Featuring interviews with top officials from the UNHCR, US Department of State, and other key players addressing refugee issues worldwide.

Guest Editors:
Emily Feenstra
Kimberly Josephson

THE REFUGEE ISSUE
In honor of John and Mary Lou Lehoczky
and in recognition of their many years of exceptional service to
Carnegie Mellon University
# Table of Contents

## Articles

10. Bhutanese Refugees and the Search for Long-Term Solutions: Reflections on Hopes, Disappointments, and Identity  
*Julia Hanby*

*Emily Feenstra*

18. Refugee Warehousing: An Economic Appeal  
*Kimberly Josephson*

22. Uprooted and Overlooked: Providing Assistance and Protection to Internally Displaced Persons in Mali  
*Angel Nonye-John*

26. Citizen Initiatives Use Simple Communication Tools to Aid Refugees  
*Lindsay Elliott-Foose*

29. Iraqi Refugee Resettlement  
*Divya Krishnan*

33. Special Highlight: An Anthropological Lens  
The Past Made Present: Constituting and Communicating Self-Understanding in a Second-Country Context  
*Courtney Wittekind*

## Interviews

37. Guiding the International Community’s Response to Refugees  
*Jana Mason and Matt Pennington, UNHCR*

44. The United States as a Humanitarian Actor  
*David Robinson, US Department of State*

51. A Forgotten Region: Displacement in Colombia and Latin America  
*Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli, Washington Office on Latin America*

58. The Psychological Effects of Refugee Resettlement  
*Marco Gemignani, Duquesne University*

64. A Local Perspective on Resettlement  
*Leslie Aizenman, Jewish Family & Children's Service of Pittsburgh*
Letter from the Publisher

Dear Reader,

Carnegie Mellon University fosters an interdisciplinary teaching and research environment by allowing undergraduates to pursue multiple majors and minors. The essays in the second issue of *CIRP Journal* provide rich examples of how CMU students are able to think about social problems from more than one disciplinary point of view. The authors address a range of issues facing refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide from the perspectives of these CMU concentrations, majors, and minors: African and African American Studies; Anthropology; Decision Science; English Literature; Ethics, History, and Public Policy; Global Studies; Hispanic Studies; Humanities and Arts; International Relations and Politics; and Policy and Management.

Government officials, leaders of non-government organizations, advocacy organizations, scholars in the humanities, and social scientists are often overburdened with the sheer magnitude of the problems facing displaced people. Through original research, fieldwork, and interviews with policy makers, the scholar-activists who have written the essays in this issue of *CIRP Journal* carefully and clearly make the case for using many disciplines in the humanities and social sciences to develop public policy that alleviates the trauma of being displaced, creates safety nets for those living in tenuous states of transition, and devises global and national strategies that make displacement less likely.

The purpose of this journal is to help the emerging generation enter the national conversation on issues that matter to them. Those in power should listen to what they have to say and note the urgency, passion, and objectivity with which they make their case.

Kiron K. Skinner
Publisher and Editor-in-Chief
Letter from the Guest Editors

Dear Reader,

We were very excited to have the opportunity to compile and edit the second edition of *CIRP Journal* because the topic of refugees is near and dear to our hearts. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a refugee is someone displaced from his or her country of origin and unable to return for fear of persecution based on one or more of the following five criteria: race, religion, nationality, social group, or political opinion. Other circumstances such as economic persecution and environmental crises also produce displaced populations, and while these groups typically are not classified as refugees, they, too, need support, protection, and aid.

For four years, we were active members and leaders of FORGE (Facilitating Opportunities for Refugee Growth and Empowerment), which is a campus organization that supports refugees recently resettled in Pittsburgh and educates the Carnegie Mellon community on refugee issues worldwide. Personally, we also worked closely with an ethnic-Nepali refugee family from Bhutan that was resettled in Pittsburgh in 2009. Visiting the family on a weekly basis, we tutored them in English and provided cross-cultural support to help them integrate into the local community. In return, the entire Bhutanese refugee community in Pittsburgh welcomed us into their lives and, quite often, into their homes. They are friendly, ambitious people who have survived discrimination, exile, and poverty. Working with them provided us with a glimpse into the challenges that refugees endure and motivated us to learn more. We hope this issue reflects the resilience and strength of refugees as well as some of the injustices they face around the world today.

While refugee issues are not explored extensively in academic literature, the millions who make up the international refugee community deserve greater attention from students of international relations who will one day be the scholars, influential policy makers, human rights activists, and development leaders to effect change. This issue of *CIRP Journal* looks into the causes of initial displacement, international response, durable solutions, and resettlement. Some articles take the form of case studies while others are more theoretical in nature, a variety appropriate to the field of international relations. We have also sought to represent the geographical diversity of refugee crises with perspectives from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. Finally, our expert interviews offer institutional observations from the local, national, and international levels.

This publication would not have been possible without the opportunity and support provided by Dr. Kiron Skinner, Faculty Director of the Center for International Relations and Politics at Carnegie Mellon University. Katie Stoebe, Executive Director for CIRP, has offered key logistical and design support and has been a vital point of contact throughout the entire process. Finally, we thank all of our student authors and professional correspondents who graciously gave their time and energy to bring this journal to life.

Guest Editors
Emily Feenstra (CMU 2013)
Kimberly Josephson (CMU 2013)
Bhutanese Refugees and the Search for Long-Term Solutions: Reflections on Hopes, Disappointments, and Identity

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in 1989, the government of Bhutan forced the ethnic-Nepali Bhutanese citizens, or the Lhotshampas, to leave their homeland. More than 100,000 Lhotshampas settled in refugee camps in eastern Nepal, where they were denied the opportunity to legally earn a living and were forced into a state of reliance on international aid. When reading about this humanitarian issue in the distant Himalayas, it is easy to reduce the conflict to a collection of statistics and reports. This article seeks to illuminate the varying opinions of the Bhutanese refugees concerning durable solutions, particularly third-country resettlement, as it draws on interviews conducted with former Bhutanese refugees living in Pittsburgh as well as interviews described in other texts. In any refugee situation, there are typically three “durable solutions”: voluntary repatriation, local integration into the country of asylum, and third-country resettlement. In the case of the Lhotshampas, years passed and the quality of life in the camps continued to deteriorate, yet there were no durable solutions in sight.

REPATRIATION

Despite the lack of progress in making repatriation a possibility, the refugees maintained their hopes and expectations for a chance to return to their homeland. When asked about refugees’ opinions on a durable solution upon arriving in the camps, Ashok Gurung said, “Maybe 3 to 5 percent probably wanted to resettle. But the majority wanted to go back to Bhutan.” Damber Bhandari, a refugee who left Bhutan in 1992 and came to the United States in 2009, said that the refugees thought that they would be able to go back to Bhutan and had continuing hopes for repatriation despite the lack of progress in reaching a resolution. Bhandari believes that the refugees felt strongly about repatriation because they still wanted their land, homes, and cattle. One 48-year-old woman said, “I would like to be repatriated, because Bhutan is the only place I know.” By 1998, Padam Kharel, a Bhutanese refugee now resettled in Pittsburgh, had nearly given up on the chance to go back to Bhutan. Although


Julia Hanby

Julia Hanby (DC ’12) graduated with a BA in Ethics, History, and Public Policy with an additional major in Global Studies and a minor in Hispanic Studies. She served for one year as a Compass AmeriCorps member at the Latino Family Center in Pittsburgh and plans to pursue a master’s degree in international development.
he still wanted to return to his country, it seemed that repatriation would be nearly impossible because of numerous unsuccessful rounds of bilateral talks between Nepal and Bhutan.\(^6\) Still today, the government of Bhutan has not accepted responsibility for the refugee situation and has not offered repatriation as a viable solution.

**LOCAL INTEGRATION**

Local integration involves the absorption of refugees into the host country. Although repatriation was their preference, some refugees believed that living in Nepal would be preferable to resettling in an unfamiliar country. One 30-year-old woman stated, “If they can’t give us our property back in Bhutan, I would prefer to stay here. It would be good if we could get citizenship and land like we did in Bhutan and also a house.”\(^7\) However, host countries are generally reluctant to accept the refugees beyond the confinements of the camp because of the possible effects on the nation’s politics, economy, environment, and security.\(^8\) Nepal did not take steps to naturalize the Bhutanese refugees, and as Human Rights Watch stated, “Nepal sees the refugees as fundamentally a Bhutanese responsibility and is unwilling to suggest by naturalizing them that Bhutan was in any way justified in denying them citizenship and expelling them in the first place.”\(^9\) For various reasons such as political instability and tension with the Nepalese, many Bhutanese refugees were not attracted to local integration as a possible durable solution.

**THIRD-COUNTRY RESETTLEMENT**

In 2006, Ellen Sauerbrey, the US Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration, announced that the United States would accept 60,000 Bhutanese refugees for resettlement. Canada, Australia, Norway, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Denmark followed with smaller quotas.\(^10\) These announcements spurred both positive and negative reactions in the camps, resulting in some violent clashes between those with opposing viewpoints.

Misinformation about third-country resettlement was rampant within the camps. After receiving news of the opportunity to be resettled in the United States, refugees had many misconceptions about what life would be like in the United States. Some thought that their family would be scattered all over the nation and they could not live together. There were fears that they would be forced to give up their culture. Many thought that by accepting resettlement to the United States, they would forfeit their right to return to Bhutan someday.\(^11\) While living in a refugee camp, one woman explained, “I don’t want to go to America. I know nothing about the country. In the third country, if their government pushes us out – where will we go? I only

---

\(^6\) Padam and Tika Kharel, interview by Julia Hanby, interpreted by Suman Giri, April 11, 2012, Pittsburgh.
\(^7\) Vartak, Memory and Migration, 78.
\(^9\) Human Rights Watch, *Last Hope – A Need for Durable Solutions*, 58.
want to go to Bhutan and nowhere else.”

Ashok Gurung explained how refugees began to accept the idea of third-country resettlement, but only as a result of frustration and the realization that no other solutions were in sight. “After 16 years, we thought that if there is some other solution, we will start to think about it. Before that, they had never thought about local integration nor third-country resettlement.”

Padam Kharel explained that coming to the United States was not so much a choice, but an obligation: “Going back wasn’t an option. Staying in Nepal wasn’t an option. So [resettlement] was the only option as a long-term solution.”

A major reason that some Bhutanese refugees favored third-country resettlement was their belief that the younger generation would be able to have a good education and a better future. Tulashi Bhandari said that if it were not for her kids, she would not have even considered coming to the United States. Her husband, Damber, said that he was fearful about coming to the United States but he knew that since his children could speak English, he would be in a relatively better position. Mon Maya Bhandari, the daughter of Damber and Tulashi, said she and her siblings forced their parents to choose third-country resettlement because they heard that they would have a good education in the United States. She also grew tired of waiting for a better solution. She told her parents, “Your life is hard. Don’t make my life hard like yours. If we go there, we will have an education. If we stay here, there will be no change and our lives will be the same.” Ultimately, she believes that her parents came to the United States because they wanted to make a better life for their children. As of November 2008, nearly 50,000 Bhutanese refugees reported to the UNHCR that they were interested in third-country resettlement.

CONCLUSION

Throughout their time in the refugee camps in Nepal, Bhutanese refugees held differing views about possible solutions to their long-term displacement. Some lived a substantial part of their lives in Bhutan and were steadfast in their desire to return. Others, particularly those born in refugee camps, developed an attachment to Nepal. Yet some had no sense of belonging to any particular country and welcomed third-country resettlement as an opportunity to eventually acquire citizenship for the first time. Unfortunately, as repatriation and local integration have

12 Vartak, Memory and Migration, 75.
13 Ashok Gurung, presentation at the University of Pittsburgh, March 21, 2012.
not been viable options, third-country resettlement has been the only permanent solution made available to the Bhutanese refugees. Although they have been denied their right to repatriate, the Lhotshampas have had the opportunity to begin their lives again in third countries like the United States, where they are forming rich and culturally diverse communities.
INTRODUCTION

In the world today, over 3 billion people live in urban environments. Of these, 1 billion live in slums or informal, spontaneous settlements.\(^1\) Rapid urbanization has dramatically affected issues related to refugees. While the majority of refugees were previously concentrated in camps, according to recent statistics by the UNHCR,\(^2\) half of the world’s 10.8 million refugees live in urban areas while only a third live in camps.\(^3\) Urban refugees are an extremely vulnerable population due to impoverishment and legal barriers constructed by host nations. Meanwhile, humanitarian actors who have traditionally responded to crises in rural environments are called to modify practices to operate in urban environments. This article will review some of the risk factors for refugees in urban environments and challenges faced by those attempting to provide relief.

RISK FACTORS FOR REFUGEES IN URBAN AREAS

Refugees typically arrive in urban centers extremely poor and lacking documentation. They are often traumatized and may lack support networks, knowledge of urban life, and local language skills. Formally acquiring property is financially infeasible and accessing housing subsidies or public housing programs available to the host communities may require proof of citizenship or financial and credit history. Thus, refugees typically settle in informal settlements such as slums.\(^4\) This form of shelter increases a refugee’s vulnerability; informal settlements are vulnerable to mass evictions, more likely to be in disaster-prone locations such as landfills or low-lying areas prone to flooding, are subject to overcrowding, and lack access to clean water and sanitation. These characteristics increase the possibility of the population suffering from outbreaks of communicable diseases or natural disasters.\(^5\)

Cities in middle-income or developing host countries also commonly lack the infrastructure to accommodate refugees. According to Anna Tibaijuka, executive director of the UN Human

---

2 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
3 UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas (September 2009), http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4ab8e7f72.html.

---

Emily Feenstra

*Emily Feenstra (DC ’13) graduated with a dual degree in Policy and Management and International Relations and Politics. She was president of the campus organization Facilitating Opportunities for Refugee Growth and Empowerment (FORGE), which partners CMU students with Bhutanese–Nepali refugees in Pittsburgh. Emily is interested in social policy, particularly relating to social mobility and inequality. She is currently working as a business analyst with McKinsey & Company.*
Settlement Program, “‘The arrival of new IDPs [Internally Displaced Persons] and refugees further stresses already inadequate water and sanitation infrastructure, shelter and access to land. Competition for resources and livelihoods among the urban displaced and host populations increases social tension and can result in new conflict.”

In addition to housing, urban refugees face distinct challenges in establishing economic self-sufficiency. Refugees in camps are typically restricted from income-generating activities and are thus assumed to need long-term assistance. On the other hand, urban refugees are expected to become self-reliant faster but also face sizable legal and institutional barriers. In host countries that do not respect the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, refugees may have no legal right to reside or work. Furthermore, refugees often have insufficient marketable skills. Refugees therefore disproportionately enter the informal sector, competing with the urban poor for low-paying and dangerous jobs. While young men are typically the least vulnerable subset among refugees, in urban areas they may be at high risk for “detention, deportation, exploitative and hazardous employment.”

Refugees can also face barriers to education. First and foremost, obtaining necessary documentation to enroll in school is often problematic. Refugees are often unaware of educational opportunities. Similar to the urban poor, fees associated with books, transportation, and uniforms can even make “free” public education infeasible. Refugees have to compete with local children for space in schools and may face discrimination from school administrators. Furthermore, they lack documentation of their age or their education may have been disrupted during conflict, thus making it difficult for them to enroll at the appropriate educational level. When enrollment at local schools is not viable, “refugee” schools are often provided by local nonprofit organizations. However, these schools lack accreditation, which may prohibit refugees from pursuing higher education. Still, some education is better than none: the “UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies regard education as a basic human right, a tool for protection and an essential component of humanitarian assistance to displaced populations.”

ADAPTING HUMANITARIAN RESPONSES

In September 2009, the UNHCR released a new policy on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas built on two key principles: (1) urban areas are a legitimate place for refugees to reside and exercise their rights; and (2) the role of the UNHCR is to maximize the protection space for refugees and the organizations that support them. As stated previously, in the past,
humanitarian policy makers and practitioners have primarily focused on rural emergencies and disasters. However, increasing displacement to urban areas calls for an adaptation of the approach of humanitarian actors. This section will provide an overview of scholars’ and practitioners’ recommendations for interagency collaboration and refugee registration.

When humanitarian agencies respond to rural crises, they are typically the sole competent responders. However, in urban areas local administrators are often the primary responders but require the support of international organizations and the development community.\(^\text{13}\) To facilitate effective responses, humanitarian actors should work with local institutions, including “local governments, service-providing agencies, line departments of national and provincial governments, urban councils and technical departments, faith and community-based groups, police forces and academia.”\(^\text{14}\) According to António Guterres, UN Higher Commissioner for Refugees, since urban refugees often face resource scarcity and high levels of risk alongside the urban poor, the UNHCR’s approach must reflect concern for both groups. Work for the displaced should be coordinated with and support the efforts of development actors in alleviating poverty, finding solutions to insecure housing in slums and disaster-prone areas, and facilitating employment through skill-building.\(^\text{15,16}\) The UNHCR policy published in 2009 emphasizes that the UNHCR will avoid building parallel services, particularly in health, education, and shelter, and rather advocate for the inclusion of refugees in national programs that the UNHCR can support.\(^\text{17}\) Refugee-specific services may include help obtaining identification documents, help fighting discrimination by landlords and employers, and assistance in returning home, if desired. However, since the well-being of refugees is ultimately tied to the local community, it is important that refugee-specific services do not invoke conflict with the local community.

Finally, integral to serving urban refugees is identification and registration, which is notably difficult in urban settings. Unlike in camps, where refugees are an easily identifiable group, urban refugees are dispersed and integrated with the urban poor. In some places, refugees specifically avoid being recognized by local authorities and thus may not seek registration. However, registration is essential for planning, resource allocation, needs assessment, family reunification, and protection against refoulement.\(^\text{18}\) While the registration of refugees is formally a responsibility of host states, it is often left to the UNHCR. Thus, expanded use of mobile registration teams, wide distribution of information on the registration process using television, radio, internet, and SMS services, establishment of local community centers, and engagement of trained outreach volunteers to successfully reach urban refugees will be crucial to registering and meeting the needs of urban refugees.

**CONCLUSION**

Damascus and Amman together house more than 1 million Iraqi refugees. Khartoum is home to an estimated 1.7 million displaced people.\(^\text{19}\) Beyond their sheer population size, historical

---


\(^{15}\) Guterres, “Protection Challenges for Persons of Concern,” 8.


\(^{17}\) UN High Commissioner for Refugees, *UNHCR Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas*.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) Guterres, “Protection Challenges for Persons of Concern,” 8.
evidence suggests that urban refugees are unlikely to return to rural areas. It is therefore critical that the international community recognize urban areas as a legitimate place for refugees to settle. Humanitarian actors, development actors, and local institutions must come together to accommodate the influx of refugees into urban areas in a way that respects their rights as human beings and refugees and that benefits both displaced persons as well as their host communities.
Refugee Warehousing: An Economic Appeal

KIMBERLY JOSEPHSON

INTRODUCTION

Violence, persecution, and natural disasters have led to displacement worldwide, creating millions of refugees. Refugee status, however, is intended to be temporary. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are three permanent, “durable solutions” available to refugees: local integration into the country of asylum, voluntary repatriation to their country of origin, or third-country resettlement. However, the reality of millions segregated and confined to camps on a long-term basis without any hint of other solutions on the horizon suggests that these solutions are often unrealistic and unattainable. This issue has been coined as “refugee warehousing” by human rights and refugee-related organizations and describes situations in which refugees are confined to camps for at least five years, though the majority of those affected have been warehoused for more than ten years. Today, some refugees remain subjected to this state of ambiguity 40, 50, or even 60 years later.

BACKGROUND

When the international community first took on the role of protecting refugees after World War II, the UNHCR favored local integration as the preferred solution; host nations were far more welcoming than they often are today. In the 1970s, many nations, particularly in Africa, experienced prolonged conflicts, some of which remain unresolved. Local populations grew to see refugees as a burden. Host nations responded by restricting access to employment and land for refugees. The preferred solution shifted from local integration to repatriation, while resettlement remained an option for only a tiny fraction of those displaced. Unfortunately, many conflicts that produce refugees are not resolved quickly; they take years or decades to end. As a result, refugee camps intended for emergency relief and protection become stagnant settlements while humanitarian and international agencies wait for repatriation to become a viable option. By depending on eventual repatriation, warehousing ultimately wastes resources and...

2 Note that neither the UNHCR nor the State Department uses the term “refugee warehousing,” opting instead to refer to any refugee population in exile for five years or more (not just those in camps) as a “protracted refugee situation.” Jana Mason and Matt Pennington, interview with UNHCR, March 22, 2013.
3 United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, World Refugee Survey 2009 – Warehoused Refugee Populations (March 4, 2013), http://www.uscfr.org/2010Website/5_Resources/5_9_Refugee_Warehousing/5_5_4_Archived_World_Refugee_Surveys/5_5_4_7_World_Refugee_Survey_2009/5_5_4_7_1_Statistics/Warehoused_Refugee_Populations.pdf.

Kimberly Josephson

Kimberly Josephson (DC ’13) graduated with university and college honors with a BS in International Relations and Politics and an additional major in Hispanic Studies. Kimberly volunteered for four years with an ethnic-Nepali refugee family from Bhutan and was an active member of Facilitating Opportunities for Refugee Growth and Empowerment (FORGE). After graduating, she interned with Results for Development Institute (R4D) in Washington, DC, and will be teaching English in Argentina as a Fulbright Fellow in 2014.
Refugee Warehousing

stalls the lives of refugees. When the UNHCR published their Global Trends report for 2011, 7.1 million people were living in “a protracted situation.” Of these 7.1 million, the precise number specifically confined to camps, or “warehoused,” is not calculated or published by the UNHCR, though it does estimate that there is a total of 3 million refugees in camps or settlements. However, scholars examining the issue of protracted refugee situations suggest that this number does not include “many of those long-term displaced in urban settings around the world or smaller residual displaced populations who remain in exile after others have returned home,” nor Palestinian refugees. The length of time for many warehoused populations is truly astonishing: Eritreans in Sudan (more than 40 years), Sahrawis in Algeria (more than 30 years), and Burmese in Thailand (more than 25 years).

RIGHTS OF THE REFUGEE

In 1951, the United Nations held the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (CRSR), where it defined to whom the refugee status applies, the rights it guarantees, and the obligations of countries that host refugees. The document promises the right to “wage-earning employment” and “freedom of movement” within host nations, two of the greatest violations in refugee warehousing. Unfortunately, as with many international conventions and agreements, the CRSR and Protocol are not enforceable and violations do not incur punishment. Neither of these documents identifies the creation or use of refugee camps as obligatory or encouraged. Rather, camps and settlements have emerged as a solution for host nations rather than the refugees themselves. While camps may provide security and the means of survival in the immediate aftermath of a conflict, they ultimately perpetuate a refugee’s state of dependency.

THE ECONOMICS OF WAREHOUSING

There are numerous ways to argue against refugee warehousing. From a security perspective, the restrictive nature of camps and the restlessness they produce often lead to violence. From a political perspective, protracted encampment fundamentally violates not only refugee rights, but oftentimes basic human rights as well. In the context of an international system that cannot realistically compel nations to follow international norms and agreements, perhaps the best argument is one that targets what all self-interested nations value: their economy.

The isolation of refugee camps simply does not make economic sense. In the 2005 World Refugee Survey, Merrill Smith of the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) draws an important parallel between the failures of protectionist economies and the plight of refugee camps. Trade barriers and other protectionist mechanisms intended to insulate fragile or vulnerable economies are often grossly inefficient and Smith argues that segregated refugee communities are similarly wasteful. Smith quotes the UN Millennium Development Project

---

7 United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, World Refugee Survey 2009.
9 Ibid., 27.
report’s criticism of protectionism as it “reduces not only … competitiveness in world markets but also the enormous opportunities of increased trade.”11 The report highlights how labor migration and the absorption of workers from the informal sector can lead to economic growth and expansion. Smith argues that these same principles apply to the potential workers residing in refugee camps and the host nation’s economy.12

Segregating refugees from the host population for decades wastes resources. Warehousing deprives refugees of the economic means to reach self-sufficiency, ultimately prolonging their dependency on aid and draining international resources. Proposed solutions such as local integration or more flexible settlement guidelines would create higher short-term costs, as aid would go towards housing, property, and employment assistance rather than just weekly food rations, but could save money in the long run. Self-sufficiency is more achievable outside of camps and would reduce the need for handouts from the UNHCR. In addition, warehousing wastes not only international resources but the potential labor force and consumer base that refugees comprise.

Self-sufficiency simply is not a realistic goal in warehousing situations; camps are usually too resource-poor to provide for any kind of livelihood.13 According to the 2004 World Refugee Survey, not only does this create immediate dependence but it can have long-lasting effects such as “pathological dependency, low self-esteem, and lack of initiative.”14 The most self-sufficient refugees are, in fact, those who are given opportunities outside of camps: “Over time, encamped refugees become more impoverished and less able to reintegrate. Self-settled refugees, on the other hand, are among the first to voluntarily repatriate” (emphasis in the original).15

Life outside of camps has demonstrated economic benefits. Tibetan refugees in Nepal achieved international success with their traditional carpet making in the 1990s, with earnings surpassing even those of Nepal’s tourism industry.16 In Kenya, Ugandan refugees who received the right to work were able to train and become teachers and doctors, reducing a national shortage in these professions. Refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia settled in local villages in Guinea instead of refugee camps and introduced a new method of rice production in swamplands.17 And the sooner refugees become integrated and settled into local communities, the sooner they can take advantage of educational benefits and income opportunities and acquire property to contribute to the national economy, perhaps even expanding the tax base. So why not leave the camps? Unfortunately, some host nations restrict refugees to living in camps, often along the country’s border. Concentrating a refugee population in segregated areas like camps can work to the host country’s advantage in the short term by attracting media attention and donor funds.18

---

12 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 54.
17 Smith, “Warehousing Refugees,” 47.
18 Jana Mason and Matt Pennington, interview with UNHCR, March 22, 2013.
Refugee Warehousing

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Ending refugee warehousing will not be an easy task, but the long-term benefits far outweigh the immediate costs. Refugees should be permitted to straddle the division between the dependent nature of encampment and the illegality of self-settling in local villages or cities. Allowing refugees to live outside the boundaries of refugee camps while maintaining their refugee status would allow them greater access to education and the ability to earn an income while still guaranteeing their protection under the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol. The USCRI suggests a stronger relationship between the UNHCR and host nations to integrate both financial expenses and assistance. Instead of shedding millions of dollars on the daily maintenance of refugee camps, donor countries and the UNHCR could reimburse host governments for some of the costs that arise from integrating refugees into local communities. Of course, this often depends on the host government’s ability to combat corruption and implement effective economic policy.

CONCLUSION

For the past four decades, international agencies and host nations have focused on the durable solution of repatriation. Based on historical precedence and the millions of warehoused refugees today, this expectation is unrealistic. Refugee camps are created with the intention of providing emergency assistance and protection. This contradicts the needs of refugees who remain detained between societies for decades. Years after fleeing from violence, refugees are looking to develop and establish their livelihood, not survive on a day-to-day basis. If international laws and norms cannot oblige host nations to integrate refugees based on a humanitarian appeal, greater emphasis should be placed on the economic potential of integration.

21 Ibid., 14.
Uprooted and Overlooked: Providing Assistance and Protection to Internally Displaced Persons in Mali

ANGEL NONYE-JOHN

INTRODUCTION

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are a historically underrepresented group, not only in terms of humanitarian assistance but also of legal advocacy. Although IDPs are often overlooked in international policy, the number of IDPs surpasses the number of refugees; Africa alone has five times as many IDPs as refugees, with 2 million refugees and 11 million IDPs in the sub-Saharan region as of 2010. The lack of legal discourse and policies concerning this population has caused neglect in crucial times of conflict and natural disaster. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center,

Internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised State border.

Within the last decade, the dialogue regarding the protection and assistance of IDPs has improved exponentially. In response to the alarming statistics on IDPs, Guiding Principles were presented to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) in 1998 by Dr. Francis Deng, the special representative to the UN Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, as a framework for governments and NGOs regarding the rights of IDPs. While this document aids governments in establishing the foundations and structures for IDP assistance, it does not legally bind them to support IDPs.

As a result of state failures, conflict, and natural disasters, Africa is the continent with the most IDPs. Today, a shocking 40 percent of all IDPs live on the African continent. After years

4 Now the UN Human Rights Council.

Angel Nonye-John

Angel Nonye-John (DC ’15) is studying International Relations and Politics and pursuing a minor in African and African American Studies with a focus on West Africa and the Caribbean. Her interests include international development, conflict resolution, the effects of immigration, and women’s participation in politics.
of neglect, the African Union (AU) met in 2009 in Kampala, Uganda, to discuss improving protection for IDPs in Africa. On December 6, 2012, Swaziland became the fifteenth African country to ratify the Kampala Declaration, creating the first legally binding policy concerning IDPs in the world. The Kampala Convention has been praised by many as a progressive move towards providing protection and assistance for IDPs in Africa. However, Africa’s success in creating the first binding legal framework on IDPs is meaningless until it becomes more than words on paper.7

In this article, I will explore the policies related to IDPs by analyzing the situation in Mali as of March 2013. I will begin by summarizing the conflict and relevant actors in Mali. Then I will explain how the conflict has affected the humanitarian situation as well as the common issues IDPs face in Mali and around the world. Finally, I will discuss key factors in implementing the tenets of the Kampala Declaration in Mali and Africa.

CONFLICT IN MALI

Mali is an Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) nation, rich with history, that has been torn apart by ethnic conflict and Islamist militants. Throughout its post-colonial history, Mali has had difficulty pacifying independence-seeking Tuareg and Moor minorities in the northern Azawad region. In January 2012, a rebellion of the Tuareg resulted in state instability and an eventual coup d’état in March. Islamist groups such as Ansar Dine and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA) joined the Tuareg Rebellion. In April, a civilian government was restored; however, by June the Islamists had not only separated from the Tuareg but also gained strength. By this time, Al-Qaeda in Maghreb (AQIM) and other splinter groups joined in the dismantlement of Mali.8 By the end of 2012, the international community became concerned with the deteriorating situation on the ground. Mali is of regional importance; it lies in the center of the ECOWAS region and borders seven nations. The international community feared that if Mali were controlled by rebels, the entire region would risk destabilization. In January 2013, Mali’s former colonial power, France, led an intervention backed by the ECOWAS military force and Chad.9 The rebels retreated with ease, and the intervention was perceived as a victory by some and a concern by others. As the rebels hide and reintegrate into society, the future stability of Mali is uncertain in the absence of French forces.10

MAIN ISSUES FOR INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN MALI

As the international community debated taking military action, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon commented that “Any proposed military solution ... should be considered extremely carefully. This could have significant humanitarian consequences, including further displacement and restrictions on humanitarian access.”11 In February 2013, there were an estimated...
230,000 IDPs and more than 167,000 Malian refugees. As a result of the foreign intervention, the International Organization for Migration reported an additional 14,000 IDPs and 22,000 refugees in Mauritania, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Due to Mali’s uncertain political future and humanitarian crisis, there is a need to create a sustainable yet flexible framework that improves governance, builds community, and provides sustainable assistance and aid for IDPs.

GOVERNANCE

When refugees flee across international borders, they fall under the responsibility of neighboring nations and the international community. The international and regional communities assume much of the responsibility for providing protection and assistance to these persons; however, IDPs are more problematic as they become the responsibility of the state in conflict. The Kampala Declaration maintains that the responsibility for IDPs is in the hands of those states in conflict. Unfortunately, weak governments with limited resources often focus on maintaining control rather than providing humanitarian assistance to the displaced. The Kampala Declaration also acknowledges the resource limitations of national governments and the important role of local and international NGOs in humanitarian assistance. Mali’s decentralized government was relatively weak and faced difficulty distributing its resources even before the coup d’état in March 2012; therefore, the improvement of governance and collaboration with NGOs will be of extreme importance.

COMMUNITY AND AID

IDPs face issues such as landlessness, unemployment, marginalization, and food insecurity, making them vulnerable within their own country. A majority of those displaced in Africa are unable to return home for more than five years, known as protracted displacement, making sustainable development of high importance. Throughout the Malian conflict, NGOs and the government have had difficulty identifying IDPs because, unlike many refugees, they are not confined to camps. Instead, they are scattered throughout the nation with extended family or in other communities. Those who NGOs can locate are often the victims of discrimination and isolation. These IDPs are not only strangers in the community but they also receive aid unavailable to other members of the community. In many areas of Mali, there has been violence toward and exclusion of IDPs, especially of the Tuareg ethnic group. Many locals are distrustful of outsiders and blame all Tuaregs for causing conflict in the nation. Building and

Angel Nonye-John

Weak governments with limited resources often focus on maintaining control rather than providing humanitarian assistance to the displaced.

17 Ferris, “Internal Displacement in Africa.”
restoring community, whether IDPs stay in their host communities or repatriate, is essential to
the development and assistance of these persons.

CONCLUSION

As the conflict in Mali comes to an indefinite end, the future of many IDPs is uncertain. France began its withdrawal of troops from Mali in April 2013, leaving 1,000 troops behind to assist the UN peacekeeping force, scheduled to deploy in July 2013. While ECOWAS troops will remain in the country, many fear that the lack of a French military presence will cause the conflict to re-escalate. The International Organisation for Migration in Bamako and Koulikoro has stated that 93 percent of IDPs in Mali wish to return home in the near future. The uncertainty of the conflict in Mali has divided NGOs and the government on how best to support IDPs under these circumstances. The UNHCR has made plans to assist IDPs and refugees who will be returning home while some NGOs are following aid frameworks based on protracted displacement.

As the future of Malian IDPs is uncertain, many suggest that IDP support groups focus on sustainable assistance and aid that helps the general community. Local governments and NGOs should coordinate and identify communities with a significant number of IDPs as well as returnees and provide sustainable assistance. While the Kampala Declaration marks progress for Africa, the unstable situation for IDPs in Mali will be a test of whether Mali, Africa, and the international community are indeed serious about protecting the rights of internally displaced persons.

Citizen Initiatives Use Simple Communication Tools to Aid Refugees

LINDSAY ELLIOTT-FOOSE

INTRODUCTION

The journey of a refugee from home country to a new nation is long, emotional, and sometimes wrought with chaos and confusion. Communication is essential throughout the whole process as refugees must be kept informed by humanitarian and relief agencies, maintain contact with family members, and remain aware of the situation in their home country. However, due to insufficient technology infrastructures, that communication can often be difficult. In response, governments and humanitarian agencies have begun to take advantage of new technologies such as satellite imaging, biometrics, and simple database management that can be operated remotely and work with limited access to large-scale infrastructure. With limited resources and international access, the communication needs of an individual refugee can be more difficult to provide for, leading to the development of citizen initiatives that use the simplest and most available forms of communication technologies.

In 2008, a workshop was conducted in Australia, bringing together temporarily and permanently resettled refugees and relief agencies to identify the main priorities during the entire resettlement process and how to enable communication “during war, in flight and in refugee camps.” The workshop organizers found that after acquiring means for immediate survival, refugees were most concerned with maintaining communication channels with loved ones. Where possible, technological innovations have allowed for greater facilitation of communication and connection at the individual level, utilizing the limited infrastructures available. The following examples of such citizen initiatives illustrate how refugees utilize technology at each of the three major points of resettlement: immediately following evacuation, during temporary settlement, and following more permanent resettlement.

RADIO UTILIZED TO FIND HAITIANS

When the 7.0-scale earthquake hit Haiti on January 12, 2010, Port-au-Prince’s communication infrastructure was decimated. Domestic and international relief forces found it difficult to coordinate with each other on the ground. Not even President René Préval was immune to this communication isolation; it took him three days to access appropriate satellite technology and communicate with President Obama. Recognizing the challenges, the United States Naval


Lindsay Elliott-Foose

Lindsay Elliott-Foose (DC ’14) is a Washington, DC, native who is pursuing a dual degree in Global Studies and Decision Science. Lindsay was enrolled in the Washington Semester Program at Georgetown University and interned for a Department of Defense agency in the spring of 2013. She is currently a senior at Carnegie Mellon, serving as a Highland Ambassador, a teaching assistant, and Career Peer Mentor.
Citizen Initiatives Use Simple Communication Tools to Aid Refugees

Postgraduate School immediately began collecting and dispatching over $250,000 worth of communications technology. But for Haitians on the ground, there was an immediate need to communicate with loved ones.³

Some, like Radio One DJ Carel Pedre, were able to harness the limited available technology to innovate communication methods across the city. Minutes after the earthquake, Pedre was able to use his radio audience to spread messages from survivors seeking news of relatives and friends. Radio One was joined by several other local radio stations in engineering unofficial “ad hoc reunions,” logging messages on their four in-house computers, and creating an impromptu database system. Pedre and others dubbed it the “Noula” system, using bicycle messengers to single out people without access to Internet or phone communications and carry messages from one isolated part of Port-au-Prince to another. Today, Carel Pedre has refined this crude process into an advanced system that integrates mapping software and text messaging, allowing for more efficient and quick communication.⁴

MOBILE APP MORE EFFICIENTLY AND SAFELY RECONNECTS TEMPORARILY RELOCATED FAMILIES

As family members cross national borders, they are sometimes separated from one another and find it difficult to reconnect. Such was the case for Mansour, an Afghan boy, as he, his five siblings, and his parents fled Afghanistan. Mansour found himself alone in Copenhagen, where he met Swedish brothers David and Christopher Mikkelsen. They spent six years trying to connect Mansour with his family, quickly realizing that the existing structures and programs for tracing families on an international scale were grossly inadequate.⁵

After successfully reconnecting Mansour with his brother, Ali, in Russia, where he had been officially resettled, the Mikkelsens founded the online and mobile-based Refugees United Project. Since its launch in 2008, Refugees United has become an independent, international nonprofit with many international partnerships including Kenya Red Cross and the UNHCR with their East-Africa missions. It has enabled reunions for more than half of their overall members and attracted over 50,000 refugees in Kenya alone. The organization harnesses the simple tools of mobile phones or internet connectivity to allow individuals to list any details about their separated loved ones they wish on the global database in a relatively secure way. It does not permit the use of names or sensitive information, instead using personal identifiers such as birthmarks, nicknames, or code words, allowing for safer, direct communication and meetings, all in a more efficient, expedient method than using the traditional paper tools.⁶

REFUGEES SETTLED IN THE UNITED STATES USE INTERNET TOOLS TO ADJUST TO NEW LIFE

The emotional difficulties inherent in permanent resettlement are often overlooked when

---

considering a refugee’s resettlement challenges. For the Faour family, fleeing Palestine in 1948 meant separating to resettle in Lebanon, Sweden, the United States, and Israel. Mona Maarouf, 26-year-old granddaughter of Houriya Faour, did not know how to reach out to her extended family members or how to follow news from her grandmother’s home village and community. However, when she joined Facebook, she searched for users with the last name Faour. She is now connected with uncles, aunts, and cousins across the world who have enabled a reconnection with her past, shared their present stories and situations, and become an ingrained part of her future. Overwhelming anecdotal evidence suggests that such use of social media to connect with family, friends, and other refugees proves invaluable to refugees as they adapt to a new life while remaining connected to their heritage, culture, and traditions.

LIMITATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Alongside technological innovation, the growing trend of urbanization contributes to the success story of technologies for refugee communication and reunification. As urban areas often have better technology infrastructures, it is not surprising that refugees will have improved access to technology solutions. However, the level of individual comfort and expertise with technology is a further limitation. Despite these potential limitations, one can still predict that refugee utilization of technology will continue to increase. Further developments necessary to make the use of such technologies even more effective and ubiquitous are: increased affordability and ease of using mobile phones across national borders; continued support and promotion of reunification databases; and further development of accessible communication technologies at resettlement locations. Finally, the safety of shared communication devices must be ensured. Without a standard of security, refugees could find themselves falling prey to identity theft and aggressive privacy crimes.

Today’s globalizing world has integrated technology into the lives of many, including refugees who utilize accessible, relatively affordable means of communication during moments of crisis, throughout temporary displacement, and once they have been resettled permanently. While there are improvements to be made to the technologies refugee populations use, trends indicate that usage will only increase in the future, calling for greater technological innovations.

---

Iraqi Refugee Resettlement

DIVYA KRISHNAN

INTRODUCTION

Refugee crises in Iraq are by no means only a recent matter. Iraq has always been a country with multiple ethnicities, religions, and sects, and this diversity has played a part in the forced displacement that has come to be a defining element of recent Iraqi history. Over the course of Saddam Hussein’s time in power, his regime carried out a policy of violent and deliberate displacement, and after his deposition, radical groups adopted similar tactics to consolidate territory and claim political power. Their efforts have made daily life untenable for millions of Iraqis. While resettlement is neither the most popular nor the most viable solution for the majority of refugees, those who relocate to other countries face their own set of problems. More specifically, Iraqi refugees resettled in the United States confront challenges unique to their group: physical and emotional trauma and problems associated with a highly vulnerable and highly educated refugee population.

The problem of resettlement peaked with the Iraq War. Contrary to hopes that the country would stabilize after Saddam Hussein’s fall in 2003, the violence has continued, often escalating in cities like Mosul, Basra, and Baghdad. Violence by political groups and concerns about bombings, assassinations, mortar attacks, and kidnappings have caused millions of Iraqis to flee their homes. The high levels of violence combined with a lack of employment opportunities and social services complicate the possibility of repatriation, so refugees leave for safer regions of Iraq, neighboring countries, or even more distant destinations. As of January 2012, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had registered and was assisting more than 103,000 Iraqi refugees in Syria and 29,000 Iraqi refugees in Jordan.

In the absence of repatriation as a viable plan, refugee resettlement has become a significant priority of the UNHCR, which describes resettlement as a “burden sharing mechanism.” Further, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) states that often “resettlement in the United States remains the only option for thousands of Iraqi refugees who are still in exile in the

---

2 Ibid., 6.
3 Ibid., 8.
4 Ibid., 6.
6 Note that, given the current violence in Syria, thousands of Iraqi refugees are choosing to return to Iraq or flee to neighboring countries. UNHCR, “2013 UNHCR Country Operations Profile – Syrian Arab Republic,” accessed May 1, 2013, http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486a76.html.
Middle East, primarily in Jordan and Syria.9 As their long-term placement in Jordan and Syria may not be viable, successful resettlement of this group is imperative.

THE UNIQUE STRUGGLE OF IRAQI REFUGEES IN THE US

Refugees who permanently relocate outside of Iraq struggle with issues common to many refugees worldwide: problems relating to income, health and sanitation, and education. In 2007, over 500,000 internally displaced Iraqis lived as “squatters in slum areas with no assistance or legal right to the properties they [occupied].”10 In addition to these problems, Iraqi refugees relocated to the United States grapple with a set of specific issues that largely stem from the makeup of the refugee population.

The US Refugee Admissions Program is designed to offer “security, rights, and a second chance in life to thousands of refugees annually.”11 Each year, it remains one of the few safe options for refugees to begin a new life in a different country. Between 2009 and 2011, Iraqi refugees were one of the three largest refugee populations to arrive in the United States after Burmese and Bhutanese refugees12 and, as such, the problems they present to the system and the challenges they struggle with are important issues for the admissions program to address. With Iraqi refugees, as well as with other refugees, the program faces the general challenge of coping with the poor state of the American and global economy. Specifically, however, Iraqi refugees pose the problem of the “resettlement of a highly educated refugee population with many special needs.”13 Not only are Iraqi refugees often well-educated professionals, but also they have undergone considerable trauma or are adapting to a different family and work dynamic. Consequently, Iraqi refugees who come to America through the program face many specific difficulties integrating into the United States.

The economic vulnerability of Iraqi refugees is exacerbated by their physical and emotional trauma and the difficulty of entering the American workforce as an Iraqi professional. The precarious nature of their resettlement situation begins with their physical and emotional state: very high levels of illness, trauma, and injury complicate integration.14 Often suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, poor general health, and “war-related physical trauma,” Iraqi refugees arrive in poorer health than other groups.15 In addition to these health conditions, often related to the ongoing violence in Iraq, significant percentages of refugees have latent tuberculosis or are obese or hypertensive.16

11 International Rescue Committee, “Iraqi Refugees in the United States,” i.
14 Ibid., 9.
15 Ibid.
Another factor that complicates refugees’ resettlement is the makeup of the refugee population. A large number of resettled Iraqis are widows with young children, a result of the fact that 90 percent of Iraqi civilians who die violent deaths are men, and that widows are considered a vulnerable population and are consequently more likely to be resettled. Lacking employment experience yet expected to support their families, they struggle to adapt to the demands of this new environment, often facing eviction if they cannot hold a job paying enough to cover their cost of housing. Their problems are further complicated by the cultural dissimilarities between the expectations of the United States and Iraq; alone in the United States, they must take on the role of the breadwinner rather than fulfilling the roles more customarily allotted to women in Iraqi society.

The economic concerns of Iraqi widows are similar to those of another group within the Iraqi refugee population. Highly educated Iraqi professionals form a significant portion of the refugee community; “at least 50 percent speak good English and graduated from universities.” Unfortunately, they struggle to integrate into the American workforce and are often unable to find any employment, even entry-level jobs. Their problem is often one of miscommunication through the resettlement process; “minimal or incorrect information given to refugees prior to their arrival left them unprepared for the challenge of resettlement in the United States and the search for employment.” A clear delineation of the jobs available in the United States and the degrees and certifications necessary to successfully apply for them has value prior to relocation. In the same vein, “formal English language training as well as effective vocational and cultural orientation” would assist new arrivals in competing more effectively in the United States and would grant this population the opportunity to contribute significantly to American society.

Economic conditions in the United States do not mitigate the refugees’ psychological trauma. Difficulty in finding employment, the adjustment to a different type of work environment, and the numerous – and often high – costs of living associated with establishing a new life can be overwhelming for many resettled refugees. Indeed, a counselor from the Center for Torture and Trauma Survivors in Atlanta testified that many of his clients “prefer to discuss how they will make their next rent payment rather than receive counseling for the torture they experienced in Iraq.” This demonstrates the troubling degree to which economic survival takes precedence over all other concerns. Further, from an administrative perspective, it suggests that addressing Iraqi refugees’ economic survival – and perhaps the economic survival of all refugees – is an immediate, and even primary, concern. While many refugee populations value economic security, this is an especially pertinent concern in light of the health conditions of Iraqi refugees.

In fact, the refugee resettlement program has its own economic concerns. It is “dangerously under-funded” to the extent that “it would not function without private funds raised by the voluntary resettlement agencies that implement the program.” Given that newly arrived refugees are demonstrably in need of more medical assistance and financial security, includ-

---

19 International Rescue Committee, "Iraqi Refugees in the United States,” 8.
20 Ibid., 11.
22 Ibid., 10.
ing greater assistance with securing employment, this lack of financial durability on the part of a body intended to support refugees in securing economic stability suggests that this is an enduring problem requiring a long-term solution. Further complications arise from the nonstandard nature of refugee “packages” distributed by the program to incoming groups. Described by the IRC as a “resettlement lottery,” the system currently allows for differences in the amount of assistance refugees receive based on their geographic assignment within the United States; refugees in Florida and California receive more compared to those in other states simply because these states have larger levels of “public assistance.” As the International Rescue Committee notes, such a system, which operates on “the luck of the draw,” is not tenable. “All refugees need assistance that is sufficient to cover at least basic needs such as housing while they search for work, learn English and address medical issues.”

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, although resettlement is by no means the only option, it remains a “critical and lifesaving intervention for thousands of at-risk Iraqi refugees who are living in precarious conditions in exile and unable to return home safely.” As such, it is important to understand two things: (1) the United States Refugee Admissions Program must create plans that take into account the specific concerns and constraints of the Iraqi refugee population; and, (2) many of the recommendations for improvements to the refugee resettlement process for Iraqi refugees apply to other refugee groups as well. Consequently, comprehensive attempts to offer recertification programs or increased medical assistance for Iraqi refugees will also benefit other groups. Addressing the problems of integrating a highly educated and vulnerable refugee population into the United States will lead to a better refugee resettlement process for all displaced persons seeking refuge in the United States.

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
INTRODUCTION

“Am I Karen, or am I Thai?”

It was a question posed to me countless times over the course of the seven months I spent researching forced migration along the Thailand-Burma border. For the children who were my primary research subjects, most of whom had left Burma and now resided in Thailand, this question not only signified an attempt to navigate a set of practical dilemmas regarding legal citizenship, eligibility for schooling, access to health care, and the potential for future employment; it also represented a struggle to construct and communicate a sense of self that acknowledged and gave meaning to displacement. The question epitomizes the struggle of the refugee child to constitute a new understanding of self that reflects a post-migration environment while still recognizing a seemingly distant home, community, and culture.

In the following article, I will begin to explore how displaced children pursue ‘self-making’ activities in post-migration contexts, with a focus on how they reconcile the complexities of being in, but not from, a second country. In particular, this article will highlight one strategy through which displaced children connect and relate their country of origin to a second-country context, bridging their past to their present.

1 The name Union of Burma was adopted after the British Empire conquered the region during the nineteenth century. In 1989, the official name of the country was changed to Myanmar by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (which, in 1997, changed its name to the State Peace and Development Council). This article will refer to the country as Burma, the name most commonly used within the country.

2 The definition of the child varies widely among international organizations, regional groups, and local communities. When discussing the child, this article will be referring to the UNCRC’s and The Hague Convention's definition of the child as every human being below the age of eighteen years.
The content of this article and accompanying visual materials are drawn from ethnographic fieldwork completed in the border region of Thailand and Burma between June and December 2011. Through participant observation, interviews, and participatory arts workshops, the study focused on exploring the effects of forced migration on ‘self-making’ processes among ethnic minority youth from Burma. A key premise of the research was that processes of forming a sense of self (or ‘self-making’) undertaken during childhood and early adolescence become more complex, but simultaneously more crucial, for individuals who have experienced dramatic upheaval across geographic boundaries, whether regional or national. Through participatory activities wherein research subjects themselves were invited to communicate their perspectives through the use of drawing, photography, and narration, I hoped to identify concrete strategies through which displaced children constitute new understandings of self, with a particular focus on how children communicate across discrepancies created by displacement.

This article will focus on a subset of the results of this research — a series of photographs created by the primary study group — and will highlight the ways in which individuals use the camera to create images in the present that depict, or refer to, the past. The camera, as a research tool, was paired with opportunities for participants to caption their images, either verbally or in writing (fig. 1.1). The significance of the photographs and captions that resulted from this methodology is not tied solely to the means of their production; instead, their significance lies in the invisible process of self-making and negotiation the camera renders as visible. It is not merely what each child chose to place within the frame of the viewfinder that holds meaning; it is the links they forged between ‘here’ and ‘there,’ ‘now’ and ‘then.’

REPRESENTING THE PAST AND PRESENT

As soon as cameras were introduced as a part of the research study, which occurred about halfway through the fieldwork, they immediately became central to the process of representing both the participants’ new environment — a boarding home in a small Thai town — and their homes in Burma —
A photograph (fig. 2.1) by 12-year-old Gee⁴ shows a friend’s house with a young boy on the porch. In a written caption, Gee acknowledges that this home belongs to her friend, but she simultaneously uses the home in the picture as a concrete symbol of the home and family of her past, saying, “It makes me miss my home very much because it seems like my home.” This layering of abstract meaning over physical reality occurs again and again. Ipo comments that while an especially “beautiful” house (fig. 2.2) is “like the house I lived in before,” it is still “not like my house.” Somchai captures an image (fig. 2.3) of a mother and her children, writing that “It reminds me of home, so I like it because I miss my mother and my home.” A set of photographs (fig. 2.4–2.5) taken on a separate occasion by 15-year-old Khin Soe Oo, displaced from her village in Karen state, shows cultural differences between her home village and host community by photographing beds and their inferred styles of sleeping. In direct contrast to her own isolated bunk bed in her boarding room, she describes a photo of sleeping mats in the home of a local Karen family, writing, “In this photo is a mother’s bed and a son’s bed next to it. The beds look so good to sleep in. This is the Karen style.”

Such comments express a sense of paradox between lived reality and memories of a past life that remain relevant. The paradox, while painful in its recognition of what is missing, promotes connection to a time that is frequently marginalized by a new social, political, and cultural order. Jao keenly represents this sentiment, commenting that a certain picture (fig. 2.6) “makes me miss my house, but it still feels good to look at.”

While this perspective was not the only significant one expressed by participants, it did represent an attempt to constitute and, simultaneously, to consider critically a sense of connection between present and past notions of home.

---

⁴ All students were made aware that their participation in the workshops would be used as a part of this research, and that any image, narrative caption, or other work created would be documented. Student’s names have been changed for confidentiality reasons.
By documenting a physical reality, but also revealing layers of otherwise inaccessible personal significance, participants revealed a great deal about the way in which they engage with a new geographic location and negotiate new realities through their past positions as citizens of a foreign country, members of a distinctly different culture and class, and children of a distant family.

CONCLUSION

For displaced children, many aspects of their existence and position in a second country are non-negotiable. Through the camera, however, participants could recognize the constraints of reality and subvert them, expressing the continued significance of a home. Through photography-based play, participants successfully offered explanations for the gaps in representation created by a lack of access to scenarios that would have otherwise played heavily into their representation of self (namely, their homes and families in Burma). While reality and its constraints remained permanent, participants were able, if only temporarily, to access and successfully incorporate a seemingly distant and discrete past into a lived present.
Guiding the International Community’s Response to Refugees

Interview with Jana Mason, Senior Advisor, and Matt Pennington, Congressional Liaison, US Government and External Relations, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Jana Mason and Matt Pennington graciously spoke with CIRP Journal Guest Editors in Washington, DC, in March 2013. Representing the world's most influential organization committed to refugees, they speak to the inner workings of the international system. In this interview, they share valuable perspectives on what drives states' responses to crises and the UNHCR's role as a mediator and advocate for refugees.

CIRP Journal: For those who are unfamiliar with the work of the UNHCR, can you briefly describe its mandate and the main components of your work?

Jana Mason: UNHCR was formed in the wake of the Second World War to deal with what was supposed to be a temporary problem. The following year, our formation was followed up by the adoption of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which made clear what state – meaning government – obligations are toward refugees in their territory. UNHCR’s role is to supervise the implementation of the convention. So for governments that are parties – that either signed on right away or that have acceded to it over the years – we’re looking at how they adhere to their obligations under the convention. UNHCR’s role is to supervise the implementation of the convention. So for governments that are parties – that either signed on right away or that have acceded to it over the years – we’re looking at how they adhere to their obligations under the convention. We also try to get more governments to become parties to the convention and we try to encourage non-parties to adhere to the obligations as much as possible.

The number one obligation of the Refugee Convention, Article 33, is what we call non-refoulement. It’s a French word that means prohibition against forced return. That obligation is generally viewed – maybe not universally viewed, but generally viewed – among legal scholars to be so important that it rises to the level of customary international law. We argue, and many people argue, that the non-refoulement provision is extremely important because if you don’t adhere to it people could be going back to their death. So even if you’re not a party to the convention, you are at least bound by that part of it.

The role of UNHCR, as initially conceived, was supposed to be as a temporary set-up for people after World War II. It was really focused on legal protection for refugees. Over the years, the UNHCR continued because refugee problems didn’t disappear after World War II; they grew and multiplied. The Cold War is over, but now we have new forms of displacement with people fleeing for different reasons. Our mandate used to be renewed every few years, but now it’s indefinite. That gives us more predictability. We know we’re not going to cease to exist next year, but it’s a sad commentary on the fact that refugee problems are here to stay. I think it’s human nature; there were refugees even before they were recognized as such.

Now our role has become just as much operational as legal. We run refugee camps in many countries. We don’t do all the work alone, by any means. A lot of what we do involves passing money down to nongovernmental organizations, either big international ones or local ones, some of which are US-based. With those partners, and along with other UN agencies and governments, we’re providing assistance.

When you think of UNHCR, you associate it with tents, the UNHCR logo, food distribution (which we do with the WFP1 because they’re the food experts), and distribution...

---

1 World Food Programme
of blankets and household goods and non-food items. You think of helping refugees go across the border and repatriate, and you think of the whole operational aspect of refugee assistance. All that assistance is critical, but our founding role, and the one that really is key, is trying to make sure that, no matter what else happens, governments don’t send refugees back to places where they would be, or could be, persecuted.

**CIRP:** From your perspective, what motivates member nations that are a party to the convention to contribute to UNHCR’s mandate? Why be a party to the convention? Is it purely for humanitarian reasons or are there other factors?

**JM:** We would all like to think that it’s purely for humanitarian reasons, and I’m sure that’s a motivating factor in many countries, particularly if they want to be a part of the international community. But I think there are a lot of things—probably too many to mention—that motivate them to protect and assist refugees. One that clearly comes to mind is that, in many cases, refugees are going to be in their countries anyway because they just can’t afford to completely seal off the border and it would cause too much of an outcry. If refugees are going to be in their country and they can cooperate with UNHCR and the international system, they will get international resources. Additionally, in many cases the countries get to the point in their development where, whether or not they’re a party to the convention, they’re signing on to other human-rights instruments; for example, they are members of regional bodies such as ASEAN and ECOWAS that have norms of their own. They are part of those regional instruments and, because they want to be full members of the international community or the regional system, they want to adhere to these obligations.

Most refugees are from the developing world and they are hosted by the developing world. People on either side of the border often have a lot in common; they’re ethnically the same or they speak the same language. There is a lot of regional solidarity with people coming across the border. Many of these situations are in places where borders have been porous and people have gone back and forth for economic reasons for years anyway. Then there are local and regional political factors at play. Very few conflicts are limited to two countries; instead, they are regional situations. Depending on who they support, they might be more or less sympathetic to the refugees coming over. If they are sympathetic, they have a motivation to host them.

So there are a whole host of reasons that states adhere to refugee obligations. Some of them simply spring from pure humanitarian spirit and some are the result of a desire to belong to the international community or be recognized as a regional player. But for many of them, the motivation is a rightful self-interest based on their own geopolitical or economic interests. Refugees are often viewed as an economic drain on resources. That’s why, if they’re going to take them in anyway, they might as well cooperate with the international system and allow us and other NGOs to come in because the system brings resources with it.

**CIRP:** Does the UNHCR have an interest in moving away from encampment as a temporary solution because there has been so much criticism of it?

**JM:** The High Commissioner was just here and in one of our meetings he said, “We don’t like camps.” One thing is absolutely clear. We are supposed to have what we call three durable solutions, which are (1) return home when it’s safe to do that, (2) local integration, or (3) resettlement. But the reality is that there is a so-called fourth durable solution (which is not really a durable solution), and that is waiting, either in camps or in urban areas or somewhere else. That
is now the reality for many, many refugees, so protracted situations are actually one of UNHCR’s thematic priorities now.

We are moving away from camps in terms of what we view as the fallback, or the automatic, position for dealing with refugees. However, the reality is that as much as we may want to do that, we’re currently unable to do that. Probably at no time in the foreseeable future are we going to be able to totally move away from camps because it’s not up to us; it’s up to the governments.

A perfect example is Jordan. When the Syrians started fleeing, our preference would not have been to build huge camps, particularly not out in the desert, which is freezing in the winter, scorching hot in the summer, and inaccessible for many reasons. But the government of Jordan, for a number of understandable reasons, said, “Let’s put these populations in a camp.” Now we have the Zaatari refugee camp, we have a second camp being built, and space is being identified for a third. That is not to say that all the Syrians in Jordan are in a camp; most of them are not.

The camps get the attention, and that’s not lost on the government. But camps bring a lot of problems, not only like the problems in Zaatari because it’s so inaccessible and the physical conditions are so hard, but also because having people in a crowded situation engenders health issues. There are issues of insecurity and domestic and other types of violence such as sexual- and gender-based violence. These are issues in urban areas and they are sometimes issues in the country they are fleeing. They are certainly issues in the camps. Child protection becomes an issue. Then, of course, there is the despair factor, with people sitting there for years and with children born and raised in camps. Even if you have some sort of vocational training or a small income-generating enterprise, there are many basically wasted lives in these camps.

Look at the Burmese in Thailand. Even though the situation is looking slightly more hopeful, there are people who have been there for 30 years. That is not a life and it is not a future. A natural reaction is to say, “Oh, there’s a big population there. We can help them by building a camp.” But UNHCR and our partners recognize that is not an ideal solution. If it were just up to us, we would look for non-camp solutions. Governments clearly have to allow refugees to live outside of camps, but at this point we don’t see that happening. If anything, we see the situation going the other way.

Kenya recently announced that it wants all the refugees to be in camps, even the Somalis who have been in Nairobi and other urban areas for a long time. We’re working very strongly with the government to try to get them to reverse that policy. There are a number of reasons they imposed what we refer to as an encampment policy. Most of the Somalis were already in camps. Dadaab is the world’s oldest and largest refugee camp. It’s bursting at the seams so it can’t hold any-
body else, and the situation in Somalia certainly is not conducive for return. But now Kenya is saying that they want the urban refugee population to move to the camps, too. There are other countries around the world where the official policy has been that refugees have to be in camps. We might not like it, but it's going to be a fact of life simply because these are sovereign states and they make the decision about where refugees will go. But even in countries with camps, about half of all refugees are in urban areas.

**CIRP:** Are there any patterns that characterize how causes of displacement have changed over time? Is there more displacement now from a certain type of conflict or a certain type of discrimination than there was 10 or 20 years ago?

**JM:** If you look at it from a US refugee resettlement perspective, when the Cold War ended the two major resettlement streams were the Vietnamese and the Soviet Jewish populations. When those streams wound down, people thought we would drastically reduce refugee resettlement. Around the same time, because the Cold War was over, the lid blew off many internal ethnic situations. You saw more people fleeing ethnic and religious struggles. We in the US said, “With these two streams winding down, maybe it’s an opportunity to resettle people from Africa and other parts of the world.” Some people say there were totalitarian dictators who, when they were in power, were able to keep the lid on tensions, but once dictators like Suharto\(^2\) or Tito\(^3\) were gone, those tensions just bubbled to the surface. We saw interethnic, interreligious conflicts. A clear example was the way the Balkans fell apart.

You also saw the rise of nonstate actors. Instead of just two governments at war, you saw rebel groups and opposition movements fighting against a government or fighting against a certain segment of the population. Intercommunal, interreligious, interethnic conflict has been one new cause of displacement, and the rise of nonstate actors and internal struggles has been another change in the nature of displacement.

Then we have climate change and environmental degradation, with insufficient water and natural resources. Climate change is usually what we call slow-onset displacement because it happens over years and people start moving. It’s similar to the way in which people move for economic reasons; the resource is not available so they move slowly. By contrast, natural disasters usually lead to quick-onset displacement. If there’s a tsunami or a hurricane or flooding, residents will flee. If you’re fleeing solely because of a natural disaster or climate-induced displacement, you wouldn’t be a refugee under international law although, obviously, we want to assist those people for many reasons. For example, when the Pakistan floods hit, UNHCR assisted that population, partly because we had already been working in Pakistan for many years assisting the Afghan refugees. The UNHCR doesn’t have a mandate for environmental refugees, so there are issues in terms of stretching our resources. However, there’s often a relationship between climate change, natural disasters, and even the classic refugee definition. When resources become scarce, particularly with climate change, groups sometimes start competing for those resources and there may be intercommunal conflict.

I always go back to talk about North Korea because it’s the classic example. China, where most of the North Korean refugees are, will always say, “These people are just economic migrants fleeing the famine.” Everybody knows that for many years North Korea had a big famine. Yes, they were hungry; they were fleeing that. But the North Korean regime had access to some food resources,

---

2 Suharto ruled Indonesia from 1967 until 1998.
3 Marshal Josip Broz Tito served as president of Yugoslavia from 1953 to 1980.
either their own or resources provided internationally, and they were responsible for food distribution. They would channel the food distribution based on political loyalty. We call it “using food as a weapon,” and it happens in many cases. So you may leave because you don’t have food, but it’s because of your political opinion, or your perceived political opinion, that you didn’t get food. In other cases, it could be because of your religion or because of some other aspect. At UNHCR, we’re always urging, in any migration situation, that governments give access to an asylum determination system for people who say they’re afraid to go home so that they can ascertain the real reason these people are fleeing and in order to protect people who are asylum seekers.

There is also development-induced displacement: governments clearing land to build dams or pipelines or even just to build casinos. Sometimes indigenous groups get displaced from their land. Sometimes there’s an overlap with a political or religious or ethnic group that may be an easier target for development displacement: “Oh, this ethnic group is disempowered; let’s take their land.” Even among development-induced displacement there could be some overlap with the classic refugee definition as well.

Reasons for displacement are getting very murky. We tend to focus, as much as possible, on our classic refugees. It’s not because we’ve got blinders on and we don’t think other people are in need. It’s a double-edged sword. Sometimes we are called upon and we respond to other forms of displacement as well, but if we open it all up and expand our definition too much, it could be expanded out of existence.

**CIRP:** By what process does the UNHCR determine the appropriate durable solution? Do you take into account what refugees prefer?

**JM:** Refugees always want to go home. The vast majority, despite what some people think, want to go home. And why wouldn’t they? They speak the language; they had a life there. You don’t have to be poor to be a refugee. Look at the Iraqis, some of the Afghans, and many of Syrians; they’re coming from what were middle-income countries. Many of them were highly educated, they had large houses, and they had a good life. Then, two weeks later, they’re living in a squalid refugee camp. If they do go to another country like the US, they have to take very low-level jobs and they may be discriminated against. Why would they want to give that up and come here?

Refugees always tell us they want to go home. Yes, there are some who, because they were so traumatized, just can’t imagine going back to their country or, for political reasons, they know they will never be safe going back, no matter which side wins. So some refugees immediately tell you they want to be relocated. When they say that, it is usually for their children. But 99.9 percent of refugees want to go home until the situation drags out for so long that there may be nothing to go home to.

UNHCR’s preferred solution is for refugees to go home when they can do so in “safety and dignity.” Even when things calm down, if you don’t do repatriation right, you risk destabilizing the country, and then they flow out again. I can’t tell you how many Liberian repatriations we had until it finally stuck. Look at Afghanistan: we’ve had a large repatriation to Afghanistan but Afghans are still fleeing. Still, that’s the preferred solution.

Local integration is a great option, but for many years it was used so infrequently it was almost like a non-solution. There have been some good examples: Burundians in Tanzania, Guatemalans or other Central Americans in Mexico. Even in West Africa, some of the countries that receive Liberians like
Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire have basically integrated the Liberians because that situation went on for so long. So it does happen. Usually it takes a long time and it happens without any fanfare. It happens almost by osmosis. Still, it doesn't happen nearly as much as we would like.

Resettlement is a wonderful solution but the numbers are very small. Less than 1 percent of the refugees in the world in any given year will get resettled. There are only approximately 100,000 resettlement slots available annually. Sometimes even early on in a conflict we might say: This population, this family, this person, for whatever reason, will never be able to go home. If they are trauma survivors, households headed by women who have no other option, medical cases, or high-profile political figures who are never going to be able to go back to their country, we'll resettle them even early on. Usually, though, as in the case of the Burmese in Thailand, this happens only after a long time or when it's clear there is no end in sight. For a long time, the Thai government didn't even want to think about resettlement because they feared it would be a pull factor. They thought if the Burmese believed they could get resettled in the US or elsewhere by entering Thailand, they would start fleeing. We, however, were looking at the push factors: villages being attacked, crops being burned, people being targeted for conscription, women being raped.

The short answer is that it's different in each country. We're always hoping for large-scale return. We're always open to resettlement, even, at the beginning, for a few numbers and then, after a prolonged period, we may start thinking about more large-scale resettlement. We would always be open to voluntary repatriation any time a government offers it, and we're always talking to the government about it, but it just doesn't happen often enough.

**CIRP:** Until the Syrian crisis, South Sudan was what everyone was thinking about, at least until their independence. Since the limelight has shifted, has the situation actually been resolved? Has the humanitarian situation improved, and what is that region still facing in terms of refugees, IDPs, and other forms of displacement?

**JM:** There are two aspects to that. There's South Sudan, which is legally independent but it automatically became one of the poorest countries in the world. It's nice to have the birth of a new nation, but then you have to start nation building, and it's very poor. Part of it is just because of the general lack of infrastructure and the lack of legal institutions and basic services. At the same time, it's not totally peaceful in the sense that there are still some intercommunal conflicts.

Second, the big issue is that even though the status of South Sudan was resolved there are the contested regions of what is now Sudan: South Kordofan, Blue Nile State, and Abyei. There is still active fighting in those regions and the refugees are spilling into South Sudan. There are 200,000 Sudanese refugees in South Sudan and Ethiopia.

So here is a new nation trying to provide for its own people and they have to provide for refugees because that region of the world is so unstable. The biggest concern for us right now is those areas – Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Abyei – because we don't have access to some of the populations in places where there is active conflict.

**Matt Pennington:** [Shows map] This is where the vast majority of refugees from Sudan are fleeing into South Sudan. They're arriving in South Sudan exhausted and tired. We're seeing 20, 30, and upwards of 40 percent malnutrition levels in some of the camps and high mortality rates. People are arriving in quite desperate situations. What's difficult for us and other agencies operating in these areas is
the challenge of access along the border. It's not as though you can drive from a nearby city on paved roads to deliver aid. These are very remote locations. In addition, the rainy season causes flooding so we are forced to fly in much of our aid and that costs a lot of money. The biggest challenge for an operation like this is funding. The last appeal figures are just over 50 percent funded. This is an extremely difficult, complex, and very costly humanitarian operation.

Globally, we're seeing a lot of attention shift to places like Mali and Syria. There's a lot of media interest and a lot of political interest because there are extremist elements in both Syria and in Mali. By comparison, South Sudan has, to a certain degree, been ignored. Certainly a challenge for us is to continue raising awareness and to help refocus the world's policy makers and the media's attention on what is going on there right now.

CIRP: What is the actual influence of the UNHCR? From a legal standpoint, you don't have the ability to sanction host nations or do anything to them. What is the push? Is it just a strong word of encouragement?

JM: It's true that we cannot sanction governments. The Refugee Convention has a provision that allows one party to take another party to the International Court of Justice. That has never happened; it is not going to happen. It tends to be a name-and-shame type of thing, and it's not always naming them; it's private diplomacy. Usually we try to publicly express support for whatever a government is doing for refugees. We will sometimes come out publicly and criticize the government, though not often and not very harshly because it doesn't get us anywhere. They have the ability to kick us out of their country. And even if they don't kick us out, they can make our life difficult by not approving visas for staff, not approving trucks to be imported, and not allowing us access to a certain region of the country. Even if they don't kick us out, which they probably wouldn't do because they would receive bad publicity, they could still make it hard for us to work. We usually take the private, diplomatic route, expressing displeasure behind closed doors and always offering our assistance – technical assistance and resources if we have them.

How much influence do we have? It's country by country. Usually there are going to be factors outside what UNHCR and the NGOs say that determine how they treat refugees. One of your first questions was distinguishing between parties of the convention and nonparties to the convention. That's not always the determining factor in what they do. I've often given this example. Thailand is not a party to the convention and in public statements they'll say, “We don't recognize refugees.” Yet, for so many years, they hosted Vietnamese, Cambodians, Lao Hmong, and other refugees, and now there are about 130,000 Burmese refugees in nine or ten camps along the Thai-Burma border, and they have been hosting them for decades. Yes, we have had problems. In Bangkok, they haven't allowed us certain things. Sometimes they send people back. Sometimes they arrest or harass people. It's a constant struggle. Still, over the years they have hosted hundreds of thousands of refugees on both major sides of the border, so that is an example of a nonparty that is doing a lot of things right. The distinction isn't always what they say; it's what they do. Ideally, it would be nice if they did both.
The United States as a Humanitarian Actor

Interview with Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary David Robinson
Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), US Department of State

David Robinson, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service and a key actor in the federal government’s policy on refugees in the United States and overseas, met with CIRP Journal Guest Editors in his Washington, DC, office in March 2013. This interview spans a variety of topics from the United States’ role in responding to the Syrian refugee crisis to the State Department’s program for domestic resettlement.

CIRP Journal: The US resettles the most refugees in the world. How do you feel this relates to its position as an international leader?

David Robinson: When you say the US is the world’s leader in refugee resettlement, we are, in the formal sense. Clearly, we invite more refugees, process more refugees, and help more refugees to start new lives in another country than anyone else. That said, it’s important to consider the countries hosting refugees, some for long periods of time, and expending their resources, their goodwill, their citizens’ taxes, and contending with often difficult political dynamics…. Look at Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Kenya dealing with Somalis and others, and Ethiopia.

The United States is a world leader when it comes to formal resettlement and giving refugees an opportunity to start new lives, become citizens of the United States, and raise their children as citizens…. We are responding in a way that I think is clearly a light for other countries to follow, and we do that for a number of reasons. First, it is an American tradition…. It is part of US foreign policy, and every foreign service officer is very proud of the fact that we’re an immigrant nation. This goes back to our roots – all the way back to before the Pilgrims. It goes back to the Native Americans, who actually took care of the Pilgrims when they arrived. This is just part and parcel of who we are and it is a valid and a very important expression of our national identity.…. Second, resettlement is an important part of the three durable solutions, and often enough, it is the engine that facilitates the other durable solutions. This is so in large part because resettlement demonstrates a certain solidarity between receiving countries, such as the United States, and the countries that host refugees. We’re all in the game together. In addition to that, the core thing we worry about is protecting these innocent people. This will be the case with the Syrians. There will be a group of people that cannot go back either because their own experience was so horrific that they will never be able to have any semblance of a real life in their home country or because circumstances back home have changed. For example, a country that was once tolerant of LGBT individuals may no longer tolerate them. These same people may not be able to stay in the host country either, possibly for the same reasons or for other reasons. What can be done with them? You have to give them a solution, and that solution is to resettle them in a third country.

There are currently 27 countries that formally resettle refugees. That number has grown significantly in the last few years. We are by far the biggest recipient of those. We work differently than the Scandinavians, who do what is called portfolio review. If you’re a refugee who can’t go back and you want to be resettled, the UNHCR can take your portfolio and send it to Oslo, where they’ll review it and agree to take you. The United States, on the other hand, has a painfully long process for bringing in refugees. It takes over a year to do this because of background
and medical checks…. We are not a rescue operation when it comes to resettlement, but we make the bulk of the effort, and that allows the countries that have more streamlined processes to do what they do well, which is to be the emergency operators…. It’s a division of labor based on the abilities of a country and the requirements and the laws of that country to respond…. There have been years of effort to design a system that is complementary, and we are constantly talking with other countries, through the good offices of the UNHCR and other organizations. We also have bilateral talks to try to determine how we can best address this common humanitarian goal. So I would suggest that the United States’ role is that of a leader in this effort…. The gravity that we bring to this endeavor pulls others into the orbit. It also gives us enormous credibility.

**CIRP:** How does the United States, through the State Department and other government agencies, seek to address the root causes of displacement?

**DR:** The root causes of displacement are so diverse that it’s almost impossible to answer that question succinctly. You can point to the evening news. You can look at Syria and clearly there has to be a political solution in Syria. The United States is working hard with our allies and others to find that solution, but it is very difficult. There are other cases that are not frequently in the spotlight but that are equally tragic, in which people are being persecuted because they’re different, on account of the five grounds,¹ and those are expanded, frankly, in operation. So we work through a variety of mechanisms multilaterally – through the UN, through the various agencies of the UN, and through other international organizations – to address things like homophobia, religious intolerance, and all of the bases of persecution that exist…. Our program helps people who have to flee under those circumstances.

As part of our normal diplomatic and foreign policy efforts, we put great stock in trying to address the root causes of displacement…. We may talk about human rights, we may talk about gay rights or human rights as Secretary Clinton did in December 2011…. It’s part and parcel of the US humanitarian agenda. We deal with the consequences of an incomplete story. So far, we haven’t been completely successful in stopping [it] worldwide; nobody ever will be. So in addition to trying to stop the root causes of displacement, we also try to pick up the pieces when those can’t be addressed. I think we take a leadership role in that as well.

**CIRP:** What has the State Department or this bureau done to respond to the Syrian refugee crisis? How does this relate to the overall US strategy in responding to the Syrian conflict?

**DR:** I’d like to set the stage for Syria and the way we work by turning to an earlier crisis: Libya…. What you saw there was another rebellion, an uprising against a despotic regime…. And early on in the crisis you saw a wave of people fleeing, essentially from east to west. They were leaving Benghazi and … moving towards the border with Tunisia. The majority of people who were on the move – hundreds of thousands of people – were third-country nationals who were low-level employees inside Libya. They were from Niger, they were from Vietnam, Bangladesh, all over the world … and they were trying to get out and away from the fighting. And if you watched the news, what you saw fairly early on in the crisis was essentially chaos at the border between Libya and Tunisia, where people with cardboard boxes and suitcases, or with nothing, were trying to get across. The Tunisians, of course, had just gone through their own political turmoil, so it was a country that was itself struggling for political and social stability. The last thing they needed was this human wave crashing

¹ Race, religion, nationality, political opinion, member of a particular social group
against its border.... People were being shot at, there were people who had nothing to eat, people who had been injured. It was a disaster.

Within five or six days of seeing those images, you began to see order being restored at the frontier. You began to see people being registered properly. Their medical needs were being taken care of, they were being given food, water, and shelter, and they were being brought across the border to safety. Then they were being taken home. They were being flown home to Vietnam, to Sri Lanka, to Niger, to Egypt – flown all over the world. These are poor people, and when they landed they were met at airports by humanitarian workers. Their needs were again addressed and they were returned to their home villages in good health. There were around 200,000 of these people who had these services provided to them, and it was a UNHCR and International Organization for Migration (IOM) operation. These organizations worked together and accomplished this.... The United States is the single largest supporter, monetarily but in other ways as well, of UNHCR, IOM, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and United Nations Works and Relief Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). These are the four agencies that, by law, PRM supports.

For the last thirty-plus years, we've been doing this business and in that time we've been instrumental in creating an international architecture of humanitarian response that is working. ICRC, UNHCR, and IOM are working in those countries. They often have permanent staffs in those countries before a crisis hits, as was the case in Syria. Before the flood of refugees became enormous in Syria, we were already there. PRM (US government) influence – dollars, expertise, priorities – working through our partners and also through our embassy, of course, was already active in addressing these needs....

If you look inside Syria, you see tremendous carnage. The brutality of the regime is breathtaking. What don't you see so far? You don't see widespread starvation, you don't see outbreak of disease, you don't see water being completely unavailable. Around the country, in all fourteen governorates, you do see aid reaching people – not everybody, by a long shot; we've got a long way to go before we have complete coverage – but much more than would have been possible had this architecture that I just described not already existed. The policy that is working, the leadership that has allowed as much relief as there is to get there, has been in place for decades.

You can see the impact on the beneficiaries inside Syria. They are getting help. We have over 144 field hospitals there funded by the United States government.... Equally important, we're doing the same work in Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan. These same organizations – UNHCR, ICRC, IOM, and the NGOs –are hard at work helping those

(From left to right) CIRP Journal Guest Editors Kimberly Josephson and Emily Feenstra with Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary David Robinson at the Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration.
governments cope with the 1.1 million refugees that have already crossed the border....
The response you are seeing, as incomplete and inadequate as it is – and it will always be inadequate as long as anybody is suffering – is the result of decades-long leadership. Our current staff can’t take credit for this. We are merely the current stewards of something that has been going on for a very, very long time.... US leadership has been essential in the Syria crisis, but the leadership is aimed not only at the crisis; it is the pre-existing policy work that we've been doing for thirty-plus years that has allowed us to be far and away the country that has the lead, bilaterally, in humanitarian response to Syria.

CIRP: To what degree do you see changes in policy between administrations?

DR: The remarkable thing is the consensus – the multi-year bipartisan consensus – that drives US humanitarian policy. If you look at funding, you’ll see the same thing. Our funding levels don't fluctuate.... For decades now we have enjoyed consistent support on both sides of the political aisle in the United States.... Republicans and Democrats want us to do better and they push us to do better. They don’t push us to do less; they don’t push us to exclude one group or another group. We are humanitarian in our work, we are neutral, and we are impartial in giving help to people. We help civilians who have been harmed or persecuted and need international assistance, and that is never challenged by either side of the aisle. I don’t see any whip-lash effect between administrations.

CIRP: Quite a few times you’ve talked about how well the US government works with these other organizations and the coalitions in place, but you keep saying the one thing is that we could always do it better. Can you elaborate?

DR: The fact is that we are in a business that deals in human tragedy and we cannot hope to blanket the entire need that exists. There are a number of aspects to humanitarian work that, for those of us who do it every day, are very unsatisfactory. One that causes us great consternation is the continued horror of gender-based violence and violence against women and children. We don't have the answer to that yet, even in the camps where we (we being the whole group, not PRM) ostensibly have greater control. We're unable to address that to such a degree that people in those camps can feel absolutely safe and secure all the time. It's a human impossibility; you're never going to be able to stop bad people from doing bad things each and every time. But the fact is that we need to build a regime and have policies and best practices that allow us to better address that.

Furthermore, we can’t always reach into places and identify all of the various causes.... We don't always understand them until they emerge as a major problem. I would point to our increased attention, belatedly, on LGBT people.... Turn to certain African countries where homosexuality is still a crime, in some cases punishable by death. We’re trying our best to stop that, to reach in and provide protection to people who are fleeing that. But our ability to do that is constrained by our understanding of the situation, the network we have in place, how robust our network is in a certain country, and how easily we can get resources in there. So we often fail.

A place that is very unsatisfactory is Dadaab in Kenya. You have people who are born and die in that refugee camp. It's been there since the early 90s.... This is a development crisis at this point, but what is the link between humanitarian work and development work? Nobody knows. It's something we all talk about. We understand there's a need to create the link ... to walk from here over to development agencies – the whole NGO network, but no one knows how to make that link
work. It’s not for lack of goodwill. There are many structural and other reasons that these links don’t always hit. In places like Kenya, Afghanistan, and other long-term situations, it’s totally unsatisfactory. It doesn’t mean we’re not trying, but we haven’t succeeded, and until we do, it’s unsatisfactory.

When it comes to refugees coming into the United States, how do we better prepare not just the refugees themselves to become fully integrated into their new communities; how do we prepare the communities? We try by giving them information and alerting communities to be prepared. But what do you do with a 17-year-old Somali boy who has never been in school? We’re all working at it but we don’t have answers to questions like this. So Congress is addressing these issues in places with large refugee populations like Columbus, Ohio, or Minneapolis. There are major issues there as they try to integrate these communities, and we work hard with our partners to make that integration smoother. We try to make sure that opportunities exist for everybody and that there is employment. We try to address these needs as they are apparent, but in my view – and I hope in the view of my colleagues here – we’re always behind the eight ball, whether it’s overseas addressing new needs or in the United States addressing well-known problems that we just haven’t been able to put our hands around yet. There is plenty of goodwill and there are lots of smart people addressing these problems through the whole partnership, including NGOs, but there are no solutions yet.

CIRP: What is the decision-making process and who are the primary stakeholders that determine refugee policy?

DR: Every year the president establishes a ceiling … and then there are consultations on the Hill between the administration, the secretary of state, and the secretary of DHS\(^2\) on the number of refugees that we can responsibly bring into the United States.

How does the president arrive at that number? I promise that Barack Obama does not sit down with a pen and paper to calculate this…. We hold formal and informal consultations throughout the year where we canvass all of our partners and ask, “What’s the need?” “What are the emerging populations?” “Where do we have to put our influence on resettlement this year?” “What populations are stuck?” All of these organizations – these NGOs and IOs – come together and submit their proposals to us. In dialogue with them, we determine how many refugees overall we can or should bring in. Within that, based on the need that these organizations have expressed to us, we say generally how many refugees we will bring in from East Asia, Africa, Europe, and so on. Then we have a number that we leave open for emergency situations that will come up. These numbers are not written into law…. We’ll stay within the ceiling but we won’t stick slavishly to the categories we have. That is an illustration of how we think the refugee situation is going to play out. Generally it does because, for the United States, resettlement is not an emergency response.

CIRP: Has there ever been a time, or can you imagine there being a time, when there is a large discrepancy between numbers that the federal government says we can accept and what states and local organizations will say they have the capacity to receive?

DR: There are communities in the United States that say they cannot take any more refugees for various reasons. We address it seriously when that happens. When we hear that someplace can no longer handle refugees, we go there and we meet with the state authorities, the stakeholders, the hospitals, the schools, the landlords, and everybody. We spend weeks on the road meeting with these people and trying to assess what’s really happening. Sometimes they really can’t
handle more refugees. There is a saturation point: the job market doesn't exist anymore, the housing market has fallen apart, there is no rental market for low-price rentals, schools have deteriorated, and so on. It would be inhuman to send refugees there so we say: No more refugees there for a time.

We maintain this is a federal program. We will continue to resettle refugees in the United States. We will continue to work through our partners, we will listen to municipalities, but we will listen to our resettlement partners as well. We will make an assessment, but we will not be dictated to by a specific political concern.... We are as open as we possibly can be. There are times when a community says that it just cannot handle any more refugees. There are good reasons for that and we will stop. There are plenty of examples of places where we have closed the pipeline for a period of time or closed down a program and moved someplace else. But if it's merely a political issue, we don't play that game. We are very tough when that happens.

CIRP: For people who are unfamiliar with the difference between refugees and asylees, can you talk about what the difference is and the US protection provided to both groups?

DR: Asylees are people who claim persecution and seek refuge once they are already in the United States. They can be students, they can be tourists. They can arrive in an unauthorized fashion. They can walk across the border. They present themselves and say, “I can’t go home.” That is the purview of the Department of Homeland Security, where they have a good corps of folks that adjudicate those claims and grant or deny asylum. Asylees generally do not have available to them the same support that we give to refugees.

CIRP: In Pittsburgh, we’ve seen that different populations have very different needs and yet the Reception and Placement package is the same. Is there discussion of how the placement could be more accommodating to some groups’ needs?

DR: Yes. There’s a lot of discussion. In fact, in this administration, the Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights convened, at the request of the White House, a long-standing White House forum in which resettlement issues were addressed. NGOs, stakeholders, and others came and discussed many of these issues, so there has been a strong effort to try to address the needs that you have brought up.

The answer, though, is that we are, as the State Department, principally overseas. Our job is to be out there in those situations with our people. We have refugee coordinators and others out there, our partners, identifying the populations in need and doing the necessary work in the field to bring them to the United States. We transport them to the United States. Refugees of ours sign an agreement and pay their own way here. Then we are responsible for their first short period here, up to roughly 90 days. After that, it becomes the responsibility of the Office of Refugee Resettlement in HHS. I’m not trying to dodge responsibility, but our role is initial placement: making sure they have housing, have signed up for their Social Security numbers, have their kids in school, have appropriate clothing, have learned how to navigate the local transportation system. They have a community to help them, and that’s really where we step back, but for a short period we have to make sure that everybody has the bare minimum. We are the safety net and make sure everybody has that. We would love to see everybody receive more than that, but what we can do with the taxpayer dollar is build a floor in, and we want to make sure that floor is at least the same for everybody so we do not

---

3 Issued by the US State Department
4 Department of Health and Human Services
have a disparity among groups. However, the NGOs do have a lot of leeway in how they use the money. Some families may not need as much as other families, and there's some leeway built into how the volunteer agencies distribute the resources that we give them, taking into account the actual needs of specific families.
A Forgotten Region: Displacement in Colombia and Latin America

Interview with Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli, Senior Associate for the Andes Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)

Gimena Sánchez is an expert on refugees and internally displaced people in Latin America, with a particular focus on the ongoing crisis in Colombia. In March 2013 she met with CIRP Journal Guest Editors to explain the unique trends of displacement in Latin America. This interview seeks to inform readers on an issue largely neglected by the international community.

CIRP Journal: For people unfamiliar with the topic, can you talk a bit about displacement in Latin America?

Gimena Sánchez: The largest internal displacement crisis in Latin America is in Colombia, with over 5.3 million persons internally displaced. However, there are also displacements in other parts of Latin America. In Mexico, you have approximately 160,000 persons internally displaced due to drug violence and remnants of the conflict that existed in Chiapas. In Guatemala, the numbers are not well known, but you still have people internally displaced from the conflict that ended more than 15 years ago. In Peru, that conflict ended 20 or so years ago, and you had massive displacement – over a million people – but the issue was never officially recognized by the government until after the conflict ended. So the displaced never received any services, and it was only through the Truth Commission, post-conflict, that they were recognized as IDPs (internally displaced persons). So all of a sudden you started getting people registered as IDPs post-conflict. Officially, I think there are 500 registered IDPs, but there could be thousands more in that situation. In addition to IDPs, there are refugees in Latin America. Refugees from Cuba still come mostly to the United States. And you also have Haitians; since the earthquake there is now a mixture of people who are displaced because of the environmental disaster and other people who have been displaced because of some of the criminal activity that takes place mostly in Port-au-Prince, where there is gang violence.

CIRP: Can you talk about the relationship between international policy in terms of policy set out by the UNHCR and national policy towards IDPs and refugees in Latin America?

GS: I would say that it is very different if you are looking at Mexico, Central America, and South America. Let me start with the area where it’s perhaps the weakest. The refugee regimes in the Andean countries are perhaps the newest, or the last ones to have really been developed. What do I mean by that? Ecuador, Venezuela, and Panama, for example, are all countries that did not adhere to the additional Protocol1 to the Refugee Convention until very late and did not start to develop national legislation to establish asylee or refugee status in their countries until very late. That retarded the process of having active UNHCR presence in these countries, and the UNHCR is still focused on putting the refugee regimes in place to help refugees crossing the borders. This is why you have a real gap in documentation between the number of Colombian refugees in those countries and the actual number who are registered, which is very large.

In terms of Central America, the post-conflict scenarios in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua were created with the United Nations, so there are actual UN missions that helped the process. The role of UNHCR,

---

which in the past was an agency that came in and helped the outsiders, was very different.

Mexico has a UN country team, but the Mexican state has traditionally been a country that has always put sovereignty first and has always been reluctant to look at its IDP issue or to deal with refugees within the international system. That said, many Guatemalans during that conflict spilled over into the southern part of Mexico beneath the Yucatán. In most of the cases, they’ve actually made those areas into villages and a lot of people have stayed. So their response was very good. It just wasn’t the traditional, outward response you get in other scenarios.

Brazil, Argentina, and Chile have begun to be more open to refugees in the past five years and they have started taking in people from other parts of the world. I think it’s been a function of the fact that it’s so far away from some of the places we’re talking about. Even within South America, they are so far south that they’ve never been countries with traditionally large populations of refugees, so there’s never been a huge refugee regime like UNHCR and networks established there.

CIRP: What role do WOLA and other nongovernmental actors play in displacement in Latin America?

GS: The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) is a nongovernmental organization that promotes human rights, democracy, and socioeconomic justice in the region. We mainly work on influencing US policy makers with regard to those issues and internal displacement. Given that it’s a huge issue in Colombia, it’s something we work on a lot. We support many displaced leaders and organizations by helping to get their proposals, their voices, and their situations heard by the US Congress, the Obama administration, and others. We also do advocacy work to get money appropriated from the US Congress to meet the needs of the displaced. The United States is a very important donor when it comes to displacement issues worldwide but, in terms of Colombia in particular, the United States gives money not just to Colombia; it gives money to the UN offices. It also gives money to the surrounding countries to help refugees. The United States as a funder is pivotally important on displaced and refugee issues in the Andes and we try to continue support for that. We also try to get policy makers to understand what the cutting issues are.

For example, in Colombia right now, a big issue is that a large number of displaced leaders are under threat and many have been killed. Colombia has a good distinction in that it has a very organized internally displaced population and there are many associations and groups working on displaced issues, a large number of which include the displaced themselves. However, Colombia is also a place with a serious security problem, and people who speak up tend to be targeted. In the past two years, the Colombian government has promoted something called the Victims and Land Restitution Law. The purpose of this law is to restitute land to the victims of the conflict, many of whom are displaced. Many IDP leaders have organized and have started that process, and because many of the illegal armed groups continue to operate in the areas of return, they’ve targeted those leaders. In 2012, 26 land rights restitution leaders were killed, a majority of whom were displaced people.

Colombia has approximately 5.3 million displaced people, of which almost 2 million are African descendants. For a whole host of reasons, Afro-Colombians and indigenous people have been disproportionately affected by the conflict. And Afro-Colombian leaders, as they’ve started to organize and become more public, have also been targeted. That’s been a huge problem. On November 13, 2012, for example, a death threat circulat-
ed by the paramilitary group The Black Eagles listed the majority of displaced peoples' organizations and individual names and said, "We will kill you." Shortly after, in December, one of the people listed, a displaced leader, was killed. So they are specifically targeted by paramilitary groups that are linked to the economic interests or to the people in the areas from where they've been displaced.

**CIRP:** Why do you think the displaced organize so much in Latin America compared to other parts of the world?

**GS:** I used to work on global displacement and there is such a marked difference. In Central America, many of the populations of displaced people were indigenous. Traditionally, indigenous people live in a communal fashion and are self-autonomous organizers just because they have always had their separate governance structures. Once displaced, they recreated that and it just became a displaced organization. If you really look at it, it’s displaced indigenous people. So I think that’s just been the method of organization, especially in Peru, Guatemala, and Mexico.

With Colombia, you have indigenous people and Afro-Colombians who are communal and would fit the theory, but you also have a large number of displaced people who aren’t indigenous, who don’t have that tradition, and they organize. In terms of Colombia, though, you have a very strong tradition of civil society, constructing movements, and constructing community groups. You have a strong tradition of communal neighborhood groups, and displaced groups have fit in and morphed into them.

The displaced groups in Colombia are so poorly received at the reception sites that they band together. There is tremendous social stigmatization for being displaced. There is a lot of distrust: “Well, they’re coming from that region so maybe they were involved in something.” In Colombian society, there is distrust of the unknown and strangers who come because of the conflict and because of all the security concerns. That has also forced people together.

**CIRP:** Especially in Latin America, refugees and IDPs flood to urban areas rather than camps. What do you think accounts for this difference?

**GS:** In Colombia, many want to be invisible because they do not want to be persecuted, and if you band together in a group, that makes you more of a target. That is why IDPs tend to be more dispersed. So while they may be more organized, that is, they’re all living in a certain area and they all meet, they don’t tend to form encampments and you do not see IDP camps.

You don’t see that in the refugee situation, either. In Ecuador, I visited one area where the Red Cross had actually set up a camp that was fairly nice and only one refugee lived in it. They lived dispersed in the closest urban town. I asked why, and they said, “We don’t want people to know we’re refugees.” They don’t want to be found, and that feeling probably explains why you don’t have camps throughout. It’s just too dangerous to form camps due to the complexity of the conflict.

At the beginning of the current displacement crisis, for example, which analysts place at around 1996 in Colombia, you would see camps. But you would also see a lot of raids and attacks and persecution in those camps, or makeshift camps that were something like getting together in a gym. This history meant that huge camps weren’t formed because they didn’t serve a protection mechanism.

Also, if they have family members, displaced people will go to them first. There is a tremendous number of displaced Afro-Colombians, for example, who are living with family members in different areas.
CIRP: As registration has increased, have there been innovations in ways to deliver services and reach these people more effectively?

GS: It has gotten better and Colombia’s Constitutional Court did something very interesting: they looked at the basic rights – right to food, right to education, right to shelter – and actually set up a commission that tells how to translate that into whether or not it’s an effective response. For example, does the right to food mean being given a humanitarian basket for three months or is it sustained, long-term assistance? When does the responsibility of the state end in meeting that right? That’s been a very interesting process because it has determined how many of the basic needs have been met and has helped to improve delivery of those needs.

That said, Colombia has increased its budget for displaced people because of this process. They didn’t have much of a budget; they were taking what the international community was giving the displaced and saying it was their budget. This actually forced Colombia’s own national responsibility to increase and it improved. We’re talking about 5.3 million people and the situation is very complex. However, in terms of basic needs, in terms of what it was in 1999 to what it is now, most of the basic needs in the majority of the cases, probably 80 percent, are met whereas they were not met before.

CIRP: For those unfamiliar with the situation, could you give us an overview of the conflict that created this massive displacement in Colombia?

GS: In the mid-1960s, an internal conflict began in Colombia with a left-wing guerrilla group called the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).\(^2\) A smaller group called the National Liberation Army (ELN)\(^3\) later joined the conflict. It was a conflict that began due to severe problems related to social inequality and lack of viable political alternatives. For many years, the state only had a military presence in 10 percent of the territory, and the political system of Colombia was set up so there were two parties that shared power but only represented the top elites. The lack of peaceful possibilities in terms of changing the situation democratically, along with a long history of exploitation on the part of the landed elite and others towards the rural sector population, is what gave birth to the armed insurgencies.

The state did not have the capacity to address the guerrilla groups militarily with the police or with any of its public forces. As such, the elites in many parts of Colombia who owned land or had economic interests turned to militias to support them. For a period of time, militias were actually legal in Colombia. You could have paramilitary groups defend you because the guerrillas would kidnap, extort, and attack infrastructure and commit abuses. As a self-defense mechanism, the paramilitaries were considered to be the relief. But what happened? The paramilitaries were outlawed. So they went under the table and began to organize and became even worse because they were outside of the law. What started in 1999 was a process of collusion with security services, police, and so forth, that we later found out also led to massive infiltration of political and economic structures throughout the country.

In that time, the paramilitaries, which were just a band of armed right-wing militias found throughout the regions, eventually formed a federation called the Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC).\(^4\) They began as the dirty-armed wing of the military and then morphed into their own platform that was uncontrollable by the government. They started committing mass atrocities including gruesome massacres of civilians throughout the country.

---

\(^2\) Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
\(^3\) Ejército de Liberación Nacional
\(^4\) Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia
the country. Colombia had a period where there were hundreds of massacres every year and the method that was used by the AUC paramilitary group was the gruesome cutting up of people with chainsaws. That’s when you started getting to the height of displacement because paramilitaries would go into an area, gather people, massacre a group of them, and dismember them. This led to displacement.

At the same time that you had these paramilitary groups forming, you also saw the rise in cocaine production in the late 1970s and 1980s, which fueled its own sets of conflicts. Part of the drug conflict is directly related to both the guerrillas and the paramilitaries because they are involved in drug trafficking or in taxing all of the operations that have to do with coca growing, production, and transport.

However, there were also independent narco-traffickers and cartels that generated their own conflicts. Most often there has been conflict between cartels, but unfortunately there have been incredibly bloody conflicts. So this multi-faceted, very complicated conflict that includes a formal internal conflict, drug links, and drug wars that have taken place at the same time is the reason you have such mass displacement.

CIRP: Are there any new causes for displacement in Colombia?

GS: In Colombia, people have been displaced for many reasons. Often it’s because of death threats, attacks, or terror campaigns to get them out of an area. More recently, displacements have taken place as well because, in the areas where coca is produced, the United States funds an anti-narcotics program that involves aerially fumigating the coca fields. Planes go by and drop herbicide on coca. Unfortunately, it’s not an art form, so it also kills everything else. Most often, it kills everything else and very little of the coca. In a lot of these areas, when an area is fumigated, the water supply is ruined, all of the crops are ruined, and people have nowhere to sustain themselves, especially rural farmers who depend on the land. The displaced population includes a number of folks who have been displaced directly due to the anti-narcotics efforts of the US. A majority of the displaced are women, a good number are children, and Afro-Colombians and indigenous groups are disproportionately affected.

The anti-narcotic policy of aerial fumigation is something that many in the US government have acknowledged is a failed policy,
the whole infrastructure for these people so that they are incentivized not to grow coca. That means a whole economic infrastructure that is very difficult to build in the areas we’re talking about, particularly considering the fact that conflicts are taking place.

On the Colombian government's side, I haven't seen any acknowledgment that the policy doesn't work, per se. However, last April at the Summit of the Americas, the Colombian president gathered with other Latin American presidents and basically said: We need to look at the drug policy issue overall differently. What is the role of the countries that are incentivizing the drugs? We need to think about it differently. This was a huge step because drug policy and what you do about drug policy is very much dictated by the United States. Since last year, there's been more openness in looking at the issue overall, which could lead to some rethinking of the fumigation program. Also, a peace process is taking place in Colombia now, and one of the agenda items that is going to come up is drug policy. We will have to see how far and how flexible the Colombian state is, what the FARC proposes, and what they negotiate. That will require some rethinking because the fumigation policy is tremendously problematic, not just because of the displacement but because the environmental damage is tremendous. Everything that gets hit by that is burnt. While causalities from herbicides are very hard to prove, there are many reports of illness, rashes, and children dying. It’s not a good policy.

CIRP: In the next ten years, what steps need to be taken to help the IDPs in Colombia that are displaced to urban areas? Is the solution based on repatriation or assistance in urban areas to facilitate local establishment?

GS: One big issue in terms of IDPs is the fact that there has always been a reluctance to actually fully assist them in the place where they’ve taken refuge because the idea is that they’ll go back someday. But the reality is that, even with this Victims’ and Land Restitution law, even with the peace process, the majority of IDPs are not going to go back. You’ve also already started to have generations of displaced children in the cities and, as with every displaced situation in the world, that changes the dynamic; they don’t want to go back. Thought needs to be given to what can be done to really integrate these displaced people so that they’re not in a completely impoverished state, which they are now. They’re worse off than the rural poor. You have situations, as in the city of Quibdó, a small city in the middle of the jungle, where there are about 800,000 people, and 500,000 or so are displaced people from the region. They’re living wherever they could grab a place to live. Some of those are areas that belong to other people, others are basically unsanitary, unstable areas, and if there’s a flood or other natural disaster, people can have their shelters ruined. You have situations where you need to figure out first, infrastructure-wise, what to do with these people. Second, the biggest problem is employment and access to opportunities so that they can sustain themselves. In many of these areas you have recruitment from the legal armed groups and from criminal gangs. You also have situations involving prostitution. There’s a serious question that needs to be addressed: what can we do for the people?

You also see in Colombia a lot of intra-urban displacement in all of the major cities: Medellín, Cali, Bogotá, Buenaventura. There are people who already have been displaced two or three times, but then things get insecure for them so they have to go to other neighborhoods. Sometimes they go back and forth. Insecurity for people is a huge problem. To deal with this problem, the first need is more international attention.

CIRP: Why doesn't this situation have international attention?
GS: There are many reasons. On one hand, there is a protracted armed conflict that is seen as intractable and, as such, it is no longer newsworthy, even though there are new displacements taking place every day.

Another reason is more complex: Colombia has the largest number of IDPs but it also has the most sophisticated legislation for dealing with them. On paper, Colombia has perhaps the most aggressive law regarding the internally displaced, the most progressive programming for the internally displaced, the most sophisticated UN country team working on displacement with UNHCR leading, and it has the largest ICRC\(^5\) operation in the world. On paper, it seems covered on the side of national responsibility and covered on the side of international community. But in reality, the percentage of the laws and those rights that are actually implemented due to political will, budgets, and everything else is limited. Within those laws, the area that is least implemented is the protection and prevention of new displacements.

In terms of the international community, when UNHCR first went to Colombia, they were very active, very vocal, but they don’t do that anymore because much of their programming has been completely tied to the Colombian government’s program so they don’t want to create problems. They’ve become very invisible in terms of their advocacy, and more operational, based on the Colombian government. However, the reach of UNHCR, although they have multiple field offices, is very limited and there are many areas of the country where they’re really not reaching people. The one agency that reaches the most people, but they’re not a political agency because of their mandate, is the International Committee of the Red Cross. They are responsible for a lot of the basic, material humanitarian needs, but they’re not involved in trying to address the issues that generate the displacement or the complex questions of justice and political questions associated with displacement. To do anything in the country, all UN agencies and international agencies always need approval from the government. So there’s that tension, as well, that has created problems for the displaced populations.

The other reason for the lack of international attention on Colombia is that, when Álvaro Uribe Vélez became president, Colombia engaged in a major publicity blitz to say that the conflict was over. This was from 2002 to 2007. That made the world drop Colombia off their radar as a place of conflict. There are so many conflicts in the world that there are limited resources. Donors jump on whatever’s going on, such as the massive natural disasters – tsunamis and so on. But the attention once focused on Colombia has not come back. The hope is that the peace process will reengage the international community so it will see what’s really going on with the displaced populations in Colombia and Latin America.

\(^5\) International Committee of the Red Cross
The Psychological Effects of Refugee Resettlement

Interview with Dr. Marco Gemignani, Associate Professor of Psychology
Duquesne University

CIRP Journal Guest Editors sat down with Marco Gemignani in February 2013 to explore his expertise in the field of psychology, especially with respect to the impact of migration and resettlement. Professor Gemignani teaches a service-learning course, Psychology and Social Engagement, in which students work directly with recently arrived refugees in the Pittsburgh area.

CIRP Journal: Often the psychological challenges faced by refugees are overlooked. Attention is focused on the economic, physical relocation, sometimes overshadowing the trauma. Could you speak a bit about the mental-health dimension of resettlement?

Marco Gemignani: The mental-health dimension of refugees is definitely something that needs to be brought up. There are two main models in the literature that describe the approach to the psychological concerns of refugees. One is called the trauma-focused model, which looks more at the pathological dimensions that refugees may bring in, typically post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. We know statistically that there’s a much higher incidence of these pathologies among refugees. But, at the same time, we run the risk of pathologizing an entire population. The meta-studies, or studies that have analyzed other studies (which are very approximate because they make an average of research which has been conducted in very different circumstances), tell us that about 14 percent of the refugee population may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or depression, which is still much higher than the general population, which would be around 3 or 4 percent. But the common expectation is that traumatization among refugees is much higher. And whereas that might be true for some populations, we need to be careful not to generalize the pathologization because, from a psychological and cultural perspective, this shapes our expectations of others. So, for instance, for the humanitarian agents and the members of the communities where refugees are resettled – politicians, doctors who work with refugees, and so on – the trauma-focused model creates expectations that refugees are problematic, traumatized, depressed, or pathological. And if we have that expectation, it may serve as a prejudice. If you are expecting somebody to be sick, you’re not giving that person a lot of power or many opportunities to develop.

So the trauma-based model emphasizes the idea that people coming with problems will first try to solve these problems. The intervention from a psychological perspective should aim at screening refugees, identifying those who are severely suffering from psychological stress of various forms, and helping them. Once the extreme cases have been helped, support of the refugee community will be more or less enough to heal the cases that are less dramatic.

The other approach, which tends to be popular in more progressive and culturally-sensitive forms of psychology, and which is definitely growing stronger than the first one, is called the psychosocial approach. The main focus of this approach is to prevent issues among refugees. The idea is to use existing resources within the community to help people who are suffering instead of using Western models of understanding of psychopathology.

In the trauma model, which is very much linked to the medical model, we tend to see pathologies as being somewhat isolated from the world in which people are living. Psychopathology doesn’t work like that, though, because it is always a part of a context that con-
tributes to the formation and maintenance of issues. The experience of a depressed refugee from Nepal is hardly comparable to the experience of a depressed African American woman from Pittsburgh. These are extremely different experiences, even though the label (depression) is the same and the pathology still meets the same diagnostic criteria. And, according to the eyes of a traditional psychiatrist (not all psychiatrists are the same, of course, but the majority of them tend to focus on the biological dimensions of psychopathologies), the cure is found by working on the brain instead of on the mind. So, both of these patients may receive Prozac as part of their therapy, for instance.

From a psychosocial perspective for refugee care, this approach is wrong because, first, it doesn’t do justice to the cultural differences of people, and, second of all, it’s oppressive because doctors end up imposing a particular viewpoint on what life is, and what being depressed – which is an aspect of life – means. By doing this, we strip away a pathology from the context in which it happens: for example, being an immigrant or being depressed in the Nepali culture. And, more importantly, we remove it from the social relationships in which that pathology happens.

For instance, we know that the Nepali culture is a very community-oriented culture, so that healing does not happen only at the individual level. Sometimes it is difficult for us to understand this because we tend to think that if people are sick, they will do something to heal their own problems. Instead, in the Nepali culture, oftentimes the whole family will participate in the healing process. It will not just be expected that the patient will do something for himself or herself to get better, but rather that other members of the community are expected to participate, to help out, to make this person feel accepted, and to listen to this person’s concerns – something that in our society we typically don’t do. We would typically tell the person to see a doctor, and if she or he had major problems, to see a psychologist or a psychiatrist. In the Nepali community, the view of who is responsible for a person’s illness and who is responsible for that person’s recovery is very different, and that is typical of community-oriented societies.

So, if we simply tell a refugee, “You are depressed and you need to take Prozac” or if we tell him that he needs to do this and that, we end up imposing a particular worldview on him. And this is one of the points on which the psychosocial approaches tend to be critical of the dominant model of psychopathology. It’s called cultural imperialism and it results from imposing the dominant view of the world and of psychopathology as being the correct, truer, or more scientific one.

In the psychosocial model, in addition, one of the main purposes is that of looking into how the group or community may grow, instead of just healing specific issues. So, for instance, a typical intervention would be that of helping a refugee community create an organization in which the leaders of the community themselves can be in charge. At the same time, it’s important to understand that these two models are not antithetical and are not in opposition to each other necessarily. They’re critical of each other, but in the best scenario they would collaborate with each other.

In the current health system, very few mental health services are provided to refugees, so there is little opportunity for high-quality psychotherapy that could respond to specific cultural needs of an individual rather than using the sort of treatment that tends to be culturally imperialistic. Along this line is the desire to offer more individualized care and spend time establishing at least a minimal relationship.
One of my research projects took place two years ago at the Squirrel Hill Health Center. I was asked by the Pennsylvania Department of Health to run a pilot project to help screen incoming refugees for their mental health concerns. The Department of Health developed a screening that included a list of questions and common symptoms. This is called “symptom checklist,” whereby people simply answer questions such as: Do you have nightmares? How often? Are you happy in comparison to a previous period of your life? Are you stressed? It’s really a checklist that is self-administered. People are given this questionnaire and are told by the test administrator, “I will come back in ten minutes to collect your forms.”

In the other scenario of the research study, the same questions are asked, but this time I sat in front of the individuals being tested, using an interpreter and trying to establish a sense of connection with the people before me. They could answer the questionnaire (the symptom checklist) in about five minutes, but in this scenario it took 40 minutes. I sat down and started chit-chatting: “How’s the weather in Pittsburgh?” “How was the bus ride here?” “How are you adjusting?” I asked general questions to help them feel comfortable and said a few things about myself to make it seem a little more reciprocal. Then I asked the questions from the same screening. People felt more secure and felt that I was not a total unknown. They felt they were talking with a person they could relate to, instead of talking with an unknown translator or looking at a piece of paper.

What I tried to do in the second scenario was to communicate that I care by saying, “I really would like to know you” and “This is for you, not for me, so please tell me.” People reported six times more symptoms than when they were simply filling in the symptom checklist! This is an example of how important it is to establish a relationship and to make people feel accepted and cared about.

CIRP: Could you talk a little bit more about your research?

MG: I started becoming interested in refugee studies when I was a PhD student at the University of Florida. I was offered the opportunity to go to the former Yugoslavia for a summer to work with refugees. I did field assessments, which basically means a needs assessment, asking people questions such as, “How’s life?” “What do you need?” “What can we do to help you?” I also had an opportunity to do therapy with the people who could speak English. This was for three months so it was short-term therapy. It was a wonderful experience. I went to Belgrade and then to areas of former Yugoslavia where the refugee camps were. This was in 2003, ten years ago, and the Balkan War had ended in 1995. Many refugees and IDPs [internally displaced persons] were still in refugee camps or settlement areas, still displaced eight years after the end of the war.

I became very interested in refugees’ mental health and psychological well-being, so this became the subject of my dissertation. My dissertation aimed at gaining a better understanding of what sense people make of their traumas many years after they occurred.

At that time, I was living in Boston and I learned that Boston had a big community of refugees from Kosovo, most of whom resettled in the United States in 1999. I interviewed them in 2005 and then again in 2008, about six to nine years after they fled. What I found resulted in an article that was eventually published in the Journal of Refugee Studies. The title of the article is “The Past if Past” because the participants really questioned the past. These participants took two main positions. One was that “The Past if Past. I don’t want to think about it. I’ve turned the page. I never think about where I came from or what happened to me. I never think about the pain, the suffering, and the people I lost. I need to look toward the future.” The other
position that people took was, “The past is my strength, so every day when I wake up, I think about what happened to me and I feel strong because I survived, because I cherish the memories of the people I lost.” What was very interesting was that these two positions towards the past were not antithetical. Often, one person would express both narratives. At first sight, this could seem a contradiction. But then it became clear that these refugees did not think about their past in either-or terms; that is, either you embrace it or you want to forget about it. People needed to have a balance. Instead of thinking about these two extreme positions and hoping to find a middle point, which is usually the general solution that is expected, people were jumping from one position to the other. It was a sort of dance. There were moments in their day, or in their life, in which they felt that they needed to look forward. They could not afford to think about what had happened to them. Yet, there were moments in which it was very important for them to look back. What is interesting in this study is that the resolution was actually to keep the dialogue going between these two positions, so the resolution was not having a fixed solution.

CIRP: Can you talk a little bit about your experience working with the Bhutanese, particularly what differences you see between age groups in terms of their adjustment?

MG: As usual, the kids adjust much easier than grownups to the new society. Usually, the older the people, the more complicated it is for them to adjust. And I don’t think this is just a cognitive aspect. There is research that highlights that for older people it’s more difficult to learn or to adapt their cognitive habits in new societies, but I don’t think it’s just that. I think that for the elderly, especially the Bhutanese elderly, it’s a problem of identity. It’s a problem of not knowing what they can do and how they can contribute to society and to the community. When they were in the refugee camps, kids were in school for one or two hours a day and the parents would often leave the camp to go to work, so the elderly were the main caretakers of the children.

Here it’s very different. The kids go to school until four or six o’clock. They come home and they need to do homework and then they may play a little bit. So the role of the elderly as caretakers for the children is very difficult to keep here. Many of the Bhutanese elderly used to work in vegetable gardens, planting tomatoes or other crops, but they cannot do that here in the city. That is one of the reasons I think it’s more difficult for them to adjust. It has to do with roles, identity, and finding a purpose in life that links together practices and values, including knowing that they can do something productive and that they are good at it.

I observed that it was particularly challenging for parents to know how to negotiate the cultural gap that was formed between them and their kids after a few years of schooling in the United States. The kids want to fit in. It’s very understandable. All of us have been

1 The terms “Nepali community” and “Bhutanese” as used here refer to the same group of people.
adolescents and we know how important it is to fit in and be accepted and not to be the outsider of a group. They want to blend in, they want to assimilate, they want to become like the Americans, to an extent, but often

that creates issues because the parents may not appreciate the way they dress, the way they act, and what they do as a pastime. There are also significant gender differences. For instance, if a group of girls leaves the house on a Saturday afternoon to go to a movie theater, it’s a big deal for a Nepali family, whereas for an American family it’s considered just fine.

CIRP: What is your impression of the Pittsburgh community’s response to resettled refugees? Pittsburgh is not known as a particularly ethnically diverse community, how does this affect the experience of refugees resettled to the city?

MG: In the literature on prejudice, one of the main strategies to reduce prejudice is called the contact hypothesis. The idea is that prejudice comes mainly from ignorance and unjustified fears and that prejudice is reduced when people learn about others. And the best way to learn about others is to be with them, to do things with them. In school, it would involve things like asking the group of kids who belong to the dominant group and the kids who are discriminated against to work together on a common project or create sports teams together. That hypothesis has been questioned lately because it works in small environments like a school, but in bigger cities it typically doesn’t work because people tend to be too afraid. The contact scenario in big cities often creates isolation. It’s not that people interact more if every neighbor comes from a different culture or looks different. Instead, people stop interacting with each other. New York is often mentioned as an exception, but in many cases where this experiment has been tried, it was not very successful. I think it depends more on the openness of the community and the system to make a place accommodating.

How does a community become open? First of all, it becomes open if people can empathize with others. The idea is to fight ignorance. In the case of refugees, if people dress in strange ways, look very different, or speak a different language, oftentimes the reaction of the local inhabitants is fear. Many of the dominant discourses that we hear in the media try to depict the immigrant as a problem. For example: most Latinos are undocumented and they’re coming as parasites to take our jobs or use our schools. We need to educate the local population. The first action is to try to promote empathy and a sense of caring, and, if it’s possible, to do this in small environments to encourage contact. A small environment could be something like a food pantry or a church or a community center where opportunities can be created to encourage members of the local center to interact with the refugee kids in school or to interact with members of the refugee community.

I think it’s also important for everybody to stop thinking of refugees in economic terms.
I often hear that people need to move to Pittsburgh because there are a lot of vacant houses and we need more people here, or because we know that immigrants have more kids and we need future generations to pay for our pensions. Even if there is a well-documented link between immigration and economic growth, these discourses are de-humanizing. They take away the human face of the immigrant. The idea of empathizing, understanding who these people are, and sympathizing with them is a big shift from thinking of them as capital, and that's what should happen in the media and with politicians, especially in Pittsburgh. Unfortunately, Pittsburgh has often adopted the rhetoric of economics when talking about immigrants, but at the same time a strong effort is going on to make the city more cosmopolitan and open to them.
A Local Perspective on Resettlement
Interview with Leslie Aizenman, Director of Refugee Services
Jewish Family & Children's Service of Pittsburgh

In February 2013, CIRP Journal Guest Editors met with Leslie Aizenman, who provided key insights into the specifics of local resettlement and the role of Volunteer Agencies (VOLAGs). She also spoke about the history and nature of Pittsburgh as a destination for refugees and how host communities can make a difference in the success of local resettlement.

CIRP Journal: What is your role as Director of Refugee Services at JF&CS?

Leslie Aizenman: I oversee the whole unit, but I am particularly involved with finding housing, employment, ensuring access to medical/social services and providing outreach and education to the local community. The housing component is very important. It’s a challenge to sell our program to landlords, encouraging them to rent to people who aren’t even in the country yet, who have no job, and who don’t speak English. That is something of a risk for the landlords, even though their current tenants may be less than desirable. Many people from refugee camps have never lived in a westernized setting, so there’s a tremendous amount of case management necessary early on to smooth things out so that they’ll understand certain basics such as food storage, home safety, local customs, and so on. The community-based culture that many of them have come from where doors are always open and children are free to roam can be at odds with the individual-based environment they find here.

CIRP: Can you share a bit about how JF&CS began working with refugees?

LA: This agency is 75 years old. At the beginning, the refugees were Europeans fleeing World War II. The next big wave came from Vietnam. We had a large role during the Soviet Jewish resettlement. Then we worked with Burmese refugees (mostly ethnic minorities) and we resettled small numbers. The next wave of refugees was the Bhutanese and they have loved it here and sang our praises (I heard they knew my name in Nepal). They formed a good relationship with the city and with our agency, so we grew. Funding came and now we’re very well staffed. We’ve met and learned from a lot of unique challenges post-Soviet Jewish resettlement, so we feel that we can work with many populations. As resettlement of the Bhutanese winds down, we see more Iraqis coming, and Congolese refugees are expected to start arriving later this year.

CIRP: What is the role of local organizations like JF&CS?

LA: The State Department funds ten national agencies, and every local agency is connected to one of the ten. Our national agency is Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS). There are JF&CSs all over the US, but we’re independent and affiliated through HIAS. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is the Catholic national agency. There are many that are faith-based (Lutheran, Evangelical, Episcopal, and so on), and there are some secular ones, too, some ethnic-based. They all have State Department contracts.

At this moment, the State Department contract provides local agencies with $1,875 per individual that it resettles. Of that, $1,125, on average, goes to the client and $700 to the agency. With that money we have to secure housing and furnishings and provide several months’ rent. We also provide refugees with bus tickets, cell phones, household goods, and some cash. Basically, we provide tangible goods and the financial package. We cover
the rent for a minimum of two months plus a one-month security deposit. Everything is very prescribed; for instance, there must be an exact numbers of forks per person. In terms of case management, we have to do a home visit within a certain number of days. We immediately bring these individuals to apply for Social Security cards, and we bring them to welfare where they sign up for refugee medical assistance and food stamps. All of this takes enormous effort given the logistics involved in communicating through interpreters and making sure people get to where they need to be. We have to bring them to see a doctor within 30 days. The children need their immunizations and we have to enroll them in school within 30 days. Parents are enrolled in English classes. We start weekly cultural orientation classes and the curriculum includes information on safety, what to do in an emergency, the healthcare system, hygiene, work, and the services provided by the resettlement agency.

CIRP: Other developed countries like Australia take in refugees as well. Do you know how the resettlement process works in other countries?

LA: I was actually in Australia a year ago. I had always heard it was the best. They take far fewer refugees. They combine their asylee and refugee numbers, which we don’t do here. They have a large number of asylees, so their refugee numbers are smaller. If you are accepted into their refugee program, they push a button in Melbourne – Melbourne is where most of them go – and it’s all set. It’s very automated. In Pittsburgh we have to scramble around, whereas in Australia it sounds as though they have most systems in place and the furniture, for example, arrives automatically. They also have quite a bit more money. All the refugees are given TVs and computers, which are considered essential. They have a 540-hour English requirement; we have none. However, I did talk to one of the refugees in Australia who had had 540 hours of English and he couldn’t really speak to me. They all complained that 540 hours is not enough time to learn English.

In Melbourne, they have a program in which a community person from the culture of the refugee is trained to take them to all their appointments. Refugees are also given a main number to call if they need an interpreter, and they are given a centralized number to use for calling their resettlement agency, government offices, and health care. They are given a little house and, with the assistance they are given, they can afford it. They all have cars and little gardens in their back yards. The problem is that they’re not getting jobs; Australians are not employing them. They can get certificates, they can go back to school, but their unemployment rate is over 67 percent.

CIRP: Do you know what the unemployment rate is for refugees in the United States or Pittsburgh?

LA: Almost everyone here who wants a job can get one if they’re willing to take a basic physically demanding job. But there’s no safety net here. Welfare is the safety net, but
it doesn’t cover the rent. Cash assistance for a family of four, for example, is $497. They could live in public housing, but they don’t want to. In Australia, they have everything, in a sense, but there may be only 200 of them. In the US, we resettle up to 70,000 per year; there are 4,000 Bhutanese in Pittsburgh alone.

CIRP: Could you talk a bit about secondary migration? Why give up the kind of support they receive in their first location to come to Pittsburgh?

LA: Pittsburgh has been such a hotspot with the Bhutanese. There are a couple of reasons. Number one: places like New York City, Boston, or San Diego are very expensive. Pittsburgh is relatively affordable and safe with jobs and educational opportunities. Refugees usually wait to move until after they get through the R&P period. The majority of them wait 30 to 90 days or longer. Since not every place gives them the kind of super support that we (JF&CS Pittsburgh) give them, they are not as wedded to the agency where they were originally placed.

As much as possible, the State Department tries to place refugees where they want to go, but last year, for example, Pittsburgh was full. That is another reason for the secondary wave. I can’t add refugee arrivals at will. I have to have enough staff, housing, and employment, so I have to be careful, but the State Department is trying to send them to Pittsburgh if they request it.

CIRP: What has been the interaction between local government, schools, the health care system, and the resettlement agencies? How have the community and local institutions – the government, schools, and healthcare system – responded to refugee resettlement in Pittsburgh?

LA: It’s been up and down. When the Soviet Jewish population came, there was a welcoming Jewish community here. Many were highly educated and they were European and familiar with life in an industrial society. What has changed in refugee resettlement is that they are no longer Europeans. There’s been a fear of the unknown with people like the Burmese. I’ve seen the Burmese wave, the Bhutanese wave, and the Iraqi wave. Communicable disease was a concern at one point. A few years ago, the school was very nervous about TB. (Refugees are screened overseas and then again upon arrival for communicable illnesses.) There was no interpretation offered in many places, but that has greatly improved now. Before this, our city hasn’t really had to face immigrants who do not speak English and who look and act different, and that can instill fear. I see it very close to home, even in this neighborhood, and that is such a barrier. It’s not just the language; it’s the culture. For example, if a refugee student is acting up in school, the teacher may think the parents don’t care because they don’t come in. But the parents are putting their trust in the school. In their culture, they are not accustomed to coming in to talk with teachers.

CIRP: What is the social mobility for refugees here? Are any of the kids graduating from community colleges?

LA: Well, the Soviet Jews have done very well here. They’re professionals, they own homes, they have started businesses. Some of them came as professionals. The kids have done very well. Many of the professionals could not continue in their fields, which is a big disappointment, and that is what the Iraqis are seeing. They might get some related job, however. The resettlement package over the years has gotten increasingly smaller. Refugees used to receive enough money to pay for at least six to eight months of rent. Now we really only have to give them enough money to pay rent for a few months.

1 According to Leslie Aizenman, “Secondary migrants are refugees who are resettled anywhere else in the US and move to Pittsburgh.”
2 Reception and Placement
CIRP: What about the Burmese refugees who came with lower levels of English and education?

LA: I think that many of them moved away. Many of the singles left Pittsburgh, and I think the families still here are struggling. We didn’t see a community form in Pittsburgh, which is why many of them left. Fort Wayne, for example, has received a great many Burmese (ethnic Karen) refugees. So they’re still struggling here, I’d say. But for the Bhutanese, there are already four or five Nepali grocery stores, a jewelry store, and a clothing store here. They’re buying homes now, and many have cars. Their kids are going to CCAC.\(^3\) I know of one student going to Duquesne University with a scholarship. But they are going to CCAC in droves, which is a good development.

CIRP: Looking forward to the next five or ten years, what do you think will be the biggest challenges? Some of that might be looking at the Congolese refugees. What do you start considering when you think about receiving a new population?

LA: From what I’ve read, they have been extremely traumatized. They’ve faced war, they’ve experienced sexual abuse and slavery. The Bhutanese did not live through a war. I think that on the continuum we’re going to see tremendous amounts of PTSD and trauma. There may be many single moms, large families, little or no education. We have heard different reports about what they speak. Some French is spoken, but there are tribal languages, too. The other concern is how they are going to be seen or welcomed by the local community. We have already started to inform the local community and providers about Congolese arrivals and their background.

CIRP: If, for example, you start receiving Congolese refugees who are not really happy

\(^3\) Community College of Allegheny County