Disconnect between lived experience and policy: Cultural integration of Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees during resettlement in Chicago

5/12/14

International Studies Honors Thesis
Catherine Tyson
Advisor: Dr. Galya Ruffer
Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been possible without the generous support of many people over the past year. Dr. Galya Ruffer and the Center for Forced Migration Studies ignited my passion for refugee issues two years ago, allowed me to learn about refugee resettlement and advocacy from experts, and provided me countless opportunities to develop as a researcher, a writer, and a student. Furthermore, Dr. Ruffer’s unlimited support and advice has been invaluable to every aspect of this thesis as it came to fruition. Feedback from Dr. Helen Schwartzman was vital to the development of my writing of ethnographic analysis and conversations with her have continually inspired me to delve deeper into anthropology. Sharp questions from Dr. Jessica Winegar and Nazli Ozkan while parts of this thesis were being developed in the anthropology capstone seminar improved the organization of my ideas and pushed me to make deeper insights. My graduate mentor, Jessica Pouchet, provided valuable feedback that sharpened my focus and encouraged me in this process.

My cohort in the 2014 International Studies Honors Program have been an endless source of support, inspiration, and encouragement, without which I would not have been able to complete this academic venture. I would also like to thank my family who have provided me with love and support throughout this process. I want to thank the staff at the Bhutanese Community Association of Illinois and the Iraqi Mutual Aid Society for their support, warmth, and their tireless work to help the refugees in their communities. I also want to send my sincerest gratitude to the participants who I met at both of these locations. Without their willingness to share their experiences and thoughts with me, this entire thesis – and the incredible experience that I had conducting fieldwork - would not have been possible.
Abstract: During the process of resettlement, a major challenge with which these refugees must grapple is cultural integration, navigating the alien cultural landscape of the United States of America and their place within it. The U.S. resettlement regime is mainly comprised of The Refugee Act, which constructs cultural integration mainly in neoliberal terms of economic productivity and self-sufficiency, regardless of differences between refugee groups. However, this top-down, “one size fits all” construction of cultural integration fails to take the actual views of integration held by the refugees and their distinct needs into account. Ultimately, this disconnect in views of integration leaves many refugees “integrated” according to the U.S. understanding but remaining unintegrated outsiders within their new country. This thesis argues that the view of cultural integration in resettlement policy is disconnected from the views of cultural integration held by refugees themselves, to the detriment of the refugees that the policy is supposed to serve. This thesis then proposes indicators of integration for a resettlement framework that enables organizations to develop programs that more effectively aid refugees.
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Chapter I - Introduction: The Problem of Resettlement

Jatan\(^1\) looked down at his rough hands and sighed. After living the past three decades of his life in a refugee camp in Nepal, he had come to the U.S., hopeful about creating a new future for himself, his wife, and their three children. However, upon arrival, the family’s cash assistance did not last long and he had to find a job as soon as possible in order to support his family, a difficult feat for someone who had no work experience valuable to U.S. employers. After a few months, Jatan had found a job as a dishwasher but was now at a mutual aid association\(^2\) in hopes of finding a second, as his pay was not enough to support the family. But this task would not be easy, as Jatan had no time to improve his broken English or take classes that would allow him to find a job to support his family. Most significantly, Jatan did not feel he belonged in the U.S. given that he could not speak to Americans, provide well for his family, nor understand much of what went on around him. Jatan wanted to go home, even if “home” was a refugee camp with few resources and no opportunity.

Jatan is part of the Bhutanese refugee community in Chicago, a growing refugee group in an area already home to several refugee groups including a particularly large Iraqi refugee community. After fleeing from their homelands and waiting for years in refugee camps and urban areas for resettlement, Iraqi and Bhutanese refugees, who are the focus of this study, began

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\(^1\) All names presented are pseudonyms
\(^2\) A mutual aid association (MAA), within the context of refugee resettlement, is an organization established by members of one ethnic group in order to aid refugees and immigrants of that same ethnic group.
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to be resettled in the United States in 2003 and 2008 respectively. During the process of resettlement, a major challenge with which these refugees must grapple is cultural integration, navigating the alien cultural landscape of the United States of America and their place within it. They spend years trying to learn the language, social customs, job skills and infrastructure of a country to which they are not at all accustomed and in which they are a marginalized group. To some, the gulf between norms of American culture and their native cultures seem impossible to bridge and they struggle to reconcile what they know and what they now must know in order to adapt to a new life in the U.S. The U.S. resettlement regime is the primary resource for this process and, as such, comes to define what all refugees must know for successful integration.

The U.S. resettlement regime is mainly comprised of The Refugee Act, which, as this thesis will argue, constructs cultural integration mainly in neoliberal terms of economic productivity and self-sufficiency, significantly as an effort for the U.S. to avoid financial burden from refugee populations. In the absence of directly consulting refugees, anthropology has produced insight into the lived experience of cultural integration that could benefit resettlement policy. However, this top-down construction of cultural integration fails to take the actual views of integration held by the refugees and their distinct needs into account. Ultimately, this disconnect in views of integration leaves many refugees in the difficult space occupied by Jatan, “integrated” according to the U.S. understanding but remaining unintegrated outsiders within their new country. This thesis argues that the view of cultural integration in resettlement policy is disconnected from the views of cultural integration held by refugees themselves, to the detriment of the refugees that the policy is supposed to serve.

The current resettlement regime ultimately leaves some, if not many, refugees still struggling even after the official period of resettlement is long over. The consistent state of
poverty for the Bhutanese and many Iraqi, climbing rates of suicide among Bhutanese refugees, and the various accounts of frustration and isolation expressed by Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees are only a few such indicators that the current approach of U.S. resettlement policy is not ultimately serving the population that it purports to serve. There is currently no single mechanism by which to approach the gap between the goals of the policy concerning integration and the lived experience of integration during resettlement. Within anthropological literature, the theme of cultural integration is relatively broad, but has been increasingly framed in terms of language acquisition, status incongruity, and preservation of the culture of origin (Chao, 2013; Warriner, 2007; Warner, 2007; Spindler, 1989; McDade, 2002). There is little effort to connect the views of integration held by refugees to the larger policies that inform their resettlement experience. On the other hand, the examination of refugee resettlement policy and practices remains largely within the purview of sociologists and political scientists who emphasize the neoliberal foundations of a national ideology of integration (Shrestha, 2011; Bloemraad, 2011; Hein, 1993; Joppke, 2012; Ong, 2003). These discussions, focused on the institutions of policymaking, largely fail to take the individual refugee and their understandings of integration into account, even when they may affect the success of resettlement policies.

The purpose of this study is to bridge the gap between discussions of cultural integration and resettlement policy within anthropological literature and sociological literature and analyze the relationship between the understandings of integration within distinct refugee communities and U.S. resettlement policy. In Chapter II, I argue that current U.S. resettlement legislation constructs cultural integration in neoliberal terms for a productive citizen – economically self-sufficient, independence, and English language acquisition. In Chapter III, I argue that, within anthropological scholarship, trends in the study of cultural integration have been English
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language acquisition, resolution of status incongruity, and cultural preservation, and that, within sociological scholarship, cultural integration has been studied as a construction of neoliberal values – economic self-sufficiency, independence, “laissez-faire”, and “future-oriented” activity.

I then highlight the disconnect between these two fields regarding studies of cultural integration and analyze the conceptual framework for studies of integration created by Ager and Strang. In Chapter IV, I introduce my research site, populations – the Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees – and methodology, based in participant-observation and semi-formal interviews. In Chapter V, I present an ethnographic case study of Bhutanese refugees in Chicago, arguing that the foci of their understanding of cultural integration are English language acquisition, cultural visibility, and cultural preservation. In Chapter VI, I present a case study of Iraqi refugees in Chicago, arguing that the foci of their understanding of cultural integration are English language acquisition, socioeconomic mobility, social bonds with Americans, and, to a lesser extent, cultural preservation.

After examining understandings of cultural integration within each refugee population and within U.S. resettlement legislation, Chapter VII argues that the individual refugee groups’ understandings of cultural integration are largely disconnected from the stated objectives of resettlement policy as concerns integration. In highlighting this disconnect, I also interrogate and question the assumption that a uniform policy based in a culturally American notion of integration is the most effective approach to resettlement of culturally distinct refugee populations. Instead, this study concludes that the emphasis of integration in resettlement policy should focus on indicators of integration derived from the views of the refugees themselves in order to more effectively aid refugees during resettlement. This study contributes to our understanding of cultural integration as viewed by different refugee groups in relation to existing
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resettlement policy and highlights the need for further anthropological studies into the experience of refugee resettlement in order to better inform resettlement policy. Such studies are needed if we are to more successfully meet the needs of all refugees and bridge the gap between discussions of resettlement policy and cultural integration within current academic literature.
Chapter II - The U.S. Resettlement Regime

In this chapter, I outline the background and structure of the resettlement regime within the U.S., arguing that it is based primarily on The Refugee Act of 1980. Although The Refugee Act is well intentioned, there are several problematic elements within it. There are no guidelines provided for the establishment of language, employment and case-management services or quality of these services, and there are also problematic elements with regards to the location-specific placement and aid of refugees. Ultimately, these dysfunctional elements of The Refugee Act, and the U.S. resettlement regime, are rooted in the prioritization of the government avoiding financial burden over the effective integration of the refugees. An additional problematic element of The Refugee Act is its treatment of all refugee populations as a uniform interest group. The uniform treatment of all refugees is particularly troubling in that it seems out of touch with the reality of the diverse refugee experiences present in the world today. A final problematic aspect of The Refugee Act is the future-oriented emphasis on economic self-sufficiency and provisions for child refugees to further their education. Furthermore, although the operation and priorities of the U.S. resettlement system may be clear to the policymakers, they remain shrouded in mystery and confusion to the actual population that the system is supposed to aid.

Resettlement of refugees in a third country is one of three sustainable solutions for refugee populations promoted by the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). A third country is defined as a country to which a refugee is resettled after leaving their country of origin, or first country, and seeking immediate refuge in a neighboring,
Disconnect between lived experience and policy: Cultural integration of Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees during resettlement in Chicago or second, country. In order to be eligible for resettlement, individuals need to first be interviewed by UNHCR officials and meet the definition of “refugee” in order to gain the official status of a refugee. According to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (189 UNTS 150. 28 July 1951), and amended in the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (606 UNTS 267. 4 October 1967), a refugee is:

“A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his or her 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 to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” 189 UNTS 150(I)(A)(2)

After meeting this definition, refugees are then assessed according to various submission categories: legal and/or physical protection needs, survivors of torture and/or violence, medical needs, women and girls at risk, family reunification, children and adolescents at risks, and a lack of foreseeable alternative durable solutions. If a refugee falls into any of these categories, he or she may be eligible for quicker resettlement than others (UNHCR, 2011). Although, as of December 2012, there were approximately 15.4 million refugees in the world, with 10.4 million registered with UNHCR, the number of refugees resettled each year has remained relatively consistent around 80,000 (UNHCR - Resettlement).

The U.S. is currently one of only twenty-two countries that accept refugees for resettlement (UNHCR – Resettlement), and The Refugee Act (Public Law 96-212. 94 Stat. 102. 17 March 1980) is the primary legislation governing the U.S. refugee resettlement regime. Prior to 1980, refugee aid within the U.S. was determined primarily by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (Public Law 82-414. 66 Stat. 163, 27 June 1952), the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962 (Public Law 87-510. 76 Stat. 121. 28 June 1962), individual
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refugee aid programs directed towards Cuban, Indochinese, and “Soviet” refugees, and additional “ad hoc” measures (Zucker, 1983). However, several concerns regarding the state of refugee assistance within the U.S. began to emerge in the 1960s. The administrative problems resulting from the use of temporary, “ad hoc” measures concerned policymakers in particular, especially as refugees continued to arrive in the U.S. (Anker, 1982). Additionally, the large numbers of refugees entering the country under these “ad hoc” measures caused public concerns of a floodgate scenario in the absence of a permanent policy (Leibowitz, 1983). Furthermore, there were concerns, from policymakers and academics alike, that the state of refugee resettlement allowed the government to tailor its aid to suit political interests, particularly with regards to refugees from Soviet countries (Anker 1982). Although initial recommendations for a permanent resettlement policy began in 1965, these recommendations did not find full support until 1978 due, in part, to inaction by the Senate Subcommittee on Immigration and Naturalization that held no public hearings for 10 years and to which bills regarding refugee resettlement were introduced. Another concern that kept bills for a permanent resettlement structure was the potential cost of resettling refugees. However, by the 1970s, statistics were available to demonstrate that the average cost of resettling a refugee, approximately $4,000, was paid back by the refugee within a few years of resettlement (Kennedy, 1981).

Written and enacted in 1980, The Refugee Act was intended to provide a permanent and systematic procedure for the admission of refugees to the United States and amend previous immigration legislation, such as the Immigration and Nationality Act and the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act. In addition to creating a procedure for refugee admissions, the main goals of the Refugee Act were to create a new definition of “refugee” based on within the UN 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol on the Status of Refugees and establish a uniform and
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effective resettlement policy to aid refugee arrivals. *The Refugee Act* set a cap on annual refugee admissions at 50,000 individuals, but that cap may be increased from year to year. Furthermore, *The Refugee Act* established the Office of the United States Coordinator for Refugee Affairs and the Office of Refugee Resettlement to coordinate and implement a range of federal programs in order to assist refugees during resettlement.

Upon examination of *The Refugee Act*, it is clear that its primary goal is establishing economic self-sufficiency, reflecting the economic and future-oriented view of integration in welfare policy as discussed in chapter III. Indeed, section (1)(A)(i) specifically stipulates that the purpose of the Office of Refugee Resettlement is to “make available sufficient resources for employment training and placement in order to achieve economic self-sufficiency among refugees as quickly as possible.” In accordance with this goal, *The Refugee Act* states that the U.S. government is responsible to make services for employment training and placement, English language learning, and case-management available to refugees through partnership with local resettlement agencies, with the aforementioned areas being the only services required to receive federal funding (Footnotes for Sec. 411, (1)(B)(ii)-(iii)). Interestingly enough, far more of *The Refugee Act* is dedicated to the requirements that must be met for organizations seeking funding through it than to the actual programs and elements that will define the refugee resettlement system.

With *The Refugee Act* establishing guidelines, a systematic procedure for the arrival and resettlement of refugees has been in place for the past few decades. Once refugees are accepted by the U.S., the federal government works with state governments and resettlement agencies throughout the country in order to determine where the refugees will be placed. Since 2000, Illinois has received approximately 23,220 refugees from 66 countries and the bulk of that
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number has been resettled in Chicago and the surrounding suburbs (Sorrel-Dejerine, 2013).

Once the geographic location of their resettlement is determined, refugees are assigned to resettlement agencies that provide immediate assistance, such as providing food and housing, upon their arrival. Resettlement agencies exist within the U.S. resettlement system – and receive federal and state funding - in order to aid refugees during their transition to life in the U.S not only by providing the services outlined in The Refugee Act, such as English instruction, employment preparedness, and case management, but also additional services such as U.S. cultural orientation courses and mental health services. Additionally, resettlement agencies act as the medium through which federal funds for a refugee upon their arrival are distributed. Refugees are also usually referred to mutual aid associations, organizations based in an ethnic community that assist refugees of their ethnicity, by the resettlement agencies or members of their ethnic community for additional support. Both resettlement agencies and mutual aid associations seek public and private grants and pursue private donations, but, unlike resettlement agencies, mutual aid associations must depend entirely on grants and donations since they receive no direct government funding.

Although The Refugee Act is well intentioned, there are several problematic elements within it. First of all, there are no guidelines provided for the establishment of language, employment and case-management services or quality of these services. As a result, the actual services can vary widely across geographic locations and between resettlement agencies. Additionally, one of the main goals of The Refugee Act is avoiding the “duplication of services” (4)(A). Although this goal seems economically prudent in order to avoid allocating several fund sources for the same service, it creates funding gaps, particularly due to confusion by resettlement and government workers over which government funds or agency is obligated to
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cover certain services. This particular issue with *The Refugee Act* was noted in a recent report to Congress, but no notable steps have been taken to change it (Bruno, 2011).

There are also a couple of problematic elements with regards to the location-specific placement and aid of refugees. Although *The Refugee Act* notes that initial cash assistance should vary based on the relative cost-of-living in different locations of the country, a refugee or entire household may still not receive enough aid due to unreliable or stingy metrics used to determine cost-of-living. The problem of faulty metrics was also noted in the previously mentioned study (Bruno, 2011). Although there is no readily available approximation of funds received by refugees resettled in Chicago, these funds must be supplemented through TANF benefits, food stamps, and private donations received by resettlement agencies. Ultimately, these dysfunctional elements of *The Refugee Act*, and the U.S. resettlement regime, are rooted in the prioritization of the government avoiding financial burden over the effective integration of the refugees.

An additional problematic element of *The Refugee Act* is its treatment of all refugee populations as a uniform interest group. This approach is understandable because it is difficult to tailor resettlement policy to fit the needs of every single national, ethnic, religious, political, and social group. Furthermore, *The Refugee Act* itself was written partly as a reaction against the previous measures that were written for specific groups. However, by treating all refugees uniformly, *The Refugee Act* does not recognize that refugees arrive in various states of preparedness to succeed in resettlement and integration into the broader American context. The uniform treatment of all refugees is particularly problematic in that it seems out of touch with the reality of the diverse refugee experiences present in the world today. Refugees vary according to a myriad of factors, including how long they have lived as refugees, the resources and
environment present in their second country, and the relative resources available to those living in refugee camps as opposed to those living outside of them. Depending on their background, some refugees arrive in the U.S. with proficiency in English, exposure to a formal educational system, and/or extensive employment experience that other refugees do not possess. With the experiences and knowledge that they bring with them, the former group will successfully integrate, according to the U.S. understanding of integration. However, the latter group will struggle even though both groups are provided with the same resources under The Refugee Act. In chapter VI, I discuss this particular problem in relation to the vast differences between the Iraqi and Bhutanese refugee populations.

A final problematic aspect of The Refugee Act is the future-oriented emphasis on economic self-sufficiency and provisions for child refugees to further their education. While it is beneficial to consider how the resettled refugee families will fare two or three generations later, this approach also leads to the neglect of some immediate issues faced by refugees. While refugee children may be able to further their education and work towards higher-salaried jobs, their parents and the immediate breadwinners are provided with a bare minimum of support in their own resettlement experience. In many cases, refugee adults must simply make do with whatever jobs they can find and whatever English they manage to gain in their initial resettlement period while their children can, realistically, learn English fluently, further their educations, and work towards stable, well-paying careers. This may seem the only possible result of the fact that children cannot immediately work, but it is hardly a satisfying result to an entire generation of refugees that end resettlement, able to neither access non-menial jobs nor feel a part of American culture.
In the previous paragraphs, I have outlined the way in which the U.S. resettlement regime operates, as based in economically oriented goals and view of integration of the U.S. However, this approach has led to many of the problems encountered by refugees in resettlement that we see today. Although the operation and priorities of the U.S. resettlement system may be clear to the policymakers, they remain shrouded in mystery and confusion to the actual population that the system is supposed to aid. Given these problematic elements, I set out, in the next chapter, to understand the ways in which integration has been studied in anthropological and sociological literature and, in Chapters V and VI, how integration was viewed within two different refugee groups, the Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees of Chicago.
Chapter III - Literature Review: What is Cultural Integration?

Integration is a messy concept since it is used by many but understood differently by most (Robinson 1998). Although there is no single accepted definition or model of integration, integration is both a goal of policy and subject of intensive examination within academia. While anthropological literature has focused on cultural integration in terms of English language acquisition, resolution of status incongruity, and preservation of culture of origin, sociological literature notes that cultural integration within welfare policy, including resettlement policy, is economic-oriented, future-oriented, and based in characteristics of a productive neoliberal citizen. Since I am concerned with understanding the relationship between the perspectives of integration held within resettlement policy and by the refugees themselves, it is necessary to examine cultural integration within both sociological and anthropological literature. Furthermore, I examine the discussions of refugee resettlement within anthropological and sociological literature, highlighting the gap of consideration between cultural integration and resettlement policy.

Cultural integration in Sociological Literature Regarding Welfare Policy

Much scholarship dealing with resettlement policy - or public welfare policy at large - is situated within sociological or political discourses. However, most literature regarding refugee resettlement policy within these disciplines approaches policy as the subject of analysis within
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the international or national political context (Fass, 1985; Anker, 1983; Winder, 1990; Joppke, 2012; Ott, 2011; Oakley, 1996). Although not focused on the local level of specific refugee populations and organizations, this collection of literature greatly informed my understanding of the way in which cultural integration is perceived and enacted by the U.S. government.

According to this scholarship, integration in U.S. refugee resettlement policy relies upon neoliberal notions of a productive citizen – self-sufficiency, independence, and a “laissez-faire” attitude (Bloemraad, 2011). These characteristics can be distilled from an understanding of the broader neoliberal sociopolitical context of the creation of these policies (Joppke, 2012). These neoliberal characteristics are also communicated in the way in which The Refugee Act, (Public Law 96-212. 94 Stat. 102., 17 March 1980) itself is written, notably in the specific types of provisions made for federally funded integration activities. As discussed in the previous chapter, activities that receive federal funding are those deemed by the U.S. government to be necessary for successful integration in these neoliberal terms. In her study, Shrestha (2011) notes that the majority of activities funded by federal and state grants are those that focus on English language acquisition and employment placement, which would hopefully enable the refugees to become self-sufficient, independent, and, therefore, successfully integrated.

Cultural integration in resettlement policy has also been observed to be economic-oriented and “future-oriented,” meaning that it is oriented towards benefiting future generations, (Keles, 2008). As “future-oriented,” cultural integration in policy focuses on meeting long-term integration for subsequent generations, even though it results in the neglect of immediate challenges of integration (Keles, 2008; Fass, 1985). The economic-orientation of cultural integration within policy indicates that cultural integration is much more about integration into “the culture of the economy” than actual cultural activities and characteristics. This particular
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insight – that of cultural integration in policy being more about economic benefit as evident within The Refugee Act – provided a point of stark contrast with cultural integration as perceived by the Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees.

Additionally, sociological studies have demonstrated the restricting impact of current refugee resettlement policy on the activities of refugee aid organizations (Shrestha, 2011; Hein, 1997). Through government grants, resettlement policy shapes the sphere of integration activities sponsored by aid organizations and, therefore, the activities available to resettled refugees. Hein (1997) observes that federal grants carry stipulations for the types of activities that they can be used to fund, limiting services at resettlement agencies to only those activities for which they can obtain funding even if this means that the needs of their refugee clients are not fully met. Shrestha (2011) goes further by demonstrating that these grants can also influence the type of relationship that service providers can have with their refugee clients, often creating aid environments that are perceived to be more hostile and unwelcoming. These insights both shaped my understanding of the organizational environments with which the Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees interacted and hold implications for the value of examining the direct impact of policy on the refugees themselves.

Cultural Integration in Anthropological Literature

Anthropological study focuses on the individual within – and as a product of – their cultural context, so discussions of cultural integration within anthropology arise from this basis of inquiry. Although cultural integration is a broad topic within anthropology, three important, interrelated trends emerge across studies: English language acquisition, resolution of status incongruity, and cultural preservation. English language acquisition is the learning and mastery
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of the English language, resolution of status incongruity is an individual grappling with conflicting messages regarding their social status within a multicultural context, and cultural preservation is the preservation of one’s culture of origin. However, a major gap in cultural integration within anthropological literature is that the larger political and legislative constraints on cultural integration activities are not brought into discussion with the lived experience of cultural integration. While legislative suggestions may be discussed briefly in the conclusions of anthropological studies, the existing legislation that influences the scope of integration activities in which individuals may engage is rarely considered during the analysis of their cultural integration activities and processes. Without acknowledgement or analysis of the prescribed realm of cultural integration activities set by legislation, current scholarship may be unable to view or demonstrate the full reality of cultural integration in everyday life.

As mentioned, a consistent trend in the approach to cultural integration within anthropological scholarship has been a focus on English language acquisition. A major aspect of the discussion regarding English language acquisition is its role in establishing a sense of belonging that is necessary to feeling integrated. Chao (2013) observes that, when immigrant parents facilitated their children’s English language acquisition, the immigrant adolescents’ sense of belonging to the American middle class strengthened. Additionally, anthropological scholarship has also focused on generational differences in the ability to learn and master the English language. For instance, the time and power invested in a formal, full-time school environment has been argued to enable immigrant and refugee children to learn English more swiftly and easily than their parents. Chao (2013) notes that the power embedded within the school context allowed Chinese immigrant adolescents to succeed academically. Generational
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differences in the facility of learning English was confirmed in my own fieldwork (below, chapters V and VI).

English language acquisition has also been examined as a catalyst for economic mobility. Conversely, a lack of English language proficiency is noted as a barrier to economic advancement and social integration, even if English language proficiency ultimately guarantees neither of those things. Warriner (2007) states that English acquisition is viewed by Sudanese refugees as a gateway to “good” jobs and “personal growth,” but concludes that English proficiency does not always result in economic self-sufficiency or social integration. This particular point proved important in my own analysis of the disconnect between U.S. resettlement policy and the lived experience of integration. Although English language acquisition is considered a main tenet of cultural integration by U.S. resettlement policy, Iraqi, and Bhutanese refugees, I observed that English proficiency did not guarantee “successful” cultural integration.

In addition to a focus on English language acquisition, another trend within anthropological scholarship is a focus on the resolution of status incongruity. Status incongruity is characterized by conflicting messages from two different cultures that inform one’s status relative to others, and resolution of status incongruity is the attempt to internally reconcile these conflicting messages (McDade 2002; Spindler 1989). Demonstrating an overlap with issues of English acquisition, the stress associated with status incongruity has been noted as adversely affecting learning ability. Spindler (1989) examined the interaction of the Menominee Indians with mainstream American culture, arguing that concepts of the self and its implications for academic successes and failures are interrelated. This particular insight – understanding concepts of the self in order to facilitate academic success – highlights the interrelated nature of
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English language acquisition and cultural visibility; if an authority figure understands the differing self concepts bombarding students, they will be able to better facilitate successful learning. For instance, the Menominee students in Spindler’s study were grappling with conflicting messages from their Menominee culture and that of mainstream American culture: one in which their self-esteem is linked to the ability to be patient and another in which their self-esteem is linked to success in timed test-taking. Once the teacher of the class realized this struggle for his students, he was better able to adapt his teaching and evaluation methods to effectively teach and test his students. This particular insight also raised the question of how much more refugee students could learn if resettlement policy engaged cultural awareness in outlining resettlement programs and services.

Additionally, issues of status incongruity were mainly situated within contexts of intergenerational conflict. Within this frame of analysis, different generations were viewed as having differing reactions to conflicting messages of status, with the older generation almost always struggling the most with the stress and resolution of status incongruity (McDade 2002; Smith-Hefner 1993). Although these insights allowed me to better understand the different challenges in cultural integration for refugees of different generations when conducting my fieldwork and analysis, the absence of status incongruity scholarship with regards to policy further demonstrated a need to bring these two ideas into discussion with one another. Many refugees deal with issues of status incongruity when they move from one society to another. By considering the psychological and social stresses that status incongruity entails, resettlement policy could provide programs to more effectively help refugees adapt to their new environment and, therefore, integrate more swiftly and successfully. Although I ultimately discuss cultural visibility, rather than status incongruity, as a focal point for the Bhutanese refugees, scholarship
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regarding status incongruity informed my understanding of the stress of conflicting cultural messages and the barrier erected by a neglect of cultural difference.

A third important trend within anthropological literature regarding cultural integration is a focus on preservation of the culture of origin. A major insight, ultimately confirmed in my own fieldwork, is the importance of the intergenerational transfer of cultural traditions and values to older refugee generations. Smith-Hefner (1993) demonstrates that Khmer refugee parents valued transferring their cultural values to their children even at the expense of their academic success and economic mobility. Not only has intergenerational transfer of culture been observed as a priority for older refugee generations, cultural preservation has been argued to be a central element of maintaining psychological wellbeing. In her account of Cambodian refugees, Ong (2003) demonstrates that the refugees often felt abandoned by Buddha as they struggled to hold onto their original cultural values. When the refugees felt that their culture of origin had left them, they exhibited signs of depression and suicidal behavior. This particular insight offered a striking parallel with my own data, as I found that one of the main reasons for beginning a traditional Nepali dance group was to ward off stress and suicidal behavior, as discussed further in chapter V.

Overall, there is currently a dearth of anthropological scholarship that explores issues of refugee resettlement policy within the U.S. and throughout the world, with a few studies minimally considering public policy of any kind in relation to resettled refugees (Shrestha, 2011; Keles, 2008; Brown, 2011; Wedel et al., 2005). As opposed to its approach to cultural integration, the anthropological community has approached study of resettlement policy mainly on the national and organizational level. The only study that directly discusses the relationship between policy and the lived experience of resettled refugees is Brown (2011), which provides
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analysis of the ways in which policy and the legal status of “refugee” influence the ways in which Liberian refugees viewed citizenship and citizenship-making processes. Through analysis of interviews, Brown found that, unlike other legal immigrants, Liberian refugees invoke their refugee status to describe a strong, personal relationship with the U.S. government and discerned themselves from Liberian immigrants who were not refugees, establishing themselves as a unique body with great power in U.S. political hierarchy (145). While this particular article structured my understanding of the ways in which the legal status created by U.S. policies impacts the refugee experience, I ultimately found that it held greater implications for understanding the way in which the U.S. citizen is structured within U.S. legislation, i.e. the particular characteristics and rights of the citizen.

As noted in the previous discussion of U.S. resettlement policy scholarship, anthropological scholarship lacks any significant consideration of political or legislative constraints to cultural integration within the lived experience. While there are many important insights made regarding cultural integration in policy and lived experience, there is currently no discourse that assesses these insights alongside each other. Upon examination of current literature dealing with cultural integration, there is much that could be gained by examining current resettlement policy and its underlying ideology in conjunction with trends in anthropological literature. As demonstrated above, some anthropological literature discusses issues of cultural integration within the context of resettlement services and education, often emphasizing the necessity of an understanding of differing cultural messages and dynamics in improving these services. Since U.S. resettlement policy actively dictates which services receive federal funding and attention, scholarship regarding cultural integration would benefit from examination of policy.
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**Conceptual Framework**

It is clear that the understandings of integration within anthropological and sociological literature have significant gaps between them. Utilizing just one of these approaches prevents a holistic understanding of the most effective ways in which to support refugees during the resettlement – and integration - process. Therefore, it is necessary to engage both the understandings of integration in policy and anthropological studies when studying refugee resettlement policy. Fortunately, there is at least one other study of refugee resettlement in which the authors recognized the gaps between integration in policy and lived experience.

In order to bridge the gap between the individual and policy, Ager and Strang (2008) proposed a “two-way” understanding of integration that engaged both the ideas of integration held by refugees themselves and those present within refugee policy. In their study of cultural integration of refugee communities, they sought to determine if it was possible to produce an operational definition of “integration” that combined elements of integration important to both the refugees and policymakers. In order to construct this framework, Ager and Strang first reviewed 200 “indicators of integration” proposed in the Council of Europe report ‘Measurements and Indicators of Integration’ in addition to 49 indicators from other policy sources. They then interrogated this preliminary analysis of integration through fieldwork within refugee-impacted communities in order to understand what the refugees themselves considered “indicators” of integration. Ager and Strang then viewed the “indicators” of integration within policy in relation to the “indicators” for the refugees themselves, combining these views in order to create their ultimate framework. Ultimately, the framework broke integration into four distinct subcategories: markers and means, social connection, facilitators, and foundation.
Markers and means are the “public outcomes” that demonstrate successful integration within the resettlement policy, social connection is social relationships both within the refugee community and those outside of it that are essential to feeling integrated, facilitators are activities or knowledge that remove barriers to integration, and the foundation is the rights of the refugee and path to citizenship. Perhaps most significantly, this model holds the “public outcomes,” or markers and means, that indicate successful integration to policy makers to be inextricably linked to the social, cultural, and educational processes – or social connection and facilitators – of integration that may only seem relevant to the individual refugee.

A key benefit of the inductive approach utilized by Ager and Strang is that the “indicators” of integration are derived from the refugees themselves. As they noted, the “indicators” of integration within policy are primarily “public outcomes” that “represent achievement” in certain areas (169). However, they recognized the problem of viewing achievement as a “marker of integration;” even if a refugee achieves in certain areas, they may not actually be integrated. By utilizing an inductive approach to understanding integration, Ager and Strang ensured that their framework of integration would be a relevant and effective tool for determining whether integration was actually taking place within the target populations. Similarly, I am using an inductive approach in order to derive the most relevant and effective understanding of integration as possible.

Although the conceptual framework offered by Ager and Strang provides an excellent foundation for studies of refugee resettlement, it ultimately falls short in a few key areas, indicating a need to adapt this approach for each new study – including my own. A key aspect is that their study of refugee resettlement is based within the resettlement regime of the U.K. Although both the U.K. and U.S. both adhere to foundational international refugee legislation,
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such as the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (606 UNTS 267. 4 October 1967), the resettlement regimes of each are greatly influenced by their own domestic legislation.

Another shortfall is the age of this study, having been published in 2008. Although the inductive approach to constructing the conceptual frame surely transcends time, it must be noted that perceptions of integration and the content of domestic refugee policy, around which Ager and Strang organize an understanding of integration, can change in even six years.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I highlighted common trends within both anthropological and sociological literature concerning cultural integration and refugee resettlement policy. Ultimately, I noted that, within anthropological discourse, English language acquisition, resolution of status incongruity, and cultural preservation are key trends of cultural integration to refugee and immigrant populations. Within sociological discourse, I demonstrated that neoliberal values of self-sufficiency, independence, and future-orientation are key trends of cultural integration within public welfare policy. Although both fields provide excellent insight into cultural integration, the major downfall of this existing literature is that the cultural integration within refugee populations and integration within resettlement policy are not discussed together, preventing a holistic understanding of integration from being attained. Fortunately, it is possible to bring ideas of cultural integration within refugee populations and policy into discussion with one another, as Ager and Strang did in their 2008 study. Their study not only provides a model for future definitions of integration, but also demonstrates the value of utilizing an inductive approach, with indicators of integration originating from the refugees themselves, to studies of integration and the development of more effective resettlement policies. In the following
chapters, I utilize this inductive approach in my fieldwork with the Iraqi and Bhutanese refugees in order to discern the ways in which they understand cultural integration during resettlement.
Chapter IV – Research Site, Population, and Methodology

Although there are many distinct refugee populations within the U.S., I ultimately chose to study two populations that have been of particular focus in the U.S. resettlement regime in recent years in proportion to the annual quota of resettlement spaces and have very different cultural, cultural, social, religious, educational, and economic backgrounds: the Bhutanese and Iraqi. In recent years, U.S. resettlement priority has shifted to a few populations, notably the Bhutanese. Although there was no explicitly stated reason for the shift in attention to Bhutanese refugees, it could likely be argued that this was due to the UNHCR’s appeal to resettlement as the only remaining solution for Bhutanese refugees. The first Bhutanese refugees arrived in Chicago in 2008 and now live mainly in the Devon and Roger’s Park neighborhoods. There are now roughly 1,500 Bhutanese refugees living in Chicago. They are first assigned to different resettlement agencies with which to work for the first six months of resettlement, such as World Relief and Heartland Alliance, and are then served by the Bhutanese Community Association of Illinois (BCAI).

The U.S. initially shifted attention to resettlement of Iraqi refugees in 2003 in order to aid Iraqis who had assisted the U.S. army during its military operations within Iraq. As demonstrated previously, Iraq had become a dangerous place for Iraqis who had worked with the U.S. military. Since 2009, Iraq has been the leading country of nationality for refugees resettled to the U.S., constituting roughly 25% of refugees resettled since then (UNHCR – Resettlement).
The first Iraqi refugees arrived in Chicago in 2003 and now live mainly in the Roger’s Park and Albany Park neighborhoods. Additionally, there are many other Iraqi refugees that have been resettled in the Skokie and Niles suburbs. There are now roughly 3,000 Iraqi refugees living in the Chicago area and roughly 800 more Iraqi refugees are expected over the next several years (IMAS).

I conducted ethnographic fieldwork for eight weeks during the summer of 2013 in order to understand how the refugees themselves viewed integration in resettlement. During my fieldwork, I was affiliated with both the Bhutanese Community Association of Illinois (BCAI), located in the Devon neighborhood of Chicago (see Figure 4.1) and the Iraqi Mutual Aid Society (IMAS), located within the Roger’s Park neighborhood of Chicago (see Figure 4.2). This affiliation allowed me access to the populations of Iraqi and Bhutanese refugees that were involved in their services and were at various stages of their resettlement experience. The specific population of my study consisted of adult Iraqi and Bhutanese refugee men and women, aged 18 and older. The Bhutanese refugees were Lhotsampa (Bhutanese of Nepali origin,
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discussed further in chapter v) and had all arrived in the united states between 6 months and five years ago. the iraqi refugees were all ethnically iraqi, predominantly sunni muslims, and had arrived in the united states between 2003 and 2013.

figure 4.2. location of imas in the roger’s park neighborhood

bcai was founded in 2010 by resettled bhutanese refugees and aids bhutanese refugees resettled to the chicago area. similarly, iraqi mutual aid society was founded in 2008 by the iraqi community in chicago in order to assist iraqi refugees in the chicago metropolitan area. like other non-profit organizations, mutual aid associations often apply for federal, state, and private grants in order to obtain funding for various services and programs. although funding is necessary in order to operate, the programming of mutual aid associations can be constrained by the type of grants that they receive. currently, bcai operates on limited funding as a subsidiary organization of the pan-african association, a larger mutual aid association serving mainly sub-saharan refugees. recently awarded a federal grant for the establishment of a legal services division, imas has obtained slightly more funding than bcai from the state level and receives both financial and material donations from the iraqi community.

my methodology consisted of participant-observation and both informal and semi-formal interviews. utilized heavily in ethnographic study, participant-observation situates the
ethnographer as both a participant in and observer of the activities and interactions occurring around them (Lofland, 2006:18). This allowed me to get involved in the services and programs offered by the mutual aid associations, particularly the Nepali dance group at BCAI and the English and employment courses at IMAS. Through my participant-observation and interviews, I sought to learn how the Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees understood cultural integration and the processes by which they pursue it. In addition to participant-observation, I conducted 12 semi-formal interviews with Bhutanese participants and 10 with Iraqi participants. These interviews were structured around questions pertaining to their expectations prior to their arrival in the U.S., language acquisition, navigation of social norms within the workplace, school, and community centers, reconciliation of status incongruity between their home countries and the U.S., preservation of their culture of origin, and experiences with cultural and social stressors within the U.S. However, these interviews were not rigidly structured and, so, allowed for the participant to lead the conversation (Lofland, 2006; LeCompte, 2010). Additionally, I had many informal interviews, or conversations, with many refugees at both BCAI and IMAS throughout the period of my fieldwork. These conversations allowed me to not only gain valuable ethnographic data, but also build relationships necessary for further interactions and semi-formal interviews. Through my observations and interviews, I also sought to understand the level to which the refugees engaged with U.S. resettlement policy and practices in their understanding of cultural integration and interactions with mutual aid association staff. Ultimately, I distilled this ethnographic data in order to understand the key integration issues, as expressed by the refugees themselves.

Like all researchers engaged in fieldwork, I encountered several challenges and limitations in pursuit of a balanced study of resettled refugees between two distinct populations.
A few limitations originated from my use of mutual aid associations as a “gateway” to observation of and interviews with the refugees. My affiliations with BCAI and IMAS had different conditions, ultimately relating to the structure of the organizations themselves. At BCAI, I was allowed to observe and participate in any programs that they offered without any expectation of reciprocal service from me. I regularly attended BCAI’s biweekly dance class, a weekly parenting class, and all public aid and service information sessions. While I was also allowed to participate in and observe any program or service offered at IMAS, I assisted in English-language tutoring and basic office work as a condition of my affiliation, in addition to attending cultural events and cultural orientation sessions. While the flexibility of my affiliation with BCAI allowed me to attend any event I wished and talk to anyone who came in, the necessary timeslots of my tutoring and office work at IMAS limited which events I could attend and to whom I was able to speak.

Furthermore, the very programs offered by each of these organizations likely influenced to whom I spoke and whom I was able to observe. While both BCAI and IMAS offered one-on-one assistance with case management issues, they differed greatly in the group programs and events that they offered during the time that I was there. During my fieldwork, IMAS offered English language classes and tutoring, employment preparedness courses, legal services, an Arabic language class for children, and a large cultural event - the souq.³ BCAI offered an American and Nepali dance class, parenting class, and several public aid and services information sessions. It is plain to see that the particular programming offered at IMAS and BCAI differed, so the individuals that regularly involved themselves with each organization also differed. This self-selection of individuals may have influenced the responses that I received in

³ *Souq* is the Arabic word for “marketplace.” For further details regarding this event, see chapter VI.
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interviews and the observations made regarding the relative cultural integration processes within each population.

Additionally, the role that the organization itself played within each organization could have influenced the refugees who engaged in its services. Throughout my conversations and observations, it became clear that BCAI was a central meeting place for the bulk of the Bhutanese community so it was easier to encounter many participants with diverse perspectives and experiences with resettlement, regardless of what they may have desired from BCAI’s services. On the other hand, Iraqi refugees came to IMAS when they needed individual help or were enrolled in an offered service, rather than utilizing it as a community meeting place.

Although newly arrived refugee families came together to IMAS for an introductory visit, individuals who regularly attended were largely self-selected; most refugees came to IMAS for a particular need or service. Although the self-selection of participants complicated access to a larger group at times, I was able to meet a larger section of the Iraqi refugee community when they accompanied relatives to IMAS and socialized in the waiting room and at the all-day *souq* event, which was heavily attended.

Another challenge was my status as an English tutor at IMAS. As I discuss in chapter V, two focal points of cultural integration for Iraqi refugees were social bonds with Americans and English language acquisition. Because I was both an American and native speaker of English, this made me an ideal person with which to interact for many refugees at IMAS. This additional factor of self-selection in the refugees who interacted with me may have influenced the responses that I received in interviews. However, I attempted to counteract this challenge of self-selection by conducting most of my detailed interviews with those whom I did not tutor and had not interacted with extensively prior to the interview.
In addition to challenges presented by affiliation with the mutual aid associations, I encountered some challenges inherent in most ethnographic fieldwork. An initial challenge, particularly with the Bhutanese refugee community, was making introductions to members of the community. However, BCAI staff members graciously introduced me to almost everyone I encountered and gave me an “in” with many members of the community, allowing me to have comfortable interactions and conversations early on in my fieldwork. An additional challenge of this work was the language barrier, particularly between the Bhutanese refugees and myself. Due to my previous study of Arabic, I was able to comfortably have conversations with Iraqi refugees in Arabic with limited use of a translator. Additionally, most of the Iraqi refugees with whom I spoke had either informal or formal education in English and were conversant in English. However, the native language of the Bhutanese refugees is Nepali and, unlike the Iraqi refugees, most had no knowledge of English prior to their arrival in the U.S. However, I was able to mitigate this challenge by using a BCAI staff translator in interviews and at some events.
Chapter V - Case Study: Bhutanese Refugees

Historical Context of Bhutanese refugees

In the early 19th century, the Lhotsampa were recruited by the Bhutanese government to settle in southern Bhutan and cultivate the land (Bhutanese Refugee Support Group, 2010). The predominantly Hindu Lhotsampa remained largely unintegrated within Bhutan due in great part to the Buddhist beliefs of most Bhutanese and the Lhotsampa’s retention of Nepali culture. In the late 1980s, the Buddhist Bhutanese began to view the growing Lhotsampa population, estimated at 28 percent at that time, as a threat to traditional Bhutanese culture and, in 1985, the government passed a new citizenship act that denied citizenship rights to the majority of Lhotsampa (Worden, 1991:424). Discriminatory practices and policies soon followed, making Nepali dress, language, and the selling of cash crops illegal. Public demonstrations against these new policies began in 1990 within the Lhotsampa-populated south. In retaliation, the Bhutanese government labeled the demonstrators as “anti-nationals,” imprisoned and tortured several thousand Lhotsampa, and demolished many Lhotsampa homes. Between 1988 and 1993, over 100,000 Lhotsampa fled Bhutan for Nepal and India in the wake of political repression and ethnic violence.

In response to the humanitarian crisis, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) set up seven refugee camps within Nepal for the Lhotsampa. These camps ultimately became entirely refugee-run, with the refugees providing policing, social, and health
services among other tasks. Additionally, the UNHCR has noted that the refugees within the camps have been able to access primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of schooling comparable to those accessed by the neighboring Nepali population (UNHCR – Bhutan). However, as of 2006, increasing rates of frustration at confinement within the camps, child marriage, prostitution, human trafficking, domestic violence, and suicide had been reported within all seven of the refugee camps (UNHCR – Bhutan).

The refugees began a movement for repatriation almost as soon as they reached the refugee camps, establishing exile-based political parties and holding demonstrations within Nepal. The end to the repatriation movement was marked by a violent end to a peace rally, held during Bhutanese elections, on the Nepal-India border on May 28, 2007 (Adhikari, 2010). Subsequent talks between Bhutan and Nepal have failed to yield any results. As a result of stagnating efforts for repatriation, UNHCR acknowledge the failure of repatriation efforts and called for the resettlement of Bhutanese refugees. In 2008, the U.S. responded, offering to resettle 60,000 of the 107,000 Lhotsampa refugees living in the Nepali refugee camps, with other countries soon following suit (Shrestha, 2008). The total number of Bhutanese refugees within the U.S. now stands at 34,000 with more being resettled within the U.S. each month (UNHCR – Bhutan).

Case Study: Analysis

I conducted an ethnographic case study of the Bhutanese refugee community in Chicago in order to learn how they understood cultural integration. After analysis of my field notes and interview transcripts, I noted three focal points of cultural integration held by virtually every
Bhutanese refugee with whom I interacted: English language acquisition, cultural visibility, and cultural preservation.

**English Language Acquisition**

A lively young woman with a sunny disposition, Aanchal arrived in the U.S. three years ago with her husband and three children. Having lived her entire life inside a Nepali refugee camp, Aanchal tells me that coming to Chicago at the age of 26 was difficult and that the most challenging aspect of her adjustment was learning an entirely different language. “I only speak Nepali and here is only English. And it is difficult, it is different. And now it is still difficult. I do not know all words.” Although Aanchal had gained basic proficiency in English during her three years in the U.S., English still occupied a central focus in her life as an obstacle to integration. Along with the two Bhutanese refugees who worked at BCAI and a handful of refugees who had spent their adolescence in the U.S., Aanchal had one of the highest levels of English proficiency in the entire BCAI community. Most adult refugees spoke and understood little to no English, even though some of them had lived in Chicago for close to 5 years.

In each interview and observation, it was clear that English language acquisition was a focal point of cultural integration for the Bhutanese refugees. Throughout twelve interviews, the difficulty of learning the English language was discussed almost immediately in all but one of them. As with Aanchal, English was often cited as the most difficult aspect of integration into the U.S. and the greatest barrier to integration and establishing a sense of belonging. During one interview, Himmat, a 34-year old refugee who had arrived with his father and brother in 2009, lowered his voice and explained, “I do not know what is said, what is written. I feel I do not belong.”
In my interactions with Bhutanese refugees, English was often framed as the method of choice to become socially mobile and economically self-sufficient. In addition to the sense of alienation demonstrated in Aanchal and Himmat’s discussions with me, English was viewed as a way in which to interact with Americans and branch out from the Bhutanese community. When I interviewed Taran, a 20-year old member of the BCAI dance group who had spent two years in a Chicago high school, he said, “When I first come, it is hard to make friends with people who are not Bhutanese, Nepali. After high school, I can now speak English but it is still hard. I want to speak to Americans, they are who I will be with in the future.” As is clearly communicated here, English is perceived as necessary in order to pursue relationships with Americans, especially when resettlement is viewed as permanent.

An additional view of English as the method of choice for economic self-sufficiency and mobility was mentioned often by refugees and sometimes tied into a desire to learn and use English for social purposes. A 56-year old man, Prabhav, who had come to the U.S. in 2010 with his three sons stated it most concisely (speaking Nepali) when he said, “We are learning that you must have friends to get the better jobs and more money. But I cannot speak English and my sons have struggled in learning it. So what will we do?” As the American adage “It’s who you know” becomes more apparent to the refugees, they recognize the need to have American friends in order to make more money or attain better positions. When they cannot speak English, this is seen as an impossible task.

To compound this frustration, most Bhutanese refugees lamented that they had been unable to continue learning English once they found “survival” jobs. Prabhav lowered his voice and hung his head slightly as he continued, “Once I found a job, that was it for me. I have no time to learn more English. I needed the survival job because I need money to live. But now I
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cannot do anything else.” This sentiment was echoed by almost every other refugee to whom I spoke: they knew that they needed to support their families, but felt they were constrained in future economic potential by their inability to continue learning English. Ironically, they were prevented from learning the major skill that would allow them to find better jobs because they had a job. Although all refugees recognized this situation, only one person to whom I spoke, a 24-year old man named Savit, had made a choice to delay taking a job in order to continue his English studies. Savit realized that he was limiting his family’s monetary resources by learning English, but he felt confident that he would find a better job later on if he possessed greater proficiency in English. In addition to economic mobility and social relations, English was cited as the single most important factor in successfully navigating new lives and surroundings. All the refugees to whom I spoke made similar comments regarding the difficulty of using public transportation or navigating public offices because they did not know English and could not read signs.

A last point of note within the focal point of English language acquisition is that, as in previous anthropological scholarship, it was widely acknowledged among the refugees that younger refugees, particularly children and adolescents, learned English much more quickly and easily than older refugees. During his interview, Manesh, a 33-year old man who had arrived in 2008 with his wife and two daughters, explained that his daughters, who were 3 and 10 at the time of resettlement, had each gained a high level of proficiency within a year. Echoing this sentiment, Taran said, “I learned English faster from school. Now I help my parents since they still cannot speak English.” The availability of full-time school in an English-speaking environment enables younger refugees to gain proficiency in English while the older refugees have expressed both greater difficulty in learning and having time to pursue learning English.
This all suggests that, under the current resettlement regime, the cultural integration of younger refugees through English language acquisition is better facilitated simply because of their age.

**Cultural Visibility**

Even though he had been living in Chicago for close to five years, Milind, a 42-year-old who came from Nepal with his wife and son, remembers what had shocked him most when he arrived in Chicago: the lack of visibility of the Bhutanese-Nepali culture:

“In Nepal, the whole country celebrates our holidays – no one works, everyone is celebrating. But, when I come here, I see that no one celebrates, no one knows our holidays. There are so many different people here, that such a small group does not stand out. I work on festival days so it is different. I see that my holidays do not matter, and I do not feel important.”

This concern with cultural visibility within the diverse environment of Chicago emerged as a major focus of cultural integration in several refugee interviews and conversations. As seen with Milind, this focus was often communicated in terms of a difficult adjustment from a culturally and religiously homogenous state to a heterogeneous one. Several refugees told me of their surprise that they were so many different kinds of people within Chicago and their dismay at how “small” their group was in comparison. As one woman mentioned during my first days at BCAI, “No one has heard of the Bhutanese refugees. We are small.” This feeling of being relatively “small” within the Chicago landscape contributes to a sense of alienation from the broader American population and demonstrates the challenge to cultural integration presented by a lack of cultural visibility.

In conversation and interviews, many Bhutanese explained the homogeneity of Nepal and how this had allowed them to feel that their holidays were sacred. Similar to the sentiment expressed by Milind and many others, Aanchal told me, “In Nepal, everyone is of the same
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religion. So our festivals are large, everyone is in them. The government stops everything.”

When everyone was of the same belief and the state shut down most operations in order to mark them, it was easy to feel that their holidays were important. Most refugees to whom I spoke also mentioned this cultural homogeneity as one of the greatest things that they missed about Nepal. For instance, Milind said, “Sometimes I wish I was in Nepal. The holidays are big and everyone knows them. It should be like that here. I do not see how to change this.”

The last sentence of that quote also illustrates another interesting element of cultural visibility. It was also, quite noticeably, the one problem that the refugees felt was impossible to change. When talking about a frustrating lack of English proficiency, refugees acknowledged that they could improve through English classes even though their work schedules could prove prohibitive. When discussing cultural preservation, most refugees were confident that they would be able to instill their cultural values and traditions into their children. However, as Milind expressed, not a single refugee saw a way to improve their lack of cultural visibility. Even when discussing this issue with the refugee staff of BCAI, they did not mention a way to improve their cultural visibility. Although this does not necessarily mean that they have no ideas as to how to bring about that change, it is telling that it is the one problem that did not immediately bring to mind a solution, no matter how difficult attaining that solution would be.

Cultural Preservation

The concern of cultural visibility often linked to an equally important concern for the refugees: preservation of traditional Nepali culture. To reiterate, although the Bhutanese refugees are considered Bhutanese within legal classifications, they adhere to traditional Nepali culture and religion. In several interviews, this focus on cultural preservation was expressed
almost in the same breath as a concern with cultural visibility; a lack of cultural visibility was seen as a threat to cultural preservation. During his interview, Prabjav remarked, “We are few here so the younger generation may forget our traditions. But I have tried my best to teach my sons our values. They are good to know.” In this excerpt, Prabjav states a common refrain (“We are few”) associated with a concern for cultural visibility and then immediately links his concern to another concern with cultural preservation.

As also demonstrated here, cultural preservation was discussed in terms of generational transfer of traditional cultural values. During his interview, Milind explained to me that, in a traditional Nepali family, the father is the head of the household and makes decisions regarding education and social relationships for his wife and children. Milind explained that he pursued a teaching degree because his father had told him to, and that, as a father now, Milind planned to exhibit the same type of household authority and teach his son that it was the right way to live. As stated by several other refugees, Prabjav and Milind place value in transferring traditional values to their children in order to continue them in the next generation.

A concern with cultural preservation was also presented as a focus on with present expression of traditional Nepali cultural forms, such as dance. The particular focus on dance is demonstrated through the presence of a dance group at BCAI, blending traditional Nepali music with a handful of American pop songs (making it a literal microcosm of integrating Nepali and American culture). However, discourse regarding the dance class reveals several important reasons that cultural preservation is a focal point of cultural integration for the Bhutanese refugees. One day before the BCAI dance group, Manesh remarked, “We have many traditions and dancing is an important one. When you dance Nepali, you are happy and everyone can join in.” Manesh mentions that “everyone can join in,” denoting Nepali dance as an act that allows
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for inclusion within their community. Manesh then continues, “It is important to have dance group. There is the stress here and Bhutanese elsewhere have committed suicide. But when you are dancing you forget your worries. And when you dance Nepali, you know who you are and are happy.” Manesh comments on a concerning pattern that has been found in Bhutanese refugee communities throughout the U.S., increasing rates of suicide. However, Manesh views the dance group and cultural preservation (“know who you are”) as a way in which to cope with the stress of resettlement and integration. These same sentiments – of traditional dance preservation as a coping strategy and community activity – were repeated by almost all of the BCAI dance group regular attendees, roughly 11 people.

Summary

Through my fieldwork and subsequent analysis, I determined that English language acquisition, cultural visibility, and cultural preservation were focal points of cultural integration for the Bhutanese refugees. English language acquisition was viewed as both a vehicle for economic self-sufficiency and mobility and a way to attain a sense of belonging through establishing social relationships with Americans and navigating the city. Additionally, the younger refugees possessed a deeper and more fluid grasp of English than older refugees, who often had little to no command of the English language. Cultural visibility was framed mainly within the terms of transitioning from a homogenous society into a heterogeneous one in which the Bhutanese were a tiny minority. It was also the only concern that the refugees themselves felt completely powerless to change. Finally, the focal point of cultural preservation was evident in the value placed in generational transfer of traditional Nepali customs, values, and cultural forms, such as dance.
Chapter VI - Case Study: Iraqi Refugees

Historical Context of Iraqi Refugees

In March 2003, the U.S. led an invasion of Iraq in an effort to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein, resulting in the exodus of 1.6 million Iraqis to neighboring countries. Between 2006 and 2007, an additional hundreds of thousands of Iraqis fled in order to escape the collapse in state security and deadly sectarian violence that had ensued (Marfleet, 2009). In late 2007, at the height of the Iraqi refugee crisis, it was estimated that 4.5 million Iraqis were displaced – 2.2 million refugees and 2.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Margesson, 2009). Despite a surge of U.S. troops in 2007, Iraqis, both those who were initially displaced and those who were not, have continued to flee as sectarian violence and state insecurity have continued.

During the U.S.-led military operations and subsequent occupation of Iraq, many Iraqis, an estimated 50,000-100,000 in official capacities, aided the U.S. military and U.S.-based corporations, working mainly as interpreters (Wong, 2013). Consequently, Iraqis who aided the U.S. military are viewed as traitors by many other Iraqis. Family members of translators were kidnapped and killed, translators were threatened, and many were killed. As a result, the U.S. has made aid and resettlement of Iraqi interpreters a priority in resettlement policy. Although a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program was established under the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008, only a further 2,500 visas may be issued under it and, when those visas are all issued, the program itself will end (U.S. Department of State). Although this legislation allowed some Iraqis who had worked as translators to obtain U.S. visas, it only
The majority of Iraqi refugees fled to Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, living mainly in urban areas and only a portion officially registering with UNHCR. Only a minority of Iraqi refugees fled to UNHCR refugee camps. Current legislation in these countries prevented the refugees from obtaining formal employment so many engaged in the informal economy, such as running unlicensed stores. Formal education for refugee children in these countries has been largely unavailable, the main exception being Syria in which all refugee children were guaranteed access to formal education until the outbreak of civil war in 2011. The Iraqi refugee population is religiously diverse; all the religious groups of Iraq – including Christians, Sunni Muslims, Shiite Muslims, Mandaeans, etc. - are represented within it (Crawford, 2007) (Zoepf, 2004).

The U.S. began resettling Iraqi refugees in 2003 but only 466 Iraqi refugees had been resettled by 2007. In order to address the protracted humanitarian crisis, the U.S. and U.N. formulated a plan to begin greater resettlement of Iraqi refugees. The U.S. placed priority on the resettlement of Iraqis considered particularly vulnerable, including children, trafficking victims, and those who had assisted the U.S. military. As a result of this focus, 73,000 Iraqi refugees have been resettled in the U.S. since 2007 and over 3,000 were resettled within the Chicago metropolitan area. In addition to working with resettlement agencies, Iraqi refugees have been served by the Iraqi Mutual Aid Society (IMAS) in the Roger’s Park neighborhood of Chicago.
Case Study: Analysis

As with the Bhutanese refugee community, I conducted an ethnographic case study of the Iraqi refugee community in Chicago. The purpose of this case study was to discern the ways in which cultural integration was understood by the Iraqi refugees themselves. After analysis of my field notes and interview transcripts, a few common foci of cultural integration emerged between all respondents. Overall, Iraqi refugees viewed English language acquisition, socioeconomic mobility, and social bonds with Americans as central to cultural integration. While it was not as central a focus to the Iraqi refugees as to the Bhutanese refugees, cultural preservation was also an important element of cultural integration to the Iraqi refugees.

English Language Acquisition

When I met Farrah, the resourceful 31-year old mother of two had already been living in the U.S. for three and a half years but had only just arrived in Chicago. She dressed stylishly in American fashion – black skinny jeans, thong sandals, and slightly bedazzled blouses – and wore kohl eyeliner that drew attention to her large brown eyes. Farrah had initially fled her home in Baghdad in 2008, going first to the Kurdistan region, taking her two young children and elderly mother with her. When she realized that “life would be impossible” since she did not speak Kurdish, Farrah took her family to Turkey. After one year living on the outskirts of Turkish villages, Farrah took her family to Syria in search of better conditions. After almost a full year living in Syria, Farrah decided to return to Baghdad, but she quickly left again after finding it “worse than before.” Farrah took her family again to Syria and, eventually, they were resettled to Oklahoma in 2010. After three “happy” years living in Oklahoma City, Farrah was denied a
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renewal of Oklahoma state benefits and could no longer afford to live there. She piled her family into the car, driving first to Buffalo, NY on the advice of her friends. When she found that it was “not like she had been told,” she then drove her family to Chicago. The very next day she came to IMAS for assistance and that was when I met her. Over the next several weeks, Farrah talked constantly about her children, often mentioning how “important” it was that they learn English fluently. Fluent herself, Farrah explained that Iraq’s secondary school system was conducted entirely in British English which had provided her a “good foundation.” Farrah had worried that, her children having spent years of their schooling in Syria and Turkey, they would “fall behind.” Upon being resettled to the U.S., one of the first purchases she made was a small television so that her children “could watch the shows and learn English even at home.”

As did the Bhutanese refugees, Farrah – and the other Iraqi refugees to whom I spoke - consistently stressed English language acquisition as a keystone of cultural integration. Throughout all 10 formal interviews and countless informal conversations, the necessity of learning – and achieving fluency – in English was consistently framed as among the most crucial aspects for successful cultural integration. Other young adults like Farrah mentioned their thankfulness that English had been taught to them during their educations in Iraq and allowed them “to get around more easily” in the U.S. However, the differences between British English, the English in which they had been taught, and American English had surprised them and led to initial difficulties in feeling a sense of belonging. Farrah remembered that, when she first arrived in the U.S., she referred to certain things, such as the bathroom, by their British English words and that the American resettlement workers just stared at her. She says, “That is not the word, but I thought I knew English! It was surprising.” However, over time, she learned American English and felt she could much more easily talk to Americans.
Although young adults like Farrah and Malik had been taught in English, the generation of their parents had been educated in Iraq when English was neither a language of instruction nor even taught in school. Because they lacked English language skills, the familial authority held by these older Iraqis was transferred to their children, the young adults who knew English and could best support the family. In several conversations, both parents and their children remarked about the strain of this shift in responsibility and power. Farrah said, “It is strange. I am suddenly responsible for everyone and it is a lot to handle.” On the other side of this, Yusuf, a 56-year old man, spoke to me in Arabic, “At home, I worked on cars and supported my family. But I do not know English so my son works instead. This is not how it should be.”

Another area of note within English language acquisition as a focal point of cultural integration is that, as in noted in my interactions with Bhutanese refugees and previous anthropological scholarship, younger refugees, especially children, were recognized as being able to learn English more quickly than older refugees. One day, Farrah remarked, “I wanted my children to learn English first, and now they are better than me!” Additionally, I met a Shatha, a 20-year old who had spent the last two years of her secondary education in the U.S. She told me, “I knew English a bit before, but when I went to school here, I heard English every day. Now I know more English than anyone else in my family.”

As with the Bhutanese refugees, English was consistently framed as a requirement for social mobility and economic self-sufficiency. Although most of the Iraqi refugees I met had at least a conversational proficiency in English, they constantly wanted to become even more proficient. Throughout my conversations with young adult Iraqi refugees, it was clear that this desire often came into conflict with a duty to support their families economically. Although I noticed this conflict as well among the Bhutanese refugees, the Iraqi refugees, unlike the
Bhutanese, sometimes chose to pursue English language training over work opportunities if they felt that their English could still improve. Malik, a 22-year old refugee who had spent the last 5 years in Jordan, came to the U.S. with his parents and younger brother. When I met him, he had recently left his minimum-wage job in the kitchen of a retirement home. He explained, “The work was hard and for little money. And I had trouble understanding the people [residents of the retirement home] when they spoke. But, when I was there, I wasn’t able to come to English class, so I quit and now I am coming to class. If I learn more English, I can find a better job.” It is clear that Malik viewed English as a requirement for finding better jobs and, as a result, opted to improve his English rather than continue working.

**Socioeconomic Mobility**

As explored briefly in the previous section, English language acquisition was often closely related to a focus on socioeconomic mobility. In fact, several English language courses offered by IMAS were framed around acquiring the necessary vocabulary for work in specific industries, such as the proper terminology for operating welding equipment. Malik, along with five other men, regularly attended these classes and worked diligently through specific workbooks, focusing on preparation for various qualification tests within the manufacturing industry. He told me, “These classes are good and I feel that I will be able to pass each test. When I pass these tests, I will be able to get a job at a plant and make good money.” In fact, these courses did have a relatively good record of enabling students to become employed in manufacturing. I spoke with Shaden, a 33-year old woman who had been resettled in 2010 and now worked on staff at IMAS: “Yes, the men in these classes go on to work in manufacturing plants and can support their families better than if they were dishwashers, or in another survival
job. There are always people that want to take these classes.” The consistent demand for this class indicates the close relationship between English language and socioeconomic mobility.

More broadly, a focus on socioeconomic mobility was communicated by the decision made by many Iraqi refugees to focus on “long-term” career goals over “survival jobs.” I had met Zaid, a large man in his mid-50s who sported a thick handlebar mustache and a wide grin whenever he spoke, during one of my first days at IMAS. Zaid was highly educated, having received a Bachelor’s degree in Iraq and a Master’s degree in law from Egypt. Upon being resettled to Chicago in 2005, Zaid was determined to return to his chosen field – law – and pursued a certificate program that would allow him to “work in the legal field.” Although he did not pursue a more costly law degree, he still incurred cost to work in a field that offered higher pay and enabled him to maintain the work that he wanted. As a longer term resident of the refugee community, Zaid says that many refugees he meets “have a degree and want to find work in their field or want to get any kind of certificate.” This sentiment was echoed by Malik who, as mentioned earlier, had left his minimum wage job to develop greater English skills and acquire a better paying job. He said, “At my job, I knew that I could do something more so now I am taking the A+ [manufacturing industry] class. I want to have a family, own a house. This will let me do those things.” Although he is losing money in opportunity cost by foregoing a job now, Malik is willing to compromise on that for the hope of a better financial future in the long-term.

However, socioeconomic mobility was also viewed as an issue of social status. Along with the preference for long-term career goals over short-term jobs, “survival” jobs, minimum wage jobs typically in menial labor, are recognized as necessary by some Iraqi refugees, but they were often viewed as a last resort rather than a desirable employment option. Regarding the
Socioeconomic mobility was also communicated as a concern with intergenerational mobility. As has been noted in previous anthropological studies of immigrant populations, first generation immigrants have focused their aspirations and economic resources around the possibility of socioeconomic mobility for their children. In several of my conversations with Iraqi refugees, I found this focus on the next generation echoed, but it is perhaps best expressed by Shatha’s mother, Amira. Shatha was the only child of Amira and her husband, Hussein. The few times that Shatha had come to speak with IMAS staff about options for college, her parents had accompanied her, gushing about their daughter to anyone within earshot. On one such day, Amira told me, speaking a mix of Arabic and English, “We do not have much, but Shatha has worked so hard. She will go to pharmacy school and do well. We will pay what we have.” Amira states their willingness to put Shatha through pharmacy school to enter a traditionally well-paying field. Interestingly enough, the two other parents I met with college-aged children were both insistent that their children attend pharmacy school as well.
A third focal point of cultural integration for Iraqi refugees was establishing relationships with Americans. As discussed previously, establishing relationships with Americans was viewed, in part, as a way to further English language acquisition. Perhaps conveyed most aptly by one man with whom I spoke, “We become friends, and I learn you Arabic, you learn me English!” However, relationships with Americans were seen as not only the best possible way to learn the idiosyncrasies of American English; they were also viewed as a way in which to gain a sense of belonging. Malik once told me that he particularly enjoyed talking to me because he “wants to know more Americans.” He then elaborated, saying that he learned more about how to “understand everything” from talking to me and other Americans. Malik had also begun attending an Iraqi Arabic language group because he had heard that some American college students attended. He told me that, although the group consisted of mostly Iraqis, he had become friends with a few American guys his age through the group. “It is good. I learn more English and they learn Arabic and we become friends. It is good to be able to hang out with people who are not Iraqi.”

Similarly, Farrah told me that, when she had first arrived in Oklahoma City, she immediately found American friends. She had ultimately become very close with a few American women her age, even being present at the birth of one of their children. She told me, “It was so good to have friends that can help me learn how to live in the States and get used to the city. They helped me so much. And our children were friends. I was so sad to leave them. We were like family.” To Farrah, relationships with Americans were not only for utility in learning language and customs but also for establishing connections that allowed her to possess a sense of belonging. Furthermore, these relationships also allowed Farrah to establish a new
network of relationships that sustained her emotionally and, in a way, replaced the kinship structure she had lost when she left Iraq.

The importance on establishing social bonds with Americans was even reflected in some of the first requests made by newly arrived Iraqi refugees to IMAS. Shaden often was the first staff member to interact with newly arrived families referred to them by resettlement agencies. Shaden met one such family on a day when I happened to be in the lobby, chatting with Farrah. She had only been speaking to them in Arabic for a few minutes before she pointed at me and said in Arabic, “Yes, you will be able to meet Americans.” Later, after the family departed, Shaden approached me and said, “It was good you were here. So many people ask me if they will be able to meet Americans and they do not believe me. They know the Iraqis, but they also want to know Americans.” Partially in response to the community-wide desire to meet Americans, IMAS had begun plans to reach out to college campuses for American volunteers and just hired an American staff member when I left the field.

*Cultural Preservation*

Although cultural preservation was not as integral to cultural integration for Iraqi refugees as it was for the Bhutanese, it was still a present issue in the Iraqi experience of cultural integration. The desire for cultural preservation was communicated particularly as a concern with child refugees failing to learn Arabic. During one of our afternoon chats, Farrah told me, “I wanted my children to learn English first. Now that they do, I want them to remember their language and their country.” The sentiment – conflicting desires for children to learn English in order to succeed and for them to also carry on their native language - expressed by Farrah had long been echoed by the Iraqi refugee community and, in response, IMAS had offered year-
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round Arabic classes for Iraqi children since its founding. When I asked about the classes, Shaden explained, “The children speak Arabic at home but they do not know how it is written. We want them to know how to write it and read it.”

However, the Arabic language classes also reflected another concern with cultural preservation – a remembrance of Iraqi history and traditions. Having helped establish the classes, Zaid told me, “We do not want our children to forget their country. So we show them the flag and tell them our history so that they will be proud to be Iraqi.” The concern with remembrance of Iraqi traditions had also been an instrumental influence in the establishment of the souq event that was held at the end of August. For the souq event, IMAS had rented out a large conference room in the Devon neighborhood and set up several “stalls,” or tables, at which members of the Iraqi refugee community offered hair styling, henna, Iraqi food, and advertised for their businesses and employers. Throughout the event, several men and women recited poetry, sung songs, and told children’s stories on a raised platform at the front of the room. When no one was performing, shaabi – literally meaning “local,” or traditional – music played through two large speakers on the platform. During the four hour souq event, roughly 75 members of the Iraqi community stopped by, making it the best-attended IMAS event that I had witnessed.

Poetry, in particular, was an important aspect of Iraqi culture that the souq event aimed to highlight. Nabil, a boisterous 58-year old man with thinning hair and a toothy grin, recited several poems during the souq event. After fleeing Iraq in the midst of sectarian violence directed at Iraqi Christians, Nabil and his wife arrived in the U.S. in August of 2012 and attended IMAS events until Nabil found a job at a factory in October. Prior to resettlement, Nabil had completed a legal education at Baghdad University and worked as a lawyer. Additionally, he
had been reciting poetry for 21 years and relished the opportunity to recite publicly once again at the *souq* event. While discussing his own past of poetry recitation, Nabil told me, “A poet needs good mind, heart, and sensibility. I will describe a beautiful girl, and most men won’t, as a gift from God. Americans cannot do that. America has no poetry. The Iraqi people are more clever and have a good culture.” For Nabil, poetry recitation was a necessary part of cultural expression and tradition. Despite the absence of poetry recitation within American culture, events like the *souq* allowed Nabil to continue to participate and take pride in a familiar cultural practice.

However, the *souq* event also clearly highlighted the fact that desire for cultural preservation was often dominated by the aforementioned focus on socioeconomic mobility. Although the *souq* event provided a space for the expression and consumption of traditional Iraqi culture, roughly half of the “stalls” at the *souq* event were occupied by community members advertising for business ventures in which they were involved. One such woman named Rana, who I had never seen before, called me over to her stall to look at her displays of cosmetics and jewelry. She told me that, since she had arrived in the U.S. two years prior, she had established her own cosmetics company and was now beginning to sell homemade jewelry as well. When asked what she liked about the *souq* event, she replied, “Everyone in the community comes together. It is good to see everyone and hear poetry, but it is also good for me. I will do a better business here.” Although she recognized the cultural purpose of the event, she ultimately attributed her own attendance to the chance to do business.

**Summary**
Through fieldwork and subsequent analysis, I noted that English language acquisition, socioeconomic mobility, and social bonds with Americans were focal points of cultural integration to the Iraqi refugees, with cultural preservation constituting a less central focus. As with the Bhutanese refugees, the Iraqi refugees viewed English as vital to gaining both a sense of belonging and socioeconomic mobility. Additionally, like the Bhutanese refugees, the younger refugees were known to learn English more quickly than older refugees. However, unlike the Bhutanese refugees, many older refugees had great proficiency in the English language. A focus on socioeconomic mobility was communicated through the emphasis on long-term jobs over shorter-term menial labor, social status, and intergenerational mobility. Social bonds with Americans were viewed as important to cultural integration because they allowed the refugees to improve their English and learn American customs, establish emotionally sustaining relationships, and attain a sense of belonging. Although not as much of a focal point as it was to the Bhutanese refugees, cultural preservation was an important element of cultural integration for the Iraqi refugees, communicated through a focus on the next generation learning Arabic and remembering Iraqi history and traditions.
Chapter VII - Bringing it Together: Policy and Practice

After gathering data from my fieldwork with the Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees, it is possible to analyze their foci of integration in relation with the view of integration as found in U.S. resettlement policy, much like Ager and Strang did in their study as discussed in chapter III. To review, the foci of cultural integration for Bhutanese refugees were English language acquisition, cultural preservation, and cultural visibility. For Iraqi refugees, they were English language acquisition, social bonds with Americans, and socioeconomic mobility, with a lesser emphasis on cultural preservation. Finally, within resettlement policy, the foci of cultural integration are future-orientation and economic-orientation, including self-sufficiency, independence, and English language acquisition (Table 7.1). Overall, there were only a few areas of convergence between the views of integration and only one focal point - English language acquisition – featured within all views of integration. Tellingly, there were far more clear differences in the ways in which each refugee population perceived integration and the way in which it was encoded into resettlement policy, indicating a huge disconnect between these views of integration.

The conceptual framework provided by Ager and Strang offers a guide by which to understand the disconnect between these foci and, in the following chapter, a blue print by which to suggest a model of cultural integration that includes the understandings of the refugees and
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within resettlement policy. To reiterate, Ager and Strang ultimately constructed a framework of integration based in four domains: markers and means, social connection, facilitators, and foundation. These four domains provide an excellent framework by which to categorize the foci of cultural integration for the Iraqi and Bhutanese refugees and in resettlement policy and better understand their relationship.

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<th>Resettlement Policy</th>
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<th>Bhutanese Refugees</th>
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<td>English Language acquisition</td>
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<td>Cultural Preservation</td>
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<td>Economic-oriented (self-sufficiency, independence)</td>
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<td>Social bonds with Americans</td>
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Table 7.1 outlines the foci of cultural integration in resettlement policy and for Iraqi and Bhutanese refugees

**English Language Acquisition as a Multifaceted Facilitator and Marker**

English language acquisition was the only focal point featured in the views of integration of both the Iraqi and Bhutanese refugees, as well as in resettlement policy, and can be categorized as a facilitator of integration within all views. To review, a facilitator, within the framework outlined by Ager and Strang, are those activities and knowledge that diminish barriers to integration. However, English language acquisition itself is broad and necessitates exploration of why refugees wanted to learn English in order to understand its role as a facilitator of integration within all views and the different facets of English language as a facilitator to the refugees and within U.S. resettlement policy. In this way, it is clear that, while there is a shared focus on English language acquisition, there exists a large disconnect in the purpose endowed
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with English learning and the amount that is deemed sufficient and, ultimately, the domain – foundation, markers and means, facilitator, and social connection - into which English language acquisition falls for each view of integration.

It must first be highlighted that English language acquisition is discussed within *The Refugee Act* as a facilitator of economic self-sufficiency; English language acquisition is important in integration only in that it is necessary for refugees to find employment and become economically self-sufficient. This is reflected in *The Refugee Act’s* specification that English is to be taught to an adequate level to enable refugees to find jobs. There is no emphasis on learning English to fulfill social functions or to even allow further autonomy in navigating U.S. infrastructure.

While both Iraqi and Bhutanese refugees recognized the necessity of English as a facilitator for obtaining employment and becoming economically self-sufficient, English language acquisition was central to their views of integration for reasons other than the economic. For both Iraqi and Bhutanese refugees, English was also a facilitator in the formation of social relationships and navigation of their new surroundings with greater ease. As discussed previously, both Iraqi and Bhutanese refugees knew that learning English allowed them to converse with Americans and gain greater salience within the American context, even in the ability afforded to read signs and navigate public transportation. Furthermore, refugees from both groups recognized that gaining proficiency in English allowed greater economic opportunities as a result of friendship with Americans.

Additionaly, both Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees wished to become proficient in English rather than learning English up to a point at which they could get a job, as specified in *The Refugee Act*. English language acquisition was clearly important in and of itself; English
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enabled both Iraqi and Bhutanese refugees to feel as though they belonged in the U.S. Some Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees even made conscious choices to delay finding work in order to learn as much English as possible. In other words, English language acquisition would itself be a marker of integration to these refugees, even though Ager and Strang only categorize policy goals within that domain in their framework.

Cultural Preservation as Social Connection and Facilitator

A key aspect of the integration views of both Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees was the importance of cultural preservation even as they sought to succeed in their new cultural context. The perpetuation of cultural knowledge and traditions to younger generations was an oft-mentioned concern to refugees in both groups. Indeed, this concern was so common among both populations that the mutual aid associations had established regular classes – the Nepali dance class at BCAI and the Arabic language class at IMAS – designed to teach cultural traditions to the next generation and held events commemorating cultural and religious celebrations. Within both views, cultural preservation can be categorized simultaneously as a social connection and facilitator. Once again, within Ager and Strang’s framework, social connection is constituted of social relationships both within the family and refugee group and with people outside of it. For both Iraqi and Bhutanese refugees, cultural preservation provided both a way to establish and strengthen relationships within families and the wider refugee community and feel more integrated as a result of being able to hold onto their culture in a diverse society.

Cultural preservation was far more central to the integration experience for Bhutanese refugees than for Iraqi refugees. While cultural preservation constituted a central way in which the Bhutanese refugees understood integration, Iraqi refugees’ concern with cultural preservation
Economic issues as Markers and Means of Differing Depth

While economic issues did not loom as large in the Bhutanese view of integration, they were important in integration to the Iraqi refugees and in U.S. resettlement policy and can be categorized as markers and means. Within Ager and Strang’s study, markers and means were the “public outcomes” of integration, most often according to the resettlement policy itself. It is
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necessary to label this category as “economic issues” because, while the overall theme of economic issues is present in both of these views, the specific elements of the economic issues differ between the refugee and policy view. As discussed in chapters II and III, one of the major tenets of integration within U.S. resettlement policy is economic orientation and a corresponding emphasis on independence and economic self-sufficiency. Within The Refugee Act, integration is achieved when the refugee is not dependent upon public assistance. This means that the only stipulation necessary for achieving economic integration within this view is earning the minimal amount that would enable refugees to live independent of public assistance. In most cases, continuing education, fluency in English, or building towards long-term careers is not necessary to achieving this goal, or marker.

Similarly, the Iraqi refugees were concerned with achieving economic self-sufficiency, even if they did not communicate the achievement of that as marked by independence from public assistance. However, the Iraqi refugees were more concerned with socioeconomic mobility as a marker of integration, as demonstrated by their concerns with furthering their English language skills and pursuing other formal education that would enable them to access a wider range of employment options. As noted in chapter VI, I met at least a few Iraqis who had made an intentional choice to quit jobs or delay working altogether in order to work towards a career that would result in higher salaries and greater job security. This juxtaposition between the marker of economic mobility to the Iraqi refugees and that of economic self-sufficiency within U.S. resettlement policy is an interesting disconnect. This disconnect also highlights the specific way in which integration in resettlement policy is future-oriented, as being aimed at the benefit of future generations. Although a focus on economic self-sufficiency is certainly more future-oriented than a focus on reliance on public assistance for an indefinite period, a focus on
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economic mobility, rather than the economic stagnation that can come with achieving only self-sufficiency, definitely seems more future-oriented even within the frame of benefiting future generations. A focus on economic mobility will result in refugees developing useful skills to pursue careers and, ultimately, make greater economic gains in the long-term.

**Disconnect: Considering Further Social Connections and Facilitators**

Connections between refugee and policy views of integration on English language acquisition, cultural preservation, and economic issues are not insignificant, but it is more significant that these are the only foci on which these views intersect even loosely. There are several disconnects between the integration views held by the Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees and that found within policy. One such disconnect, cultural preservation, has already been noted. Another disconnect between integration in policy and to Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees is a focus on social relationships with Americans, properly categorized as both social connection and facilitator within this framework. Although this was a distinct focal point of the Iraqi refugee view of integration, it was also a concern voiced by several Bhutanese refugees. In order to form fulfilling – even adequate – relationships with Americans, Iraqi refugees knew that they needed to be as proficient in English as possible, as discussed in chapter VI. Not only did the Iraqi refugees desire relationships with Americans in order to feel a greater sense of belonging in their new cultural context (social connection), but they also knew that they could better develop their English skills through conversation with Americans (facilitator). Subsequently, gaining even greater proficiency in English through interactions with Americans would enable them to feel an even greater sense of belonging. However, as has been noted several times, *The Refugee Act*
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only supports English training to an extent and makes no mention of any importance of encouraging Americans and refugees to interact.

Another key disconnect between these views of integration can be found in the Bhutanese focus on cultural visibility, as discussed in chapter V and appropriately categorized as a facilitator. However, the Iraqi refugees do not place the same importance on cultural visibility within their own view of cultural integration. Not only does this illustrate the fact that conceptions of cultural integration can vary greatly between refugee groups, it also leads into an important discussion on the implications of varying conceptions of cultural integration for different refugee groups operating under the same resettlement policy. I choose to begin this discussion through the lens of the unique Bhutanese concern with cultural visibility because, as discussed in chapter V, it originates in part from an awareness of being a member of an incredibly small community with no established support systems. However, the Iraqi refugees join a larger community that already has cultural and social institutions in place that offer support to supplement traditional resettlement aid. Although it has not been measured quantitatively, the additional support offered through these channels for Iraqi refugees in the facilitation of cultural integration – for which Bhutanese refugees have no equivalent – can enable them to more readily succeed during resettlement. However, The Refugee Act does not take this facilitator of integration into account and, therefore, does not provide a framework for the development or funding of programs that could account for the difference in resettlement readiness between refugee groups, leaving those without an established community without support that others may be receiving.

These gaps in the understandings of integration indicate that the stated goals of resettlement policy, culminating in successful integration into the American context, do not
Disconnect between lived experience and policy: Cultural integration of Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees during resettlement in Chicago speak to the understandings of integration within the populations that it is designed to aid.

Ultimately, this disconnect demonstrates that the focus of U.S. resettlement policy is not actually on the target populations. In order to be effective, resettlement policy must consider the views of integration as held by the refugees and provide a framework that will enable organizations to develop programs to best serve these populations. Even if policymakers are ultimately only interested in achieving economic goals, it is still necessary to recognize that, without aid to all elements of integration, most refugees do not integrate successfully according to the view of integration, or achieve the markers, within resettlement policy.
The foci of cultural integration that emerged in the course of this research – and can ultimately be categorized as indicators of integration - are English language acquisition, cultural visibility, and cultural preservation for the Bhutanese refugees, and English language acquisition, relationships with Americans, and socioeconomic mobility for the Iraqi refugees, with a lesser emphasis on cultural preservation. However, the foci of integration within U.S. resettlement policy were neoliberal qualities of a productive citizen – economic-oriented, including self-sufficiency, independence, and English language acquisition, and future-oriented. Therefore, the Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees did not align with ideas of U.S. resettlement policy in their understanding and experiences of cultural integration. Furthermore, the refugees did not even mention U.S. resettlement policy or characteristics in their accounts of various aspects of cultural integration. This lack of engagement points to a fundamental disconnect in cultural integration of the Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees and of U.S. resettlement policy, and necessitates an attempt to bring these views together.

As discussed in Chapter III, I used the conceptual framework created by Ager and Strang in their 2008 study as a guide for the establishment of indicators of integration derived from the refugees themselves. From both analysis of U.S. resettlement policy and the Iraqi and Bhutanese refugees in the previous chapter, I propose indicators of cultural integration (Table 8.1):
Of the four domains, I have excluded foundation from my new proposal since I did not gather any data to suggest that the foundation of cultural integration in refugee resettlement should be changed. Markers and means is supposed to be constituted of solely the “public outcomes” sought by resettlement policy which, in this case, is economic self-sufficiency, independence, and benefit to future generations. However, English language proficiency, the level of English language acquisition sought by both Iraqi and Bhutanese refugees during integration, is considered an outcome of successful integration within this framework. Additionally, socioeconomic mobility – similar to the other economic-oriented markers yet distinct – remains a clear marker of integration to the Iraqi refugees.

Within the category of social connection, I have included two indicators that were central to the Iraqi and Bhutanese perceptions of cultural integration – social relationships with Americans and cultural preservation. Social connection indicators are those that establish social relationships both within and outside of the refugee community and are key to integration on the local level. Social relationships with Americans undoubtedly accomplishes just that, and cultural preservation enables the establishment and strengthening of relationships within the refugee group. Within the category of facilitator – activities and knowledge that diminish barriers to cultural integration - four indicators derived from my fieldwork are included: social relationships
Connect between lived experience and policy: Cultural integration of Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees during resettlement in Chicago

with Americans, cultural preservation, cultural visibility, and English language acquisition. Of these four, three have already been included as indicators in other categories, but indicators are multi-faceted and can be categorized in more than one area in this framework. As discussed in the previous chapter, social relationships with Americans are also viewed as essential to learning English and gaining cultural knowledge invaluable to integration. Cultural preservation and cultural visibility are important to the refugees because they are able to maintain their cultural traditions while adapting to the U.S. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter V, activities related to cultural preservation are viewed as mitigating psychological stress associated with the resettlement process and, as such, undoubtedly diminishes barriers to integration. Finally, English language acquisition is categorized as a facilitator, in addition to English proficiency as a marker, because it is necessary to finding employment, navigating public aid systems and public transportation, and much more associated with integration.

These indicators, derived from my fieldwork with Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees, present a way by which to approach a more holistic and effective understanding of cultural integration in refugee resettlement. While these indicators are not inclusive of every refugee group in the U.S., it is necessary to begin to establish a framework of resettlement that takes the views of diverse refugee groups and their distinct needs into account. In chapter II, I had demonstrated that U.S. resettlement policy was established to address refugees as a uniform interest group, rather than culturally distinct populations. While this may have offered greater ease in policy administration, the negative effects of such an approach are apparent. The consistent state of poverty for the Bhutanese and many Iraqi, climbing rates of suicide among Bhutanese refugees, and the various accounts of frustration and isolation expressed by Bhutanese and Iraqi refugees
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are only a few such indicators that the current approach of U.S. resettlement policy is not ultimately serving the population that it purports to serve.

It is encouraging to see that, in recent years, researchers and resettlement professionals have also noticed the ineffectiveness of the current U.S. resettlement regime. In Bruno’s 2011 report to Congress, the current flaws in resettlement policy and possible policy solutions were acknowledged. Although the increasing cultural diversity among refugees was noted, none of the recommendations for policy change addressed ways in which to bring this cultural diversity – and corresponding diversity of experience and perspective - into effective policy creation. In order to offer more effective resettlement aid within the U.S., it will be necessary to bridge the gap between policy and the lived experience of cultural integration by taking distinct cultural considerations into account in the formation of new policies and practices. While creating resettlement policies for each refugee group may be problematic, it is still necessary to take into account the factors that allow refugees to feel integrated in order to effectively serve them.

In addition to these suggested approaches to future policies and the indicators of integration that I proposed, future scholarship regarding refugee resettlement should strive to bring policy considerations into discussion with the lived experience of refugees in order to bridge the gap that exists in current literature. Further research regarding refugee resettlement could seek to understand why the foci of cultural integration between different refugee groups differ. Although I can speculate based on the data I gathered during my fieldwork, further research focusing specifically on explaining these differences would be needed in order to reach supported conclusions. Additionally, further research could gather statistics on how many resettled refugees remain unintegrated within their own personal views and how many remain on
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public assistance after the official period of resettlement ends. A report on this data might spur quicker governmental action to amend current resettlement policy.
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Appendix

Figure 4.1

Location of BCAI in the Devon neighborhood

Figure 4.2

Location of IMAS in the Roger’s Park neighborhood
Table 7.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resettlement Policy</th>
<th>Iraqi Refugees</th>
<th>Bhutanese Refugees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Language acquisition</td>
<td>English Language acquisition</td>
<td>English Language acquisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Preservation</td>
<td>Cultural Preservation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic-oriented (self-sufficiency, independence)</td>
<td>Socioeconomic Mobility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social bonds with Americans</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural Visibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future-oriented</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Foci of cultural integration

Table 8.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Markers and Means</th>
<th>Social Connection</th>
<th>Facilitator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic self-sufficiency</td>
<td>Social relationships with Americans</td>
<td>Social relationships with Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Cultural preservation</td>
<td>Cultural preservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefit to future generations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural visibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic mobility</td>
<td></td>
<td>English language acquisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language proficiency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Proposed indicators for integration based on data
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