirectly through business, investment, or family.
  2. An ownership or investment interest in any entity with which the corporation has a transaction or arrangement;

3. A compensation arrangement with the corporation or with any entity or individual with which the corporation has a transaction or arrangement; or
4. A potential ownership or investment in, or compensation arrangement with, any entity or individual with which the corporation is negotiating a transaction or arrangement.
5. Compensation includes direct and indirect remuneration as well as gifts or favors that are not insubstantial.
6. A financial interest is not necessarily a conflict of interest. Under Section 3, paragraph B, a person who has a financial interest may have a conflict of interest only if the appropriate governing board or committee decides that a conflict of interest exists.

### **Section 3: conflict of Interest Avoidance Procedures**

1. **Duty to Disclose:** In connection with any actual or possible conflict of interest, an interested person must disclose the existence of the financial interest and be given the opportunity to disclose all material facts to the directors and members of committees with governing board delegated powers considering the proposed transaction or arrangement.
2. **Determining Whether a Conflict of Interest Exist.** After disclosure of the financial interest and all material facts, any discussion with the interested person, he/she shall leave the governing board or committee meeting while the determination of a conflict of interest is discussed and voted upon. The remaining board or committee members shall decide if a conflict of interest exists.
3. **Procedures for Addressing the Conflict of Interest.** An interested person may make a presentation at the governing board or committee meeting, but after the presentation he/she shall leave the meeting during the discussion of, and the vote on, the transaction or arrangement involving the possible conflict of interest.

The chairperson of the governing board or committee shall, if appropriate, appoint a disinterested person or committee to investigate alternatives to the proposed transaction or arrangement.

After exercising due diligence, the governing board or committee shall determine whether the corporation can obtain with reasonable effort a more advantageous transaction or arrangement from a person or entity that would not give rise to a conflict of interest.

If a more advantageous transaction or arrangement is not reasonably possible under circumstances not producing a conflict of interest, the governing board or committee shall determine by a majority vote of the disinterested directors whether the transaction or arrangement is in the corporation's best interest, for its own benefit, and whether it is fair and reasonable. In conformity with the determination, it shall make its decision as to whether to enter into the transaction or arrangement.

4. **Violation of the Conflict of Interest Policy.** If the governing board or committee has reasonable cause to believe a member has failed to disclose actual or possible conflict of interest, it shall inform the member of the basis for such belief and offer the member an opportunity to explain the alleged failure to disclose

If, after hearing the member's response and making further investigation as warranted by the circumstances, the governing board or committee determines the member has failed to disclose an actual or possible conflict of interest, it shall take appropriate disciplinary and corrective action.

#### **Section 4: Records of Board and Board Committee Proceeding**

The minutes of meeting of the governing board and all committee with board delegated powers shall contain:

1. The names of the person who disclosed or otherwise were found to have a financial interest in connection with an actual or possible conflict of interest, the nature of the financial interest, any action taken to determine whether a conflict of interest was present, and the governing board's or committee's decision as to whether a conflict of interest in fact existed.
2. The names of the persons who were present for discussion and votes relating to the transaction or arrangement, the conflict of the discussion, including any alternatives to the proposed transaction or arrangement, and a record of any votes in connection with the proceeding.

#### **Section 5: Compensation Approval Policies**

A voting member of the governing board who receives compensation, directly or indirectly, from the corporation for services is precluded from voting on matters pertaining to that member's compensation.

A voting member of the governing board or any committee whose jurisdiction includes compensation matters and who receives compensation, directly or indirectly, from the corporation for services is precluded from voting on matters pertaining to that member's compensation

No voting member of the governing board or any committee whose jurisdiction includes compensation matters and who receives compensation, directly or indirectly, from the corporation, either individually or collectively, is prohibited from providing information to any committee regarding compensation.

When approving compensation for directors, officers and employees, contractors and any other compensation contract or arrangement, in addition to complying with the conflict of interest requirements and policies contained in the preceding and following section of this article as well as the preceding paragraphs of this section of this article, the board or a duly constituted compensation committee of the board shall also comply with the following additional requirements and procedures:

1. The terms of compensation shall be approved by the board or compensation committee prior to the first payment of compensation.
2. All members of the board or compensation committee who approve compensation arrangements must not have a conflict of interest with respect to the compensation arrangement as specified in IRS Regulation Section 53.4958-6(c)(3) which generally requires that each board member or committee member approving a compensation arrangement between this origination and a "disqualified person" (as defined in Section 4958(f)(1) of the Internal Revenue Code and as amplified by Section 53.4958-3 of the IRS Regulations):

3. Is not the person who is the subject of the compensation arrangement, or a family member of such person;
4. Is not in an employment relationship subject to the direction or control of the person who is the subject of the compensation arrangement;
5. Does not receive compensation or other payment subject to approval by the person who is the subject of the compensation arrangement.
6. Has no material financial interest affected by the compensation arrangement; and
7. Does not approve a transaction providing economic benefits to the person who is the subject of the compensation arrangement, who in turn has approved or will approve a transaction providing benefits to the board or committee member.
8. The board or compensation committee shall obtain and rely upon appropriate data as to comparability prior to approving the terms and compensation. Appropriate data may include the following;
9. Compensation levels paid by similarly situated organizations, both taxable and tax exempt, for functionally comparable positions, "Similarly situated" organizations are those of a similar size, purpose, and with similar resources;
10. The availability of similar services in the geographic area of this organization;
11. Current compensation surveys compiled by independent firms;
12. Actual written offers from similar institutions competing for the services of the person who is the subject of the compensation arrangement;

As allowed by IRS Regulation 4958-6, if this organization has average annual gross receipts (including contributions) for its three prior tax years of less than \$1 million, the board or compensation committee will have obtained and relied upon appropriate data as to comparability if it obtains and relies upon data on compensation paid by three comparable organizations in the same or similar communities for similar services.

1. The terms of compensation and the bases for approving them shall be recorded in written minutes of the meeting of the board or compensation committee that approved the compensation. Such documentation shall include:
2. The terms of the compensation arrangement and the date it was approved;
3. The members of the board or compensation committee who were present during debate on the transaction, those who voted on it, and the votes cast by each board or committee member;
4. The comparability data obtained and relied upon and how the data was obtained;
5. If the board or compensation committee determines that reasonable compensation for a specific position in this organization or for providing services under any other compensation arrangement with this organization is higher or lower than the range of comparability data obtained, the board or committee shall record in the minutes of the meeting the basis for its determination;
6. If the board or committee makes adjustments to comparability data due to geographic area or other specific conditions, these adjustments and the reasons for them shall be recorded in the minutes of the board or committee meeting;
7. Any actions taken with respect to determining if a board or committee member had a conflict of interest with respect to the compensation arrangement, and if so, actions taken to make sure the member with the conflict of interest did not affect or participate in the approval of the transactions (for example, a notation on the records that after a finding of conflict of interest by a member, the member with the conflict of interest was asked to, and did, leave the meeting prior to a discussion of the compensation arrangement and a taking of the votes to approve the arrangement);

8. The minutes of board or committee meetings at which compensation arrangements are approved must be prepared before the later of the date of the next board or committee meeting or 60 days after the final actions of the board or committee are taken with respect to the approval of the compensation arrangements'. The minutes must be reviewed and approved by the board and committee as reasonable, accurate, and complete within a reasonable period thereafter, normally prior to or at the next board or committee meeting following final action on the arrangement by the board or committee.

## **Section 6: Annual Statements**

Each director, principal officer, and member of a committee with governing board delegated powers, if any, shall annually sign a statement which affirms such person:

1. Has received a copy of the conflicts of interest policy;
2. Has read and understands the policy;
3. Has agreed to comply with the policy; and
4. Understands the corporation is charitable and in order to maintain its federal tax exemption it must engage primarily in activities which accomplish one or more of its tax-exempt purposes.

## **Section 7: Periodic Reviews**

To ensure the corporation operates in a manner consistent with charitable purposes and does not engage in activities that could jeopardize its tax-exempt status, periodic reviews shall be conducted. The periodic reviews shall, at a minimum, include the following subjects:

1. Whether compensation arrangements and benefits are reasonable, based in competent survey information, and the result of arm's-length bargaining.
2. Whether partnerships, joint ventures, and arrangements with management organizations conform to the corporation's written policies, are properly recorded, reflect reasonable investment or payments for goods and services, further charitable purposes, and do not result in inurement, impermissible private benefit, or in an excess benefit transaction.

**Section 8: Use of Outside Experts.** When conducting the periodic reviews as provided for in Section 7, the corporation may, but need not use outside advisors. If outside experts are used, their use shall not relieve the governing board of its responsibility for ensuring periodic reviews are conducted.

## **Article 12**

### **IRC 501(C)(3) Tax Exemption Provisions**

#### **Section 1: Limitations on Activities**

No substantial part of the activities of this corporation shall be the carrying on of propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation (except as otherwise provided by section 501(h) of the Internal Revenue Code) and this shall not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of, or in opposition to any candidate for public office.

Notwithstanding any other provisions of these Bylaws, this corporation shall not carry on any activities not permitted to be carried on:

1. By a corporation exempt from federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code or
2. By a corporation contributions to which are deductible under section 170(c)(2) of the Internal Revenue Code.

## **Section 2: Prohibition against Private Inurement**

No part of the net earnings of this corporation shall inure to the benefit of, or be distributable to, its members (if any), directors or trustees, officers, or other private 4958(f)(1) of the Internal Revenue Code and as amplified by Section 53.4958-3 of the IRS Regulation:

1. Is not the person who is the subject of the compensation arrangement, or a family member of such person.
2. Is not in an employment relationship subject to the director or control of the person who is the subject of the compensation arrangement.
3. Does not receive compensation or other payment subject to approval by the person who is the subject of the compensation arrangement.
4. Has no material financial interest affected by the compensation arrangement; and
5. Does not approve a transaction providing economic benefits to the person who is the subject to the compensation arrangement, who in turn has approved or will approve a transaction providing benefits to the board or committee member.
6. The board or compensation committee shall obtain and rely upon appropriate data as to comparability prior to approving the terms and compensation. Appropriate data may include the following:
7. Compensation levels paid by similarly situated organizations, both taxable and tax exempt, for functionally comparable positions, "Similarly situated" organizations are those of a similar size, purpose, and with similar resources.
8. The availability of similar services in the geographic area of this organization.
9. Current compensation surveys compiled by independent firms.
10. Actual written offers from similar institutions competing for the services of the person who is the subject of the compensation arrangement.

As allowed by IRS Regulation 4958-6, if this organization has average annual gross receipts (including contributors) for its three prior tax years of less than \$1 million, the board or compensation committee will have obtained and relied upon appropriate data as to comparability if it obtains and relies upon data on compensation paid by three comparable organizations in the same or similar communities for similar services.

7. The terms of compensation and the bases for approving them shall be recorded in written minutes of the meeting of the board or compensation committee that approved the compensation. Such documentation shall include:
8. The terms of the compensation arrangement and the date it was approved: empowered to pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and to make payments and distributions in furtherance of the purpose of this corporation.

## **ARTICLE 13**

## **WRITTEN CONSENT OF DIRECTORS ADOPTING BY-LAWS**

We, the undersigned, are the initial Directors of the BHUTANESE COMMUNITY IN WESTERN STATE (BCO), and in accordance with the authority granted to the Directors by these By-Laws, consent to and do hereby adopt the foregoing By-Laws, consisting of 19 pages as the By-Laws of this corporation.



**APPENDIX C: Food Inventory Foods Categorized according to Traffic Light Diet (Green, Yellow, and Red)**

Food Group	Traffic Light Color					
	Green		Yellow		Red	
	Food item	Frequency Observed/ Endorsed	Food Item	Frequency Observed/ Endorsed	Food Item	Frequency Observed/ Endorsed
Vegetable	Tomato	18	Spinach *	19	Fried Potato	22
	Cucumber	12	Cabbage *	13	Fried Pumpkin	13
	Daikon Radish	7	Mustard Leaf *	10	Fried Yam	4
	Mustard Leaf	6	Okra *	7		
	Broccoli	5	Chili Pepper *	4		
	Okra	5	Bitter Melon *	4		
	Ginger	4	Cauliflower *	3		
	Squash	3	Broccoli *	2		
	Carrot	2	Squash *	2		
	Avocado	1	Onion *	2		
	Egg Plant	1	Bamboo *	2		
	Pumpkin Leaves	1	Egg Plant *	1		
	Lambs Quarters	1	Pumpkin Leaves *	1		
	Purslane	1				
Pokeberry	1					
	Total	68	Total	70	Total	39
Fruit	Apple	22	Banana	10		
	Limes	8	Jackfruit in can	4		
	Grapes	6	Pineapple	2		
	Mango	5	Pear in can	1		
	Oranges	4	Peach in can	1		
	Pear	3				
	Peach	3				
	Grapefruit	1				
	Total	52	Total	18	Total	0
Grain	Parboiled Rice	7	Spaghetti	7	White Rice	26
	Full Grain bread	3	Cheerios	5	White Bread	5
			Rice Crispy	3	Spaghetti *	2
					Kix	1
	Total	10	Total	15	Total	34
Protein (meat and fish)	Stewed Goat	18	Chicken Thigh	16	Pepperoni	1
	Fish	4	Pork	2		
	Turkey	2				
	Pigeon	2				
	Total	26	Total	18	Total	1
Protein (Legumes, Nuts)	Lentils	29				
	Kidney Beans	11				
	Total	40	Total	0	Total	0
Dairy Products			Whole Milk	32		
			Butter	8		
			Full Fat Yogurt	7		
	Total	0	Total	47	Total	0
Snack Items					Pizza (cheese)	12
					Crackers	11
					Potato Chips	10
					Fried Chicken	10
					French Fries	9
					Fried Roti	7
					Kasaar	6
					Fried Samosa	5
					Gold Fish	1
					Cheetos	1
				Lady Fingers	1	
	Total	0	Total	0	Total	73
Spreads, Oils, Sauces, and Sugar			Vegetable Oil	8	Sugar	9
			Peanut Butter	6		
			Mustard Oil	5		
		Total	0	Total	19	Total

**APPENDIX C**  
**CONTINUED**

Food Group	Traffic Light Color					
	Green		Yellow		Red	
	Food item	Frequency Observed/ Endorsed	Food Item	Frequency Observed/ Endorsed	Food Item	Frequency Observed/ Endorsed
Beverages and Condiments	Tomato/Cilantro	17	Tsia (full milk)	33	Soda	16
	Pickle	11	Lime Pickle (oil)	1	Tang	11
	Radish Pickle	1			Chana Chatpate	6
	Okra Pickle	1			Lime aide	4
	Green Chili	1				
	Pickle					
	Pumpkin Pickle					
	<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>

Green= Recommended Every day  
Yellow= Recommended no more than 2-3 times a week  
Red= Recommended no more than once a week

**APPENDIX C**  
**CONTINUED**

**Foods on Food Inventory unable to be categorized according to Traffic Light Diet**

Food Item	Frequency Observed/ Endorsed
Curry Powder	28
Dal Bhat	21
Goat Curry Stew	16
Salt	13
Black Pepper	13
Vegetable Curry	12
American Salad	7
Chili Powder	5
Turmeric	3
Cumin	3
Cardamom	3
Mustard Seed	3
MSG	2
Subway Sandwich	2
Masala Spice Mix	1
Coriander	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>133</b>

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### PUBLICATIONS

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