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ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONG DIASPORA PEOPLES: HOW
GLOBALIZATION AND MIGRATION RESHAPE THE
PEOPLE GROUP PHENOMENON

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ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONG DIASPORA PEOPLES: HOW
GLOBALIZATION AND MIGRATION RESHAPE THE
PEOPLE GROUP PHENOMENON

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I dedicate this dissertation to Dr. Allan Beane, who has been a great friend, supporter,
and brother in Christ.

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PREFACE

Special thanks to my wife, Barinda Pierce, who made this possible. Without her encouragement, patience, and love I would have never completed this project. Also, thanks to Anthony Casey, who took the time to help me think through issues associated with reaching diaspora peoples in North America.

Thanks to Dr. David Sills, Dr. Steve Ybarrola, and Mark Caldwell, who encouraged me to study cultural anthropology to better understand how to communicate the gospel clearly. Also, thanks to Dr. James Hamilton, leaders of Kenwood Baptist Church, and all the refugee ministry volunteers over the years. Without your help and encouragement ideas for this dissertation would have never taken shape. Lastly, I would like to thank Hardin Baptist Church for 8 years of financial support.

Matthew Lynn Pierce

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CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHDOLOGY

Introduction

In 2008 CNN ran a story that began with the headline, “First of 60,000 refugees from Bhutan arrive in U.S.”¹ Thousands of these refugees from Nepal have been resettled in Louisville, Kentucky, since 2006. These refugees often do not have a choice as to where they will be relocated to and had no choice as to where they were living before being relocated. Their homes were taken away and they were forced to relocate in the 90s. They “can no longer be understood merely as people who once had a static traditional culture that has been temporarily disrupted. The environments of refugees were usually unstable for a long time before the period of dislocation, and cross border refugees may have already undergone a period of in-country displacement.”²

In the move from Bhutan to Nepal and finally to a worldwide diaspora, including Louisville, these refugees have fought hard to maintain their culture, but ethnic identity is difficult to define. Some researchers focus on cultural similarities within the group instead of looking at ethnic boundaries. Culture can move anywhere and be transmitted to anyone. Ethnicity is about ethnic boundaries that are identified in relation to the group and how this group interacts with others.³ More confusion arises because

¹Manesh Shrestha, "First of 60,000 Refugees from Bhutan Arrive in U.S.," CNN, last modified March 25, 2008, accessed May 4, 2013. <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/03/25/bhutan.refugees/index.html>.

²Ted C. Lewellen, *The Anthropology of Globalization Cultural Anthropology Enters the 21st Century* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 2002), 174.

³Fredrik Barth, introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1998), 15.

they do not generally think of themselves as only belonging to one distinct ethnic group or tribe at any given time. The labels used when referring to themselves change based on where they are and with whom they are interacting. When Nepali-speaking people were in Bhutan they would have been referred to Lhotshampas, or Southern Bhutanese by Bhutanese people in the 1980s. In Nepal they were known as the Bhutanese refugees and in the United States they are sometimes referred to as the Nepali refugees or Bhutanese-Nepali refugees. It becomes even more challenging for the person studying this group when group members refer to themselves by their tribal names or caste names. Peggy Levitt writes,

Though many scholars have abandoned the notion of fixed identities for one that acknowledges malleability, much research still assumes that individuals have a “master,” overarching identity that is fundamentally rooted in a single place. In contrast, transnational community members develop several fluid, sometimes contradicting identities.⁴

The labels may change based on others, but boundaries can be determined based on language, marriage and other characteristics. Charles Keyes found that Karen people in Thailand preferred to marry other Karen. This is an example of ethnic endogamy, and it is defined by Keyes as “one of the main structural mechanism for maintaining boundaries between ethnic groups.”⁵

The research in this dissertation reveals that Nepali refugees in Louisville have also developed several identities that sometimes overlap and contradict one another when one tries to classify this population into distinct units or ethnic groups. The same applies to the refugees who originated in Burma. The refugees who originated in Burma come from several different tribes and speak many different languages. Some of the refugees from Burma lived in refugee camps in Thailand for many years and sometimes they refer

⁴Peggy Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 202.

⁵Charles F. Keyes, ed., *Ethnic Adaptation and Identity: The Karen on the Thai Frontier with Burma* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1979), 14.

to themselves as Thai. Others lived in refugee camps in Malaysia, but refer to themselves by their tribal name or sometimes Burmese. Self-identity is important for evangelical mission strategists because evangelical mission strategy is dominated by a desire to reach “people groups” and diaspora peoples are not easily broken up into distinct people groups.

The most commonly accepted definition of a people group is “a significantly large grouping individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, etc., or combination of these. For evangelistic purposes, it is the largest group within which the gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.”⁶ This definition of people groups is often misapplied because evangelical mission agencies and strategists want to place people groups in lists to be checked off as they “complete the task.” For example, mission agencies do not label second-generation refugee communities as a distinct group or recognize that groups living in different countries are distinct groups even though they would be separate groups if the definition of distinct people groups. Also, the borders between groups are no longer seen as rigid, but fluid, especially when dealing with diaspora peoples.

Research Problem

The research project investigates the validity of traditional people group strategy when working with diaspora peoples. The two main research questions,

1. Diaspora peoples cannot be placed into distinct groups without seriously distorting reality. What does this mean when trying to reach diaspora peoples in North America?
2. How do diaspora people draw boundaries between their group and the “others”? Do they draw boundaries?

⁶Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch, "Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 19, no. 4 (2002): 19.

The distinct boundaries between people groups are eroded by diaspora peoples moving to urban areas in North America. In the drive to reach people groups many put diaspora peoples into distinct categories of ethnic groups do not exist in reality. Some of these are considered groups because of the policies of modern nation states and the policies of past colonial leaders. What existed before modern nation states were “usually multiple, overlapping, flexible identities; only in exceptional cases did these approximate to the one-and-only-one tribe per person model.”⁷ The theory that diaspora peoples have fluid identities as described by anti-anti-essentialists such as Douglass, Friedman and others puts a major wrinkle in the idea that diaspora peoples can be fit into distinct categories.



Figure 1. Research map

⁷David N. Gellner, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, and John Whelpton, *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom: The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Nepal* (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1997), 12.

The figure above provides what Creswell calls a “research map – of existing literature”⁸ that shows how this research fits into existing literature.

Paul Hiebert wrote in one of his last publications that people group strategy is based on early theories of sociology. Early anthropologists focused on studying small societies and viewed them as closed systems. Today, anthropologists have realized that “peasant and urban societies cannot be cut up into distinct, bounded people groups without seriously distorting the picture . . . consequently, we cannot really speak of distinct people groups or hope to generate people movements in complex settings.”⁹ Hiebert’s statement fits with the findings in the literature review. Cultural anthropology has moved on in their assessment of people groups in diaspora settings while missiology has not. Therefore, people group strategy is not helpful when attempting to reach diaspora peoples. Diaspora peoples have fluid, liminal identities and cannot be placed into the traditional view of people groups consisting of distinct, clear-cut boundaries without severely distorting reality. The qualitative research in this dissertation will attempt to answer the question: what does this mean when trying to reach diaspora peoples in North America?

Terminology

The following terms are used throughout this dissertation: *culture*, *diaspora*, *ethnic identity*, *essentialism*, *instrumentalism*, *refugee*, and *people groups*. These terms will be defined and the limitations and delimitations will follow.

Culture is a term loosely used among evangelicals and secular writers. Sometimes it is used in reference to what some would label ethnicity. The distinction between culture and ethnicity is important for ethnographic research. Culture is

⁸John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013), 133.

⁹Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 92.

something that can be transmitted from one person to another, something that can be taught. It is often fluid and not a fixed, bounded entity. Many human beings belong to more than one culture and consider themselves bicultural or multicultural. They blend elements from the majority culture and the one they learned at home. Culture describes the behaviors and assumptions common to one group that can be used to distinguish it from another group. For example, in Bhutanese-Nepali culture the idea of dating is something that is deplorable. A man is supposed to marry the woman his parents find for him and they are supposed to learn to be happy with one another. They see Western forms of dating as disgraceful. For anyone to find a spouse without the help of one's parents is unthinkable and shameful. Even in the diaspora.

Diaspora is a commonly used term among evangelicals, often used in reference to the Jewish dispersion among the Gentiles. Today there is a new movement among evangelicals called Diaspora Missiology. Their movement has come about because of the great number of peoples migrating from their places of origin. Some publications use the term transnational, to help differentiate between *transnational* populations and diaspora populations. The term *diaspora* will be used in this dissertation.

Diaspora people do not include those who often travel for business purposes, but those who have moved from their place of origin due to push or pull factors. Push factors include forced displacement because of war or famine. Pull factors include financial or other incentives that draw people to move away from their homelands.¹⁰ Theorization of diaspora should not be divorced from history and culture; therefore, two chapters in this dissertation chronicle the movement of refugees from Bhutan and Burma to Louisville. These groups, pushed from their homelands to neighboring countries, were finally resettled in Louisville, Kentucky.

¹⁰Jana Evans Braziel, *Diaspora: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2008), 26.

What is the *ethnic identity* of a Nepali or Burmese refugee? Do they think of themselves as Burmese or Nepali? Secular cultural anthropologists have debated the dichotomy between primordialism/essentialism and instrumentalism/constructivism. The two different terms for each dichotomy are used synonymously by cultural anthropologists (some prefer one term over the other).

The primordialist and essentialist views are very similar and are often used as synonyms, as Douglass does in his article “In Search of Juan De Onate: Confessions of a Cryptoessentialist.” Douglass writes, “Today it is difficult (even impossible) to identify pure adherents and practitioners of either the primordialist (essentialist) or constructivist analytical stances.”¹¹ The term *essentialism* will be used in this dissertation. Essentialism is usually referred to in the literature as the besetting sin of cultural anthropology. It is associated with biological determinism and nationalism. *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* says “the distinctive mark of essentialism . . . lies in its suppression of temporality: it assumes or attributes an unchanging, primordial ontology to what are the historically contingent products of human or other forms of agency.”¹² The term is often used by national and ethnic leaders as a basis of legitimacy for an ethnic group. National and ethnic leaders look back historically to where they came from, searching for some basis for unity in history. Essentialists believe this identity is an ontological category, not something defined by leaders for social action.

Whereas essentialists believe ethnic identity is not something formed by a group for social action, constructivists view ethnic identity as a product of recent historical forces in society where leaders attempt to present the group’s ethnic identity as

¹¹William A. Douglass, "In Search of Juan De Onate: Confessions of a Cryptoessentialist," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 56, no. 2 (2000): 152.

¹²Michael Herzfeld, "Essentialism," in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, ed. Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer (London: Routledge, 2010), 234-35.

old. Researchers in the field of ethnic identity often use instrumentalism and constructivism synonymously. In this dissertation the term *instrumentalism* will be used.

Most anthropologists today hold to a modified version of instrumentalism/constructivism/essentialism because people do not just choose what cultural identity they have; “. . . [identities are] . . . never created *ex nihilo* or out of free-floating elements, but rather from an inventory of ‘cultural stuff.’ ”¹³ Also, people are driven by more than a desire for power. But, all realize that ethnic identity is often characterized by instability, especially in diaspora populations.

According to the UNHCR, a *refugee* is someone who, “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”¹⁴ A refugee is an immigrant who is not a tourist, student or other person entering another country for education or travel. A refugee is a person who is fleeing persecution.

People groups are defined differently by various evangelical agencies and missiologists. The definition for people groups has been a point of contention in missions circles for over 40 years. The aim of missiologists should not be finding the perfect definition of people groups so they can develop more accurate lists. Rather, they should seek to understand the use of terms such as *ethnicity*, *cultural identity*, and *tribe* from the point of view of the people themselves, “as ethnographic phenomena rather than analytical tools.”¹⁵ Context is the key to differentiating people groups in diaspora settings. Diaspora peoples have fluid identities that change based on context, but people

¹³Douglass, "In Search of Juan De Onate," 152.

¹⁴United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Refugees," accessed February 24, 2014. <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c125.html>.

¹⁵Jonathan Friedman, "The Implosion of Modernity: A New Tribalism," in *Modernities, Class, and the Contradictions of Globalization*, ed. Kajsa Ekholm Friedman and Jonathan Friedman (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008), 239.

are not free to change their identity as individuals whenever they desire. Friedman writes, “Identity is what people do. It is not simply an act of self-reference, but an identification of significant worlds within which the identifiers move.”¹⁶ Identity is formed in socialization with others, developing within already existing “interpretations of the world that resonate with peoples’ existences. The construction of identity is always a concrete historical interaction process that cannot be reduced to choosing food from a menu or any other unitary conscious act.”¹⁷ Fuzzy boundaries between ethnic groups will be explored later in this dissertation.

Personal Background

The diaspora groups researched in this dissertation live in the Louisville metropolitan area. Networks of people were chosen to be researched, not specific neighborhoods. One of Theodore Bestor’s anthropology students suggested that urban researchers should “choose a network, not a neighborhood”¹⁸ when doing urban research. Instead of attempting to locate the ideal neighborhood, research began through existing relationships. Additional contacts were sought out from existing contacts as research continued. Networks of people to observe and interview were greatly expanded through this process.

Initial contact with the Nepali refugee community in Louisville was in 2009. Involvement in this community includes teaching English at Kenwood Baptist Church, visiting families in their homes, attending weddings, and religious ceremonies. Relationships with older members of the Nepali-speaking community have been

¹⁶Jonathan Friedman, "The Politics of De-Authentification: Escaping from Identity, a Response to ‘Beyond Authenticity’ by Mark Rogers," *Global Studies in Culture and Power* 3, no. 1 (1996): 127.

¹⁷Friedman, "The Politics of De-Authentification," 129-30.

¹⁸Theodore C. Bestor, "Networks, Neighborhoods, and Markets: Fieldwork in Tokyo," in *Urban Life: Readings in the Anthropology of the City*, ed. George Gmelch, Robert V. Kemper, and Walter P. Zenner (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2010), 22.

developed through these activities. Younger people in this community are more difficult to interact with because they work at a wide variety of jobs and when they are at home they want to spend time with family. The older people in the community have been easier to approach since they do not work outside the home and were initially interested in studying the Bible to learn English. People involved in Kenwood Baptist Church's international ministry used Chronological Bible Storying as a method for teaching the biblical worldview to people in the Nepali-speaking community. After understanding the gospel most of the community rejected the message, but continue to be interested in studying English to prepare for the U.S. citizenship exam.

In the spring of 2013, I took an ethnographic research seminar with David Sills. One of the requirements for the seminar was to complete an ethnography. Ethnographic research on the Nepali community in Louisville, particularly focusing on the high caste Hindus began in this seminar. The caste system is still important in the US, even though people in the Nepali-speaking community previously said it was unimportant in today's world. Caste is so important to high caste Hindus that they will not eat in the same room with low caste people and do not consider lower caste people to be the same category of human they are. Caste is the reason many of the Nepali people would not attend the new Nepali church plant or listen to the Nepali evangelists. Most of the Nepali Christians are from lower castes.

In the fall of 2013, I completed an independent study seminar with Steven Ybarrola at Asbury Seminary on urban anthropology. Continued research was conducted with the Nepali-speaking community. Readings and interviews revealed that the common definition of people group does not work with refugees from Nepal or Burma. The people referred to as Nepali refugees are really many different castes and ethnic groups. Michael Hutt, noticed this in his research in Nepal, where "almost without exception, they belonged to castes (Rais, Limbus, Gurungs, Kamis, etc.) and ethno-linguistic groups

(Rais, Limbus, Gurungs, Magars, etc.) that are nowadays categorized as ‘Nepali’; almost without exception the language they spoke was Nepali; in socio-religious terms most were broadly Hindu.”¹⁹

The refugees from Nepal were initially contacted in 2009. Encounters with refugees from Burma have not been as consistent as those from the community that originated in Nepal. The group from Burma arrived in Louisville about the same time as the group from Nepal. Karen tribal people were the first encountered by the author in Louisville. They were interested in studying English on Wednesday nights and many speak the Thai language well. Love for the Thai language and food helped maintain and extend contacts among this community.

More people from this group were contacted at a Thai restaurant in Louisville. The restaurant owner came to Louisville as a refugee with his family several years before the large group began coming to Louisville in 2008. The owners employ several refugees from Burma. In 2009 a few men from a Chin Baptist church began attending Kenwood Baptist, where I serve as an elder. As interaction increased it was discovered that this church of almost 100 people was currently meeting in a two bedroom apartment. Kenwood Baptist Church invited the Chin congregation to use the building on Sunday evenings. Kenwood Baptist Church and this Chin congregation have been sharing space since 2009. People from the Chin church and the Thai restaurant were happy to introduce the author to refugees from Burma for interviews. As my network expanded, so did my opportunity to attend cultural gatherings, weddings and other activities. Networks are more important than neighborhoods for urban anthropological research, but location is not unimportant.

¹⁹Michael Hutt, *Unbecoming Citizens: Culture, Nationhood, and the Flight of Refugees from Bhutan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 8.

While I was conducting my research, my family moved to a neighborhood where many refugees live to have better, and more regular, access to people in these communities. Bestor said that instead of finding a neighborhood to research that he decided to “determine where my contacts were strongest and where introductions from existing contacts could be most effective and go there; don’t search for an “ideal” place and then try to find connection to it.”²⁰ This advice was excellent. Our refugee friends helped us find a house, and through this process contacts with the refugee community from Burma and Nepal expanded.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Proposed Research

This dissertation is limited by the small number of books and articles published about the problem of placing diaspora peoples into specific people groups.²¹ Because of the small number of publications about the problem of ethnic identity when trying to reach diaspora peoples using the people group strategy, I relied heavily on secular research about ethnic identity. Another limitation is that case studies are restricted by the sensitivity and integrity of the researcher. The researcher is the primary instrument of investigation, so the strength of the findings depends on the abilities of the researcher.

Stake said, that sometimes “we will have a research question, a puzzlement, a need for general understanding, and feel that we may get insight into the question by studying a particular case.”²² Through the case studies insight was gained into how

²⁰Bestor, "Networks, Neighborhoods, and Markets," 22.

²¹In one paragraph of his posthumous *The Gospel in Human Coontexts*, Paul Hiebert refers to the problem of placing peoples who live in modern complex societies into distinct people groups. Hiebert’s comment created such a stir in the evangelical community that an entire edition of *Mission Frontiers* was dedicated to the topic. See Paul Hieber, “Do People Gropus Matter?” *Mission Frontiers* 30, no. 3 (2010): 6-7. Hiebert’s book did not mention diaspora peoples, but the matter is discussed in Steve Ybarrola, “Diasporas and Multiculturalism: Social Ideologies, Liminality, and Cultural Identity,” in *The Human Tidal Wave: Global Migration, Megacities, Multiculturalism, Pluralism, Diaspora Missiology*, ed. Sadiri Joy Tira (Manila: LifeChange Publishing, 2013).

²²Robert E. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 3.

diaspora peoples identify themselves. Are they Burmese or Thai; Bhutanese or Nepali? Does this depend on context? In selecting a case or cases Stake says, that “the first criterion should be to maximize what we can learn.”²³ In this dissertation I learned more about ethnic identity among diaspora peoples.

A delimitation of this dissertation is the focus on refugees who originated in Burma and Bhutan who have been relocated to Louisville, Kentucky since 2006. These two groups are the largest and most recent refugee populations to be relocated to Louisville since the end of the Vietnam War when Laotian and Vietnamese refugees were relocated to Louisville. People from different castes and tribes from within these two groups will be interviewed to get a purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling will show, “Different perspectives on the problem.”²⁴ For the sake of consistency, it will be necessary to adhere to the definition of refugee provided earlier. This will help avoid any variances that may arise from other people who immigrated under different circumstances.

Research Methodology

Research methodologies used in this dissertation include an examination of books and journal articles on cultural identity in the diaspora and people group research from any perspective. Strauss and Corbin say that this examination of the relevant literature will assist the researcher in gaining knowledge of existing theories in ethnic identity to extend “an already existing theory and uncover how it applies to new and varied situations.”²⁵ Diaspora peoples do not have identities rooted in a single place and

²³Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, 3.

²⁴Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 100.

²⁵Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), 51.

cannot be easily classified without distorting reality. Several qualitative research²⁶ methodologies were used: case study, narrative research and grounded theory. Creswell says, “Case study research involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary setting.”²⁷ Research was conducted among refugees from Burma and Nepal that live in the Louisville area. The quality of the case study research was improved by drawing from narrative and grounded theory research. Narrative research is a method that is employed in the case studies; “it begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals.”²⁸ Several people were interviewed to collect stories about their transition from one country to another and how this affected their ethnic identities. Grounded theory research attempts to move beyond description of a situation or group to generate or discover a theory: “This theory development does not come ‘off the shelf,’ but rather it is generated or ‘grounded’ in data from participants who have experienced the process.”²⁹ The final goal of the case studies is the final conclusions formed by the researcher about the overall meaning of the cases.

Data collected was coded and analyzed using ATLAS.ti. The results are presented in two chapters, one chapter about the refugees that originated from Bhutan and another chapter about those that originated from Burma. The research methodologies will be explained in detail in this next section, beginning with narrative research.

Narrative Research

Narrative research consists of stories collected from individuals that not only consist of conversations, but also documents. According to Creswell, the stories used in

²⁶For a helpful introduction to qualitative research methods, see Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds., *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2011).

²⁷Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (2013), 97.

²⁸Ibid., 71.

²⁹Ibid., 83.

Narrative research “may emerge from a story told to the researcher, a story that is co-structured between the researcher and the participant, and a story intended as a performance to convey some message or point.”³⁰ The research is the result of collaboration between the researcher and the person telling his or her story. Narrative research best fits this research problem because the refugees are the people who can best tell their story. It was used to capture the experiences of individuals within these communities.

The narrative research in this dissertation tells the experience of the refugees to shed light on their identities; how they identified themselves from one context to another. Chase writes, the narratives are biographical stories that provide “a way of understanding one’s own or others’ actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time.”³¹ Extensive information was collected about each participant to provide a clear understanding of the context of a life lived out.

Mattingly has criticized narrative research for its, “problematic epistemological status.”³² People tell their stories with a personal bias that is affected by their personal background. The story is also shaped by the personal background of the researcher. Active collaboration with the people interviewed helps avoid bias and reveal the context of the narrative. Creswell and Miller refer to active collaboration as member checking in the 2000 article *Determining Validity in Qualitative Research*. Creswell and Miller write that member checking “Consists of taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative

³⁰Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (2013), 71.

³¹Susan E. Chase, "Narrative Inquiry: Still a Field in the Making," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2011), 421.

³²Cheryl Mattingly, *Healing Dramas and Clinical Plots: The Narrative Structure of Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 26.

account.”³³ The participants add credibility to the findings by having a chance to make comments or correct assumptions of the researcher. This was helped by grounded theory.

Grounded Theory

Creswell writes, Grounded theory generates or discovers a theory, “An abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon that relates to a particular situation.”³⁴ The theories developed by the researcher are grounded in data from field research. The field research typically consists of multiple field interviews providing information until the category (unit of information composed of events) is saturated. The participants interviewed are chosen based on those who can help best form the theory (theoretical sampling). Data analysis was conducted in grounded theory research following this standard format. First, interviews with refugees were recorded on a digital recording device. Later notes and interviews were transcribed and entered into ATLAS.ti. This was followed by coding. The codes were not set in stone because the software allows the research to recode as codes are merged or seen to be unhelpful. ATLAS.ti is superior to coding on paper because as Freise observes, when using paper, “It is not feasible to go through all the data again (and again) to recode if one notices something new in interview 10 or 12.”³⁵ The software allows one to easily rename codes when needed. This helped with examining the frequencies of codes in analyzing the final data set.

Grounded theory is useful for case study research because there is no assumed hypothesis. The theory assumes the researcher does not know which questions to ask and allows him to develop questions and theories as he interviews people in the group he is

³³John W. Creswell and Dana L. Miller, "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry," *Theory Into Practice* 39, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 127.

³⁴John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 56.

³⁵Susanne Friese, *Qualitative Data Analysis with Atlas.Ti*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014), 19.

learning from. Most social science research is directed toward the task of testing formal theories that are developed before research begins. But, grounded theory reduces the chances of ethnocentrism by developing theories grounded in empirical data of cultural description (interviews and observation). The result of well-designed grounded theory is a theory that explains why and how the people themselves view life and go about their daily lives.

Grounded theory was chosen because the refugees from Bhutan and Nepal are allowed to speak for themselves, and this approach helps avoid reading my own biases and misconceptions into the data. The data was analyzed using ATLAS.ti, a software tool that helps manage cultural and linguistic data. It helps the researcher categorize, retrieve summarize conclusions about research notes. Grounded theory data cannot be gathered and analyzed without first conducting interviews.

Interviews

Ethnographic interview provided an effective way to learn how the people communicate. Fetterman writes, because of this, “The interview is the ethnographer’s most important data-gathering technique.”³⁶ Interviews provided opportunities to learn how the people use expressions and words in their own context. It was a key step in describing culture from an emic perspective. I gathered and identified the thoughts of the people through the eyes of informants; the first step in Spradley’s developmental research sequence.³⁷

The strength of the interview is the ability to gather and identify the thoughts of people from an emic perspective. Through careful listening and well thought out questions that build off what is learned from previous questions, I was able to understand

³⁶David M. Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step-by-Step*, 3rd ed., Applied Social Research Methods Series (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2010), 40.

³⁷James P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 1979).

better the worldview of the people through learning the language they use in everyday life.

Refugees from Burma and Bhutan were interviewed until the point of “saturation” was reached.³⁸ Saturation occurs when collection of new data from interviews does not shed reveal new information about the topic being researched. Interviews began with 5 individuals from different castes or language groups and the sample size was expanded to nearly 15 from each caste or language group.³⁹ Each interview was recorded with the permission of the informants. I utilized a semi-structured interview schedule (appendix 1) with all interviewees. The interviews were transcribed to validate the accuracy of the transcription. After the interviews were transcribed they were shared with the participants to allow them the opportunity to read the transcriptions. They were allowed to make any corrections, update their responses, and comment at that point in time. Merriam refers to this method of triangulation as “member checks taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible.”⁴⁰ This method enhances internal validity. The interviews were then coded in ATLAS.ti. As interviews were conducted, important ideas and new questions were written down to ask when listening to their responses. Participant observation is another way the communities were studied.

Participant Observation

Cultural anthropology has traditionally produced ethnography through participant observation. Participant observation has traditionally been understood as the

³⁸Juliet M. Corbin and Anselm L. Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 148.

³⁹ Mark Mason suggests that somewhere between 30 to 60 people are commonly interviewed for PhD dissertations before the student feels he or she has reached saturation. Mark Mason, “Sample Size and Saturation in Phd Studies Using Qualitative Interviews,” *Forum: Qualitative Social Research.*, 11, no. 3 (2010).

⁴⁰Sharan Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 204.

prolonged observation of a group. The researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives and activities of the people; immersion in the culture.⁴¹ Total immersion in the lives of the people can prove to be challenging in an urban environment like Louisville, Kentucky. The refugee populations being researched in this dissertation are scattered all over the city. Following the suggestions of Theodore Bestor, the research was focused on particular networks and not neighborhoods.⁴² Robert Yin points out that participant observation provides “the ability to perceive reality from the viewpoint of someone ‘inside’ the case study rather than external to it.”⁴³ This approach helps to produce a more accurate portrayal of a case study.

Following the advice of Bestor, I observed refugees who originated in Bhutan and Burma by going to their homes and putting “myself in the path of contacts.”⁴⁴ Contacts were made through teaching ESL and helping refugees prepare for the US citizenship test at Kenwood Baptist Church. Other contacts were made through relationships with people from the Chin Baptist Church. The most fruitful source of contacts were the interview participants. Each time someone was interviewed, the interview was concluded by my asking, “Do you know anyone else I could speak with about this topic?”

By putting myself in the paths of their daily lives, I observed the rituals of the people. As a Christian, I was unable to participate in the rituals offering worship to idols, spirits, demons, or all of the above. The best option for Christian researchers studying religious practices is usually passive participation. Spradley explains that this action is when “the ethnographer engaged in passive participation is present at the scene of action

⁴¹Fetterman, *Ethnography*, 37.

⁴²Bestor, "Networks, Neighborhoods, and Markets."

⁴³Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 88.

⁴⁴Bestor, "Networks, Neighborhoods, and Markets," 23.

but does not participate or interact with other people to any great extent.”⁴⁵ A researcher finds an “observation post” and records what he observes. In almost every circumstance I had cultural informants who explained what was happening from their point of view. Another way I learned more from passive participation was interviewing those involved after the ceremony, ritual, or other activity is finished.

Participant observation is a necessary part of developing strong case study. It allows the researcher to develop the emic perspective necessary to understand the worldview of other people. Through participant observation the researcher gains acceptance in the community and experiences a different culture. Weaknesses of participant observation include misunderstanding on the part of the researcher and ethical issues of participating in activities that are not congruent with the Christian faith.

Case Study

Case studies are used in fields such as psychology, anthropology, political science, history, economics, and missiology. Yin writes that case studies “are the preferred strategy when “how” or “why” questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context.”⁴⁶ The refugee communities that originated in Bhutan and Burma that live in Louisville were explored over a number of months through in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information.

More than one case was explored in this dissertation. Multiple cases are examined because they provide more evidence than a single case and add confidence to the findings.⁴⁷ A Type 3 multi-case study was used. This is what Yin calls a holistic

⁴⁵James P. Spradley, *Participant Observation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), 59.

⁴⁶Yin, *Case Study Research* (1994), 1.

⁴⁷Robert E. Herriott and William A. Firestone, "Multisite Qualitative Policy Research: Optimizing Description and Generalizability," *Educational Researcher* 12, no. 2 (1983).

design, as an approach based on the following assumptions.⁴⁸ First, was the belief that the research questions could be best answered through the dimensions of a compare and contrast process that a multi-case design provides, to provide a test of the ideas in the conceptual framework. Multiple case studies allow for use of replication logic instead of sampling logic. Sampling logic would compare multiple case studies to the quantitative research that is dependent on the statistical data found in multiple respondents to a survey. But, replication logic in multiple case studies is different from sampling logic because it is not dependent on statistical data. It is similar to the logic used by scientists when conducting multiple experiments. When scientists make a discovery using one experiment they conduct the experiment again to ensure the soundness of the discovery.

After the data were collected a detailed description of the case was produced, themes were analyzed and this provided an interpretation of the case. The final interpretation includes lessons learned from both cases in the final chapter of the dissertation.

Through the case studies in this dissertation, the theory that diaspora peoples cannot be fit into distinct categories of people groups was grounded. The way the term “people group” is used by missiologists is not always helpful. The two case studies demonstrate why this is not always helpful. Diaspora peoples have fluid identities that depend on the others they are interacting with.

Limitations and Validation of Methodology

Any social science methodology is limited by the abilities of the researcher. I am limited in my ability to speak Burmese, Nepali, and the other minority languages spoken by the peoples who originated from Nepal and Burma as refugees. The heart

⁴⁸Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014), 56-57.

languages spoken by interviewees included: Karen, Hakha, Falam, Tedim, Burmese, and Nepali. My wife and I have been working with a group of volunteers teaching English and leading Bible studies with Nepali-speaking peoples for about four years. During this time I have learned many important Nepali phrases, religious terminology, and some writing. Because proficiency has not been reached in all the languages spoken by the people interviewed, I was assisted by several friends from the communities. They have helped with my research in the past and agreed to help with the research involved in this dissertation. Many interviews were conducted in English with a translator, some were conducted without a translator, and many of the interviews with Karen refugees were conducted in Thai. Many Sgaw Karen people speak Thai well because they lived in refugee camps in Thailand for many years. The interviews conducted in Thai were with people who spoke Thai better than they spoke English.

Another limitation is my own Christian worldview. Many of the people interviewed for this dissertation were Hindus and Buddhists. A large group of people in the community of refugees from Burma are Baptist, so we share many common worldview traits. One of the people who agreed to assist in interviewing Nepali-speaking people is a Hindu priest and another is a Christian. They were also able to assist in understanding the religious aspects of cultural identity for refugees from Nepal.

Creswell and Miller write that triangulation of data is important for quality qualitative research because it “is a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study.”⁴⁹ Data was triangulated in this study by combining three elements. Corroborating evidence was collected through the literature review, semi-structured interviews and allowing the participants the opportunity to read the transcriptions and make any corrections, update their responses, and comment at that point in time. The

⁴⁹Creswell and Miller, "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry," 126.

process of triangulating the data ensured the validity of findings because I relied on “multiple forms of evidence rather than a single incident or data point in the study.”⁵⁰

The procedure for my research involved three steps:

1. Identify the way diaspora peoples categorize themselves and place boundaries between themselves and other groups.
2. Identify and analyze these boundaries.
3. Identify and analyze what this means when trying to reach diaspora peoples in North America.

The identification of how diaspora peoples categorize themselves and place boundaries between themselves and other groups initially began with a literature review. Research continued with interviews that were studied and corroborated by informants. The interviews were conducted following standard qualitative interview guidelines.⁵¹ The interviews were transcribed in ATLAS.ti and coded using the same software.

Grounded theory helped identify key themes as more interviews were conducted. As interviews were conducted the answers given and stories told by the interviewees inspired follow up questions. The themes, questions, and ideas that were developed through the interview process helped learn more about how the people identify themselves in different situations. The research also revealed how they draw boundaries between themselves and others.

Informants were divided into two key groups for the case studies. The first group was made up of refugees who came from Bhutan, settled in Nepal for a time, and were finally resettled in the United States. The second group originally came from Burma, settled in either Thailand or Malaysia for a time, and was finally resettled in the

⁵⁰Creswell and Miller, "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry," 126.

⁵¹Herbert J. Rubin and Irene Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005).

United States. These are not homogeneous groups and their methods of placing boundaries between themselves and “others” was discovered through interviews.

Data Analysis

Yin defines data analysis as it “consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining evidence, to draw empirically based conclusions.”⁵² Data coding and analysis was a two-step process and was aided with the use of a computer software program, ATLAS.ti. The software is designed to accomplish qualitative analysis tasks of coding of text, coding of multi-media sources, retrieval of coded text based on self-defined parameters, creation of customized reports, testing of propositions based on self-identified codes or combination of codes, hypothesis testing, and statistical analysis through frequency of codes.

For this study I utilized the coding, retrieval and customized report functions of Atlas.ti. As stated earlier in this chapter, the coding table for this study was refined through the process of conducting interviews. After transcripts of the interviews were checked by the participants, the text was entered into ATLAS.ti, and then an open coding process was used to identify concepts and dimensions in the source files. According to Strauss and Corbin, open coding is the process of “Naming and categorizing the phenomena through close examination of the data . . . the data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data.”⁵³ As the open coding progressed across both cases, I kept a manual research journal to enter emerging ideas, concepts, and themes that arose from the initial coding process. The open coding process resulted in ninety-two codes with fifty-four pieces of data coded. Appendix 2 does not include every

⁵²Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Designs and Methods*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 126.

⁵³Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, 62.

code from the initial coding process; it includes codes that were used in developing themes.

The second step of the analysis was the analysis of themes. Themes analysis focused on a few key issues to help with understanding the complexity of the two cases. Diaspora peoples have fluid, liminal identities, and cannot be placed into the traditional view of people groups consisting of distinct, clear-cut boundaries without severely distorting reality. The open coding results were sorted into a two dimensional matrix that correspond to the phenomena observed and themes found during research. Coded source data was entered into the matrix (Table 1).

Table 1. Themes and description matrix

Theme Description	Codes	Coding Results	
		Burma	Nepal
Ethnic Identity Labels Change	IDV, IDVL, IDVLH, IDVN, IDVNRBH, IDVR, IDVB, IDVCH, IDVFCH, IDVK, IDVTH, IDVY, IDVD	35	27
Religious Boundaries	RNHIN, RI, RNI, RR, RNR, R, RBB, RCB, RC	30	63
Marriage Boundaries	MNR, MR, MRR, MRB, MRNB, MRE	31	43
Language Boundaries	LI, LNI	8	18
Food Boundaries	E, EFL, ER	0	21
Discrimination Boundaries	C, CI, CU, CE, CHC, CLC, DR, DC, CUL, D, DKB, DBK	24	115

After all the open coding was sorted into the matrix, the data were analyzed and coded for common patterns and themes in each case. The themes were then analyzed to identify any levels of similarity across the participants in each case. From the dominant themes initial findings appeared from the data. Documents were then analyzed to determine if the data supported or refuted the themes identified in the interview data.

Each case finding was analyzed across the cases to identify any level of convergence of themes and findings. Yin defines this process as an important tool in qualitative research, “An important caveat in conducting this kind of cross-case synthesis is that the examination of the word tables or cross-case patterns will rely strongly on argumentative interpretations, not numeric tallies.”⁵⁴ Cross case analysis results in the ability to develop strong and plausible arguments that are supported by the data.

Ethical Issues

Social science research is not without ethical dilemmas. Ethical dilemmas were minimized by first seeking approval for this study from the research ethics committee at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Then, permission was gathered from individuals involved in the research and community leaders from each group. A verbal consent was agreed upon before the beginning of each interview. The consent included an explanation of the purpose and nature of the research project. The people and sites chosen for study did not have a vested interest in the outcome of this study. Copies of initial findings were provided to people in the community for their review and approval as well. All in depth interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and the digital versions of these interviews are stored in a secure location.

Chapter Summary

This study utilized a qualitative, multi-case, mixed methods research design to evaluate the research questions of the study. The goal of the research project is to investigate the validity of traditional people group strategy when working with diaspora peoples. There are two main research questions are as follows:

1. Diaspora peoples cannot be placed into distinct groups without seriously distorting reality. What does this mean when trying to reach diaspora peoples in North America?

⁵⁴Yin, *Case Study Research* (2009), 160.

2. How do diaspora people draw boundaries between their group and the “others”? Do they draw boundaries?

The distinct boundaries between people groups are eroded by diaspora peoples moving to urban areas in North America. Because of the desire to reach people groups diaspora peoples are often placed into distinct categories of ethnic groups that do not exist in reality. What existed before modern nation states were “usually multiple, overlapping, flexible identities; only in exceptional cases did these approximate to the one-and-only-one tribe per person model.”⁵⁵ The theory that diaspora peoples have fluid identities as described by anti-anti-essentialists such as Douglass, Friedman, and others puts a major wrinkle in the idea that diaspora peoples can be fit into distinct categories.

Collected data were triangulated in this study by combining three elements. Corroborating evidence was collected through the literature review, semi-structured interviews, and allowing the participants the opportunity to make any corrections, update their responses, and comment at that point in time. This process ensured the validity of findings was ensured because, according to Creswell, “Multiple forms of evidence rather than a single incident or data point in the study.”⁵⁶ Findings were entered in Atlas.ti, a qualitative research software program, to code and sort the data into recurring themes. The themes and conclusions will be discussed in the concluding chapter of the dissertation.

⁵⁵David N. Gellner, "Ethnicity and Nationalism in the World's Only Hindu State," in *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom: The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Nepal*, ed. David N. Gellner, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, and John Whelpton (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1997), 12.

⁵⁶Creswell and Miller, "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry," 127.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

Introduction

Literature review tells the historical development of the components of the dissertation and grounds the dissertation in the history of the relevant literature. It also reveals gaps, holes, and conflicting theories that have not been resolved. Randolph writes that the literature review “is a means of demonstrating the author’s knowledge about a particular field of study, including vocabulary, theories, key variables and phenomena, and its methods and history.”¹ The literature review will provide a framework for relating the findings of this dissertation within this field of study. It will summarize, synthesize, and analyze relevant literature from the fields of missiology and cultural anthropology, especially as it concerns diaspora and cultural identity. The literature reviewed comes from secular and evangelical sources making this an interdisciplinary dissertation. The findings will demonstrate the dissertation’s significance.

Research Methods

The research method for the first section focusing on ethnic identity draws mainly from evangelical missiologists since the end of World War II. The theories and strategies developed since World War II were built primarily on the work of Donald McGavran and other proponents of the Church Growth Movement (CGM). According to McGavran, the CGM was concerned with “the discipling of *panta ta ethne*, to the end that rivers of the water of eternal and abundant life flow fast and free, to every tongue and

¹Justus J. Randolph, "A Guide to Writing the Dissertation Literature Review," *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation* 14, no. 13 (2009): 2, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://pareonline.net/pdf/v14n13.pdf>.

tribe and people in all the earth.”² CGM practitioners were not just concerned with reaching nation states as conceived today, but reaching hidden, or unreached peoples. McGavran says that modern nation states are made up of mosaics of peoples, “very large numbers of homogeneous units – ethnically, geographically, culturally, and economically separate segments of mankind.”³ Leaders of the CGM were mainly concerned with reaching unreached people groups. The desire to reach unreached people groups led to the many books and journal articles being published on this topic. The research of individuals in this field was usually from field research, ethnographies, biblical studies and case studies.

The body of research specifically focused on ethnic identity among diaspora peoples is much more limited among evangelical missiologists. Missiologists only began writing on this topic in the late 1990s. Therefore the writings of secular anthropology are more prolific than evangelical missiology. The discussion about primordialism/essentialism, constructivism/instrumentalism, and the anti-anti-essentialists has been particularly helpful in providing insight into understanding ethnic identity among diaspora peoples.

Coverage

A purposeful sample of published literature is used in this literature review. Thousands of books and articles have been published by secular anthropologists and sociologists about ethnic identity. In the last twenty years many relevant articles and books critique primordialism/essentialism in sociocultural studies. Virtually no scholars today hold to the primordialist/essentialist view of ethnic identity. Within much scholarship today primordialism/essentialism has been rejected out of hand because

²Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), viii.

³Donald A. McGavran and C. Peter Wagner, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 51.

scholars have recognized that diaspora peoples have multiple identities. The identities of diaspora peoples are largely contextually determined and modified. However, many anthropologists believe they have thrown the baby out with the bathwater when it comes to identity—i.e., in acknowledging the contextual nature of identity. Especially the issue of hybridity. Some anthropologists have been too quick to assert that there is no rootedness to identity. All people are hybrids. The problem with this position is that most people do not live their lives like this—as if they have no rootedness. Most people live in a world where they feel their identities are real and run deep.⁴

Secular scholars writing on ethnic identity are not concerned with the missiological issue of people group strategy. Enoch Wan, Steve Ybarrola, Michael Rynkiewich, and Paul Hiebert have all critiqued the issue of people group strategy among diaspora peoples. The issue of ethnic identity among diaspora peoples was brought to the author's attention through the works of these four evangelical missiologists. All four completed their Ph.D. research at secular universities and have taught at evangelical seminaries training missionaries for cross cultural ministry. Paul Hiebert did not publish much about transnationals/diasporas until his posthumous publication *The Gospel in Human Contexts*. But, Wan, Rynkiewich and Ybarrola have published several books and articles that deal with the issue of ethnic identity among diaspora groups.⁵

⁴These researchers have written critiques of the extreme constructivist view of ethnic identity from the past two decades: William A. Douglass, "In Search of Juan De Onate: Confessions of a Cryptoessentialist," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 56, no. 2 (2000): 137-62. Jonathan Friedman et al., "Putting Cultural Anthropology Together Again," *Current Anthropology* 36, no. 4 (1995): 711-18. There are thirteen other contributing authors. Jonathan Friedman, "The Politics of De-Authentication: Escaping from Identity, a Response to 'Beyond Authenticity' by Mark Rogers," *Global Studies in Culture and Power* 3, no. 1 (1996): 127-36. Kajsa Ekholm Friedman and Jonathan Friedman, *Modernities, Class, and the Contradictions of Globalization: The Anthropology of Global Systems* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008). Steven Grosby, "The Verdict of History: The Inexpungeable Tie of Primordality—a Response to Eller and Coughlan," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17, no. 1 (1994): 164-71. Andreas Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁵Enoch Wan, ed., *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice* (Portland, OR: Institute of Diaspora Studies, Western Seminary, 2011). Michael Rynkiewich, "Mission in 'the Present Time': What About the People in Diaspora?" *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 30, no. 3 (2013): 103-114. and Steven Ybarrola, "Anthropology, Diasporas, and Mission," *Mission Studies* 29, no. 1 (2012): 79-94. Steven Ybarrola, "Diasporas and Multiculturalism: Social Ideologies, Liminality, and Cultural Identity," in *The Human Tidal Wave: Global Migration, Megacities, Multiculturalism, Pluralism, Diaspora Missiology*, ed. Sadiri Joy Tira (Manila: LifeChange Publishing, 2013): 135-49.

Organization

The organization of this literature review is first conceptual and historical. The first section focuses on the findings within the literature published by evangelical missiologists. The data is organized historically. When and why did evangelical missiologists begin writing on this topic? What do they have to say and why is it insufficient? The next section is a review of the literature published by secular anthropologists. The review is focused on their writing on ethnic identity. The focus on ethnic identity provides the historical context of how this idea developed, where it began and how it is understood today. Key concepts from all the literature discussed include: people groups, diaspora missiology, transnationalism, diaspora, refugees, primordialism/essentialism, constructivism/instrumentalism, and anti-anti-essentialism.

After introducing historical background and key concepts in the literature an analysis of each concept is provided. This analysis will show any inconsistencies in theory and provide the basis for the research presented in the rest of the dissertation.

Missiology and Ethnicity

By the time of the 1974 International Conference on World Evangelization there was a church planted in every country of the world. Christianity was a worldwide movement, no longer confined to Europe and the Americas. If the Great Commission was a geographic challenge, then the church had completed her mission. Most mainline churches at this time conceived of the mission as being complete and called for a moratorium on missions at their meeting in Mexico in 1963. McGavran writes, that the World Council of Churches assumed the church “would grow naturally as devoted Christians of each nation evangelized their neighbors. They would be so much more effective than foreign missionaries.”⁶ The idea that foreign missionaries were no longer needed would be discredited by Ralph Winter.

⁶McGavran and Wagner, *Understanding Church Growth*, 45.

In 1974, Ralph Winter delivered an address entitled, “The Priority of Cross-Cultural Evangelism” to the International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland.⁷ Since Winter’s address, missiologists cannot write about current mission strategy without referencing this work. His speech marked a fundamental shift in how evangelicals think about the task of taking the gospel to the nations. After the first Lausanne Conference, mission strategists stopped thinking about nations as geographic areas that need to be reached. Missiologists began to think about nations as “peoples.” The shift from a geographic strategy to people group strategy paved the way for new ways of thinking about deploying missionaries for planting new churches. The terms people group, near neighbor, cross cultural evangelism, unreached peoples, and least reached peoples became standard terms in any book concerning mission strategy.⁸

Winter did not develop his ideas in a vacuum. Cam Townsend went to Guatemala in 1917 to begin selling Spanish language Bibles for the Los Angeles Bible House. Soon after he began selling his Bibles, he realized the Indian population could not read or speak Spanish. Townsend’s biography reveals that an Indian told him all the evangelical missionaries go to Spanish speaking people, no one evangelizes the Indian in his own tongue.⁹ Townsend was convinced that Spanish-language evangelism could never reach Guatemala’s Indian tribes. He decided to begin work translating the New Testament into the languages of the local people. Townsend’s New Testament translations began what would be later known as Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). Both organizations focus on translating the Bible into indigenous languages all over the world.

⁷The address has been reprinted in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*: Ralph D. Winter, "The New Macedonia: A Revolutionary New Era in Mission Begins," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009): 347-360.

⁸Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2010), 355.

⁹James Hefley and Marti Hefley, *Uncle Cam* (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1981), 39.

While Townsend was beginning his work in Bible translation, Donald McGavran was thinking about the social barriers to the spread of the gospel in India. In 1955, McGavran published his ground-breaking book *Bridges of God*. In this book he explained how the gospel moves through what he termed, homogeneous units of people. These homogeneous units of people would later become known as people groups. After writing *Bridges of God* he was involved in founding a school of missions at Fuller Seminary. From Fuller he and others led the Church Growth Movement. McGavran, Alan Tippett, and systems analyst Ed Dayton are credited by Hesselgrave as taking the seminal ideas from the homogeneous unit principle and arriving at the conclusion that “people groups,” rather than nations are to be reached with the gospel.¹⁰

The concept of people groups has been redefined and debated for several decades in missions circles. The concept of people groups is important for research in refugee/diaspora studies because evangelicals devise cross cultural church planting strategies based on reaching people groups. In 1979 Peter Wagner and Edward Dayton edited a book entitled *Unreached Peoples '79*. This book was part of the work of the Lausanne Strategy Working Group and it was to be the first of a series of books looking at people group strategy. Wagner and Dayton defined a people group as, “a significantly large sociological grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, etc. or combinations of these.”¹¹ Wagner and Dayton explicitly stated, “We need to put some boundaries around them.”¹²

¹⁰David J. Hesselgrave, *Today's Choices for Tomorrow's Mission: An Evangelical Perspective on Trends and Issues in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1988), 51.

¹¹C. Peter Wagner and Edward R. Dayton, *Unreached Peoples '79* (Elgin, IL: David C Cook, 1978), 23.

¹²*Ibid.*, 26.

In 1982 the Lausanne Committee in Chicago organized a gathering of mission leaders to standardize terminology. Johnstone records The Lausanne Committee's definition of people groups,

A people group is a significantly large sociological grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, etc. or combinations of these. From the viewpoint of evangelization it is the largest possible group within which the gospel can spread as a viable, indigenous church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.¹³

The Lausanne Committee's definition tightens the earlier definition by limiting the list to barriers of acceptance and understanding of the gospel message. Johnstone provides several variations from this definition of people in the same article.¹⁴ He wants to limit the definition of people groups to ethnolinguistic peoples and exclude sociopeoples so they can be counted more easily. Sociopeoples such as taxi drivers, alcoholics, prisoners, etc. are difficult to quantify and place on lists. Sociopeoples were included in earlier definitions, but were usually excluded from the lists. For example, in *Unreached Peoples '79*, Wagner and Dayton included "white, swinging singles in North American apartments" in their example of a people group, but "white, swinging singles in North American apartments" is not in the people group listing in the back of the book.¹⁵ Boundaries are placed around these groups so they can be placed in a list for use by mission strategists and prayer groups. Socio-peoples are not included because they are difficult to quantify. Missiologists are concerned with drawing tight boundaries for lists used in devising mission strategy.

¹³Patrick Johnstone, "People Groups: How Many Unreached?" *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 7, no. 2 (1990): 36-37.

¹⁴See, for example, Patrick Johnstone, "Affinity Blocks and People Clusters: An Approach toward Strategic Insight and Mission Partnership," *Mission Frontiers*, (March-April 2007): 8-15. In this article Johnstone attempts to categorize people groups into blocs and clusters. He also provides a brief history of people lists.

¹⁵Wagner and Dayton, *Unreached Peoples '79*, 23.

Today, the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (IMB) identifies a people group as “an ethnolinguistic group with a common self-identity that is shared by the various members. There are two parts to that word, ethno, and linguistic. Language is a primary and dominant identifying factor of a people group.”¹⁶ The IMB, and most other evangelical mission agencies, are focused on reaching the last unreached people groups. This is problematic because the very definition used by frontier mission agencies and promoters is a shifting target. Nobody has been able to agree on a specific definition and the numbers are always changing. If the people who fit into the mission strategists’ list are considered “reached” then missionaries are often relocated to engage a group that is listed as “unreached.” When the unclear definitions of reached and unreached are combined with an unclear definition of what it means to be a people group mission strategy becomes very unclear.

People group strategy has been critiqued in recent years.¹⁷ As early as 1984 Jim Reapsome pointed out that the concept of people group has no clear definition. He explained, that the goal of mission researchers “is simply to devise a research tool and get on with the job”¹⁸ in spite of the fact that their definitions have no corresponding categories in current anthropological research. On the other hand, Paul Hiebert saw a place for people group strategy in certain situations. Hiebert wrote that the people group concept fit best with small scale societies. But, the many heterogeneous groups that make up today’s urban society cannot be easily separated into bounded groups. When these

¹⁶Orville Boyd Jenkins, "What Is a People Group?" accessed March 27, 2014. <http://public.imb.org/globalresearch/Pages/PeopleGroup.aspx>.

¹⁷Multiple journal articles have discussed and defended in depth people group strategy in depth: Scott Holste and Jim Haney, "The Global Status of Evangelical Christianity: A Model for Assessing Priority People Groups," *Mission Frontiers* (January-February 2006), 8-13; Alan Johnson, "Analyzing the Frontier Mission Movement and Unreached People Group Thinking. Part I, The Frontier Mission Movement's Understanding of the Modern Mission Era," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 18, no. 2 (2001), 81-88; Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch, "Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 19, no. 4 (2002): 15-25.

¹⁸James W. Reapsome, "People Groups: Beyond the Push to Reach Them Lie Some Contrary Opinions," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (1984), 12.

heterogeneous groups separated into bounded groups the picture presented in badly distorted. Hiebert writes, “We cannot really speak of distinct people groups or hope to generate people movements in complex settings.”¹⁹

Tom Steffen, points out that “the first United States professors of missiology in the last half of this century were mostly trained in anthropology under the theory of structural functionalism.”²⁰ Training in structural functionalism is one reason missiologists have emphasized distinct groups. Hiebert says that structural functionalists believe, “each culture is made up of parts that function to maintain a harmonious, balanced whole.”²¹ Mission leaders and educators trained in structural functionalism see cultures as integrated wholes. People belong to distinct, bounded groups.

People group strategy is dependent on identifying with a larger group. Rynkiewich writes, “The question is never: What is a person’s identity? Rather: What is a person’s identity vis-à-vis a specific other? A person presents an identity, but others confer an identity.”²² Identity in relationship to the other will be discussed more in next section. A history of anthropology and mission since the end of World War II and the development of diaspora missiology as a field of study will be reviewed.

Diaspora and Cultural Identity

Anthropology and missions became wed, at least within missiology, in the 1950s. After World War II mission leaders such as Eugene Nida and Alan Tippett wrote and spoke about the many ways cultural anthropology could help missionaries better

¹⁹Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 92.

²⁰Tom Steffen, "Missiology's Journey for Acceptance in the Educational World," *Missiology* 31, no. 2 (2003): 142.

²¹Paul G. Hiebert, "Critical Issues in the Social Sciences and Their Implications for Mission Studies," *Missiology* 24, no. 1 (1996): 73.

²²Michael A. Rynkiewich, *Soul, Self, and Society: A Postmodern Anthropology for Mission in a Postcolonial World* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 211.

communicate the gospel across cultures.²³ Eugene Nida wrote in the much quoted introduction to his book *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Mission*,

Good missionaries have always been good anthropologists. Not only have they been aware of human needs, whether stemming from the local way of life or from man's universal need for salvation, but they have recognized that various ways of life of different peoples are the channels by which their needs take form and through which the solutions to such must pass.²⁴

A great number of missionaries went out from North America following the end of World War II. After Christian GIs returned home from battle many felt called to return and take the gospel to the places they had been. Another rousing call for missions resulted from the much publicized 1956 martyrdom of Jim Elliot and his friends in South America.

Wheaton College and The School of World Missions at Fuller Seminary offered courses in cultural anthropology for missionaries preparing for work overseas. Rynkiewicz writes, "The model of anthropology appropriated by early missionaries featured the concept of and informed missionaries about the organic unit of *society*, the functions of various institutions, the deeper meaning of different customs, the links between language and culture."²⁵ Missionaries were encouraged to settle down in a village, and learn the new language and culture of the people. The rural villages they settled in were made up of homogeneous ethnic groups. In the latter part of the twentieth century, the discipline of cultural anthropology moved on and the evangelical version of the discipline was partially left behind.²⁶ Besides the changes in the discipline, there were also changes in societies all over the world. People from the rural villages were leaving

²³Rynkiewicz, *Soul, Self, and Society*, 5.

²⁴Eugene Nida, *Customs and Cultures* (Pasadena: William Carey Library Publishers, 1954; repr., 1975), xi.

²⁵Rynkiewicz, *Soul, Self, and Society*, 7.

²⁶Rynkiewicz may be overly harsh in his judgment of missiology and its relationship to cultural anthropology. Paul Hiebert was a missiologist trained in cultural anthropology and was aware of the shift from modernism to postmodernism. Hiebert wrote about it in Paul G. Hiebert, *The Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999).

home in vast numbers due to push or pull factors. Missiologists were trained to work in homogeneous villages, not heterogeneous cities. The people missionaries wanted to reach were, and are, moving into mega cities looking for jobs. Often times they are being relocated due to war, famine, or ethnic cleansing programs.

Diaspora studies have become more prevalent among evangelical missiologists after the 2004 forum hosted by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization in Pattaya, Thailand. The conveners of the forum recognized that the world was quickly changing. New polarizations, the advent of globalization, and growing refugee populations have presented new challenges to world evangelization. The leadership of the Lausanne Committee wanted to take these issues into consideration and develop strategies for dealing with this changing world. An issues group was organized on diasporas and international students. The group produced a paper entitled *The New People Next Door*.²⁷ This article raised awareness of the issue, but it was limited in scope.

Two consultations were held in 2009. These were the Lausanne Diaspora Strategy Consultation and the Lausanne Diaspora Educators Consultation. In October 2010 over four thousand evangelical leaders met at Cape Town, South Africa for the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization. Diaspora was a topic addressed at the meeting through a group led by Sadiri Joy Tira, the Lausanne senior associate for diasporas. This group produced a position paper entitled, *Scattered to Gather: Embracing the Global Trends of Diaspora*. After these meetings and Cape Town 2010 Enoch Wan edited a volume entitled, *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice*. This book dealt with initial ideas about a multidisciplinary approach to developing a paradigm for reaching diaspora peoples. In 2012, J. D. Payne published a book entitled, *Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration and Mission* that was written to “educate the Western

²⁷Tom Houston et al., "The New People Next Door," in *A New Vision, a New Heart, a Renewed Call*, ed. David Claydon, Lausanne Occasional Papers (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2005).

church on the scope of global migrations that are taking place as the peoples of the world move to the West in search of a better way of life.”²⁸

The New People Next Door is “about the opportunities and challenges presented to Christians by the presence of people from different countries who are now living near them.”²⁹ After the first section about diaspora in the Bible, the authors discuss the changes that happen in diasporas. Houston recognizes that diaspora people “belong to more than one culture and have to learn to adapt. Some feel that their identity is questioned.”³⁰ Fluid identity is recognized as an issue, but the idea is not dealt with in relation to people group strategy. The authors assume people group strategy is still normative strategy when church planting among diaspora peoples. Diaspora peoples living among us are said to give us an opportunity in “reaching unreached people groups” with the gospel.³¹ Do diaspora peoples belong to a specific ethnic group after making the move from their homeland to a new land? Does this change their identity? These questions are not addressed in relation to people group strategy. *A New Vision, a New Heart, a Renewed Call* was one of the first books written about reaching diaspora groups, so it is an understandable omission.

The position paper produced in 2010, from the Lausanne meeting in Cape Town entitled *Scattered to Gather: Embracing the Global Trends of Diaspora* was written to “lay a theological foundation for those who seek to formulate a strategy for Christian missions to the diasporas and the employment of “diaspora” missions.”³² The authors never discuss changes in ethnic identity due to the move from the home country

²⁸J. D. Payne, *Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 18.

²⁹Houston et al., "The New People Next Door," 77.

³⁰Ibid., 84.

³¹Ibid., 88.

³²Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Scattered to Gather: Embracing the Global Trends of Diaspora* (Manila: LifeChange Publishing, 2010), 14.

to the new place of residence. Nor do they mention about how moves to a new place of residence impacts ethnic identity. *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice* was edited by Enoch Wan shortly after Cape Town 2010.

Several chapters in *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice* touch on ethnic identity among diaspora peoples. Enoch Wan mentions the issue of fluid identity among diaspora peoples. Diaspora peoples have both ascribed and chosen identities for individuals and groups. The people in the diaspora live in multiple locations and even have multiple ethnic identities since kinship ties have moved from a local, to global phenomenon. Identities are not tied to a place of origin, or place of destination.³³ In another chapter Wan includes a list comparing the old perspective of mission strategy and the new challenges and opportunities working with diaspora communities. One of the old perspectives listed is “the paradigm of traditional missiology, priority is given to the ‘unreached people groups’ in the most ‘unreached’ regions of the world over ‘reached’ people.”³⁴ The new perspective offered by Wan is “the priority of diaspora missions is every person outside the Kingdom everywhere; there is no difference between reaching out to Buddhists in New York or Thailand, Muslims in London or Iran, and communist Chinese in Africa or inside China.”³⁵ Other chapters in *Diaspora Missiology* mention preservation of ethnic identity or assimilation, but how this relates to people group strategy and fluid identity amongst diaspora groups is not mentioned.

J. D. Payne’s book *Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration and Mission*, as mentioned earlier, was written to inform the North American church about the migration of peoples to Western nations and how the church can reach migrants with the gospel. Payne’s book includes the traditional definitions of people groups and lists of

³³Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 18-19.

³⁴Ibid., 98.

³⁵Ibid., 100.

people groups living in Western countries in the appendices of the book. The lists are admittedly incomplete since “accurate information on the UPGs living in the United States and Canada does not exist. Not only do we not know who is living in our communities, we do not know their evangelical statuses or who may be working among them as church planters.”³⁶ The goal of Payne’s book and the other books and papers listed above are different than the purpose of this dissertation. Diaspora and ethnic identity is a topic discussed in books and articles not written specifically for diaspora missiology. The authors include Brian Howell, Jenell Williams Paris, and Michael Rynkiewich.

In 2011 Howell and Williams Paris published a book entitled *Introducing Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective*. In this book the authors discuss the differences between primordialism and instrumentalism, two important ideas in the discussion about ethnic identity. They write, “Primordialism is the view that ethnic identity, like race, is a naturally occurring and immutable feature of human life.”³⁷ The other side of the coin is instrumentalism. Instrumentalism “is the idea that ethnicity changes with people’s interests and context.”³⁸ Some ethnic categories are developed by groups due to the need for government representation (Hispanic/Latino) that are not based on a sense of shared history. Other ethnic categories are based on language, clothing, dance, song, and other markers. The issue of fluid ethnic identity among diaspora peoples is not mentioned in *Introducing Anthropology*; however it is mentioned in Howell’s article entitled *Multiculturalism, Immigration and the North American Church Rethinking Contextualization*.

³⁶Payne, *Strangers Next Door*, 61.

³⁷Brian Howell and Jenell Williams Paris, *Introducing Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 77.

³⁸Ibid., 78.

The notion that North American missionaries need to focus on problems of contextualization or culturally appropriate missiology in attempting to reach diaspora peoples is challenged by Howell in this article. He is not against the culture concept, but missionaries need to be careful when applying the culture concept in attempting to reach diaspora populations. Howell suggests, missionaries “would do better to foreground virtues of hospitality, justice, and compassion.”³⁹ This is because these groups cannot be separated into bounded sets without distorting reality. Howell continues,

The goal of missiology should always be to empower the local church to engage in mission, rather than train specialists or professionals for the task. Focusing on the cultural particularity of “people groups” or other bounded categories, developing “culturally appropriate” missional strategies for them, and seeking to create culturally particular congregations de facto excludes the North American church from having much of a role beyond the financial support of the specialists. Moreover, these strategies will become rapidly obsolete as populations respond to the wider context. Instead, missiological knowledge should support the virtues of the church in reaching out to meet the social, cultural, and physical needs of their neighbors.⁴⁰

Howell argues that the identity of diaspora groups living among us is something that is changing and contextual, not primordial. North American missionaries need to focus less on cultural contextualization and more on loving their neighbors. The issue of ethnic identity and people group strategies is not a central feature of this article, although it is mentioned. Michael Rynkiewicz discusses this idea more in his article entitled *Mission in “the Present Time”: What about People in the Diaspora?*

In Rynkiewicz’s article *Mission in “the Present Time”* he attempts to help mission strategists and missionaries better understand how the world is in the process of a cultural transformation brought about by the movement of peoples. Rynkiewicz wants to answer the question, “How are we to understand rapidly changing *persons, peoples, politics, and economics* in light of our participation in God’s mission in the world?”⁴¹

³⁹Brian M. Howell, "Multiculturalism, Immigration and the North American Church: Rethinking Contextualization," *Missiology* 39, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 80.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 83-84.

⁴¹Rynkiewicz, "Mission in the Present Time," 103.

Mission in "the Present Time" tackles some of the same issues dealt with in Rynkiewicz's 2011 book *Soul, Self and Society*. But, this article is focused on one issue, unlike his textbook that deals with many issues in modern missiology. *Mission in "the Present Time"* includes a case study about an Indian couple who live and work in the Middle East. The Indian couple wants to maintain their Indian identity and raise their children as Indians, while surrounded by a diverse expat community. Rynkiewicz uses their story as an example of the lives lived by many peoples in diaspora communities today. What does it mean to "return home" when your children grew up in the diaspora and now live in various countries outside your homeland? How should these people be classified? Are they Indians, even though they have lived most of their lives outside of India? Rynkiewicz says, "The quest for classification and enumeration has been part of the drive to control populations, and to incorporate them into the colonial project."⁴² The desire to categorize people in bounded sets is part of the Enlightenment project. The British colonial administration attempted to organize the peoples of India in an attempt to make sense out of the chaos of languages and peoples. Rynkiewicz goes on to say that

people tend to be organized into "networks" held together by the flow of information, money, and goods through various technologies, especially cell phones and various venues on the Internet. The argument here is that the "groups" we have grown up with are not the only way to organize the world; indeed, great numbers of people organize their lives in other ways.⁴³

Ethnic identity is not the only way to understand who people are. Missionaries need to take time to understand and serve the people they want to reach, not try to place them into categories of people groups to be checked off. These ideas and others will be discussed in the concluding chapter of this dissertation. Diaspora and ethnic identity is discussed more in secular literature than evangelical Christian literature.

⁴²Rynkiewicz, "Mission in the Present Time," 106.

⁴³Ibid., 110.

Cultural Identity in Secular Literature

In the 1980s, globalization became a term commonly used to describe “the worldwide changes that are increasingly integrating and remolding the lives of the people of the world.”⁴⁴ These worldwide changes include the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the music we listen to, and movies we watch. One of the most popular songs of 2012 was the K-Pop song, Gangnam Style. The song was recorded in the Korean language, but was very popular all over the world.

The history of ethnic identity research will be discussed in the first part of this section. Then the differences between transnationals, refugees, and diaspora peoples in secular literature. This is important because these different groups are mentioned in the discussions amongst anthropologists. When secular anthropologists discuss ethnicity they are usually in one of three camps: primordialist/essentialist, constructivist/instrumentalist, or anti-anti-essentialists.

History of ethnic identity research. One of the earliest definitions of ethnicity in anthropological and sociological literature is in Max Weber’s posthumously published work *Economy and Society*. It was published in German in 1922 and the English translation was published in 1969. Weber devoted a chapter to the topic in this book and he says, “We shall call ‘ethnic groups’ those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration . . . It does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists.”⁴⁵ Ethnic groups are a social construct, and he gives three reasons. First, they are based on a subjective belief in shared *Gemeinschaft* (community). Second, this belief in shared *Gemeinschaft* did not create the

⁴⁴James Peoples and Garrick Bailey, *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, 9th ed. (Belmont, CA: Cengage Learning, 2012), 364.

⁴⁵Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), 1:389.

group; the group created the belief. Third, group formation resulted from the drive to monopolize power and status. Weber's writings about ethnic identity will prove to be helpful in this dissertation, even though his are some of the earliest ideas about ethnicity and ethnic identity.

Identity became an important part of anthropological research with the publication of Fredrik Barth's edited volume *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* in 1969. Barth was an early proponent of what would later be labeled 'constructivism' and when the book was published most anthropologists implicitly believed that ethnicity could usefully be described as an array of societies with their own, shared cultures. Barth writes, "They further assumed that each such entity should be analyzed in a structural-functional paradigm to display its systematic order and functional integration."⁴⁶ Instead of this structural-functional paradigm that saw ethnic groups as bounded entities with primordial bonds, Barth focused on ethnic boundaries. He did not consider ethnic identity to be universal. Ethnic identity was regarded as a product of interaction with other ethnic groups, rather than a quality inherent in them. Ethnic identity is constantly negotiated and renegotiated by both external attribution and internal self-identification. According to Barth, ethnic identities are interconnected "ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction and acceptance, but are quite to the contrary often the very foundations on which embracing social systems are built."⁴⁷ Ethnic identity is situational in character and this situational view of ethnic identity focused on inter-group boundary mechanisms has had a profound impact on secular anthropology and sociology. Barth's writings will also be helpful for this dissertation. His ideas about boundaries and Weber's writings about ethnicity as social constructs are not without their challengers.

⁴⁶Fredrik Barth, preface to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1998), 5.

⁴⁷Fredrik Barth, introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1998), 10.

Ronald Cohen disputes Barth's assertion by explaining that ethnicity is not so concrete or black-and-white, but rather a fluid concept by which members distinguish "in-groups" from "out-groups." Ethnicity (the labeling aspect) can be in a state of constant change due to various situational applications. People can label themselves and others according to occupation, education, ethnicity, clan, or any other culturally appropriate label.⁴⁸ Cohen and other anthropologists heavily influenced by postmodernism argue that terms like 'group,' 'category,' and 'boundary' still suggest a fixed identity for ethnic groups, and Barth's concern with boundary maintenance tends to affirm it still more.⁴⁹ Cohen is too quick to dismiss the ideas of Barth. In acknowledging the contextual nature of identity he has been too quick to assert that there is no rootedness to identity. In reality people do not live their lives like this; most people feel their ethnic identities are real and important. This will be further discussed in the following sections.

Transnationals, refugees and diaspora peoples. *Transnationalism* as a term can be traced by to the early twentieth century. One of the first times this word was used was by Randolph Bourne. Around this time there were many immigrant groups from Eastern and Southern Europe immigrating to the United States and people were concerned with their integration into the American "melting pot." Bourne said immigrants come here with their own unique cultural background and it is unrealistic to expect to wipe it out and replace it with an Anglo-Saxon American one.⁵⁰ The US needs to recognize that people cannot just become Anglo-Saxon Americans by living near Anglo-Saxon Americans. America is a nation of trans-nationals rather than nationals in the European sense. It is a nation where cultures weave together instead of forming a

⁴⁸Ronald Cohen, "Ethnicity: Problem and Focus in Anthropology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7 (1978): 388.

⁴⁹Ibid., 386.

⁵⁰Randolph S. Bourne, "Trans-National America," *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1916, 86-97.

homogenous culture. Bourne suggested that Americans accept that these new immigrants will often have dual citizenship and maintain ties with their home country.

Transnationalism became a hot topic again in the 1970s when Europe and North America began to see an increase in globalization and migration. The transnational migrants of the 1970s and later are different than earlier migrant groups. The new transnationals can easily move from their home country to the country they desire to work in because of the reduced cost of air travel. Plus they can easily maintain contact with people back home with the development of cell phones and the internet. The internet and other technologies allow transnationals to maintain contact with their home in ways previous generations could only imagine. The pressure to integrate is not as high as it was in the past because of this continued contact with friends and family.

The new mobility of transnationals has brought about change in what Bourne referred to as transnational communities.⁵¹ The term first used by Bourne is a new concept in how anthropologists think of ethnic groups. Traditionally ethnic groups are broken up by nationalities and subnationalities. Nationalities are ethnic groups with a strong sense of homeland and control a geographic area. Subnationalities are groups that depend on nationalities and lack a distinct homeland.⁵² Basch, Schiller, and Blanc define transnationalism as “the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multistranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement.”⁵³

Transnationals are people that move for economic, sociocultural, or political reasons but maintain long term contacts with family and friends in the homeland. They regularly engage in cross border activities. Transnational communities are made up of corporate

⁵¹Steven Vertovec, "Transnationalism and Identity," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 27, no. 4 (2001): 573-82.

⁵²Peoples and Bailey, *Humanity*, 393.

⁵³Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 7.

workers who are assigned to work in a country other than their home country and refugees. Werbner writes, “Scholars have distinguished between transnationalism from above – of multinational corporations or new transnational social movements, such as the feminist or human rights networks and alliances, both of which are often funded and managed by partners from the North; and transnationalism from below – of refugees or relatively underprivileged individuals from the Global South moving in search of work.”⁵⁴ Refugees, or transnationals from below, will be discussed next.

Refugee studies have traditionally been tied to policy developments.⁵⁵ The issue of how to define and help refugee populations came to the forefront of anthropological research after the end of the Vietnam War. This mass exodus out of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia led to a special issue of *International Migration Review* devoted to the analysis of the refugee experience. This special issue of *International Migration Review* did not offer much in the way of theoretical reflection on the issue of refugees and ethnic identity, but it is often referred to in articles and books about refugees.

A definition of refugees that is most commonly accepted is the one used by UNCHR. Refugees are not so different from transnationals, except their public status is usually below of transnationals. Also, refugees are usually given a special status by the United Nations for repatriation or resettlement:

To be eligible for refugee or asylum status, an applicant must meet the definition of a refugee set forth in 101(a)(42) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA): a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Pnina Werbner, "Transnationalism," in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, ed. Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer (London: Routledge, 2012), 699.

⁵⁵Richard Black, "Fifty Years of Refugee Studies: From Theory to Policy," *International Migration Review* 35, no. 1 (2001): 58.

⁵⁶Daniel C. Martin and James E. Yankay, *Refugees and Asylees: 2012* (Washington, DC: Office of Immigration Statistics, 2013), 1.

Refugees are peoples displaced from their homes due to a wide array of human rights violations. They are without homes, nation states, or work. The lack of nation state leaves them open to harassment and abuse. Whereas transnational peoples have a home to return to, refugees often do not have the option of returning home. Also, when refugees flee their ancient homelands they are separated from primordial attachments. Geertz defines primordial attachments as the givens of social existence: assumed blood ties, race, language, region, religion, and custom.⁵⁷ Muecke points out, that four of the grounds for being given refugee status in the UN's definition are the givens of Geertz's definition.⁵⁸

Today refugee studies that interact with the issue of ethnic identity are usually focused on those people whose homes and communities have been destroyed and there is no hope of repatriation. Such is the case with refugees from Burma, Bhutan, and many other groups. These refugees, like many others, longed to return home but later found this to be impossible. Refugees are placed into camps in another, usually neighboring country, to await an answer to their dilemma. Michael Hutt writes, of his arrival in the refugee camps set up in Nepal for the refugees from Bhutan, "I met people who had had years in which to develop a historical consciousness that was conditioned both by their sense of injustice and by their need to underscore their right to return."⁵⁹ While living in the camp surrounded by many of other Nepali-speaking Bhutanese people who had experienced similar injustices they had time to establish their own history and social categories. The process of determining their own ethnic identity was forced on the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese people by geographic relocation. Issues surrounding the development of ethnic

⁵⁷Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 261-63.

⁵⁸Marjorie A. Muecke, "Trust, Abuse of Trust, and Mistrust among Cambodian Refugee Women: A Cultural Interpretation," in *Mistrusting Refugees*, ed. E. Valentine Daniel and John Chr. Knudsen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 38.

⁵⁹Michael Hutt, *Unbecoming Citizens: Culture, Nationhood, and the Flight of Refugees from Bhutan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 10.

identity by refugee communities will be discussed in a later section about how anthropologists think about ethnic identity.

Diaspora was originally used in reference to the Jewish dispersion from Israel or the Greek dispersion during the Hellenistic period. Today it is used broadly in reference to people who no longer live in their homeland. Amit writes, “One of the most frequently cited issues in delimiting this wide-ranging version of diaspora is its overlap with transnationalism.”⁶⁰ The title of one of the leading journals in the field *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* suggests that this overlap is intentional. Braziel and Mannur differentiate diaspora from transnationalism in that diaspora is a subset of transnational movements between nations. Diaspora is used in reference to the movement of people. Transnationalism can refer to the movement of people, information, ideas, goods, and capital across national borders.⁶¹ The idea that diaspora refers to people dispersed across the world is not controversial. The more contested issue is the idea of a homeland. The Jewish people clearly longed for their homeland during the diaspora and some authors want to use the diaspora of the Jews as an ‘ideal type’.⁶² James Clifford, on the other hand, argues that too strong an emphasis on homeland would exclude South Asian and African diasporas. These diasporas are less concerned about their roots and homeland than about routes. A recreated group identity in multiple locations developed through transnational cultural ties. The identity of South Asian and African diasporas is not coupled to people and land like the Jewish people, but to a new identity formed in a new land.⁶³

⁶⁰Vered Amit, "Diaspora," in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, ed. Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer (London: Routledge, 2012), 196.

⁶¹Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, "Nation, Migration, Globalization: Points of Contention in Diaspora Studies," in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, ed. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 8.

⁶²William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991): 84.

⁶³James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1994): 308.

Stuart Hall illustrates the idea of diaspora people without a homeland to look back to with the black diaspora of the Caribbean. The black Caribbean peoples were relocated to the Caribbean hundreds of years ago as slaves, and with the passage of time “the original Africa is no longer there. It too has been transformed.”⁶⁴ There is no sacred homeland to form ethnic unity. The African diaspora of the Caribbean have been transformed by the people and land they have lived in for hundreds of years. Their language has changed, the cultural matter that makes up their ethnic identity has changed as well. Hall writes that their experience in diaspora is not defined by purity, but “by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of “identity” which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity.”⁶⁵

Diaspora peoples are made distinct by their cultural, linguistic, ethnic hybridity, and heterogeneity.⁶⁶ Diaspora peoples often have hybrid, liminal identities that are often negotiated depending on where they are living and which part of society with which they are interacting. Many diaspora peoples no longer have a homeland to look back to in forming their ethnic identity. If diaspora peoples do not share an orientation toward a common homeland, defined first and foremost by heterogeneity, and hybridity, what holds them together besides a category of difference? The anti-essentialists, or those

⁶⁴Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, ed. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 241.

⁶⁵Ibid., 244.

⁶⁶Fluid identity for diaspora peoples is discussed in the following articles and books: Miriam Adeney, "Colorful Initiatives: North American Diasporas in Mission," *Missiology* 39, no. 1 (2011): 5-23; Cristina Bradatan, A. Popan, and R. Melton, "Trans-Nationality as a Fluid Social Identity," *Social Identities* 16, no. 2 (2010): 169-78; Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2003); Stephen Cornell, "The Variable Ties That Bind: Content and Circumstances in Ethnic Processes," *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 19, no. 2 (1996): 265-89; David N. Gellner, "How Should One Study Ethnicity and Nationalism?," *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* 28, no. 1 (2001): 1-10; David N. Gellner, "Fluidity, Hybridity, Performativity: How Relevant Are Social-Scientific Buzzwords for Nepal's Constitution-Building?," in *Ethnicity and Federalization in Nepal*, ed. C. Mishra and O. Gurung (Kathmandu: Central Department of Sociology/Anthropology Tribhuvan University, 2012); Hutt, *Unbecoming Citizens*; Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers*; Sidney W. Mintz, "The Localization of Anthropological Practice: From Area Studies to Transnationalism," *Critique of Anthropology* 18, no. 2 (1998): 117-33; Nina Glick Schiller, Ayse Caglar, and Thaddeus C. Guldbrandsen, "Beyond the Ethnic Lens: Locality, Globality, and Born-Again Incorporation," *American Ethnologist* 33, no. 4 (2006): 612-33; Vertovec, "Transnationalism and Identity."

advocating instrumentalism/constructivism, have driven the discussion about fluidity and hybridity. Instrumentalist arguments will be compared with those of the essentialists and anti-anti-essentialists in the following section.

Essentialism, instrumentalism and anti-anti-essentialism. When dealing with ethnic identity there are three main views in the social sciences: essentialism, instrumentalism (anti-essentialism), and anti-anti-essentialism. These theories reflect changes in cultural anthropology over the last thirty years. Cultural anthropology has shifted from cultural evolution theories, structural-functionalist theories, to postmodern theories. Primordialism is often used by authors as a synonym of essentialism. Authors use constructivism as a synonym of instrumentalism. The terms essentialism and instrumentalism will be used in this dissertation.

Table 2. Three basic approaches to understanding ethnic identity

Perspective	Description
Essentialist Theories	Ethnicity is something one acquires at birth.
Instrumentalist Theories	Ethnic identity is not something people possess at birth. Rather, all people are mixed and live in a hybrid world where the focus is on liminality.
Anti-Anti-Essentialist Theories	Instrumentalists have vastly oversimplified ethnic identity by declaring everyone hybrids. Nobody lives that way in reality. Cultures do mix together producing mixtures, but they maintain properties of older cultures.

Herzfeld writes, “Essentialism commonly appears as both a violation of anthropological relativism and one of the besetting conceptual sins of anthropology.

Exemplified by such totalizing ideologies as nationalism and biological determinism, it is also frequently conflated with reification, objectivism, and literalism.”⁶⁷ What can be categorized as essentialist? There are social scientists that hold to this view based on kinship and biology. Pierre van den Berge wrote on the contribution of sociobiology to a better understanding of ethnic identity in 1981. He writes, “My central thesis is that both ethnicity and “race” (in the social sense) are, in fact, extension of the idiom of kinship, and that, therefore, ethnic and race sentiments are to be understood as an extended and attenuated form of kin selection.”⁶⁸ The central concept is based on inclusive fitness that describes the natural human propensity to, “Prefer kin over non-kin, and close kin over distant kin.”⁶⁹ Pierre van den Berge says that people maximize their own self-interests and group interests through nepotism and ethnocentrism. Ethnicity is defined as natural selection and kinship connections that are primordial impulses that “continue to be present even in the most industrialized mass societies of today.”⁷⁰ According to biological essentialists, ethnic groups are nothing more than breeding populations, in-breeding super families that maintain clear territorial and social boundaries with other ethnic groups.

Edward Shils and Clifford Geertz offer the more widely known and criticized reference to primordialism. Edward Shils is probably the first to use the term in relation to family connections. In Shils’ view, relational attachments to kinsmen “is not merely to the other family member as a person, but as a possessor of certain especially significant relational qualities, which could only be described as primordial.”⁷¹ The relation is not

⁶⁷Michael Herzfeld, "Essentialism," in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, ed. Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer (London: Routledge, 2010), 234.

⁶⁸Pierre L. Van den Berghe, *The Ethnic Phenomenon* (New York: Elsevier, 1981), 403.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 402.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 35.

⁷¹Edward Shils, "Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties: Some Particular Observations on the Relationships of Sociological Research and Theory," *The British Journal of Sociology* 8, no. 2 (1957): 142.

made through interaction; rather, it is made from, “a certain ineffable significance . . . attributed to the tie of blood.”⁷² In Shils’ journal article he describes and analyses the attachments that characterize families as the precondition of the formation of community. Shils said, that his conceptualization of primordialism was developed while studying several books on the sociology of religion:

at about that time, I was studying in connection with my work on primary groups Professor A.D. Nock’s *Conversion* and Professor Martin P. Nilsson’s various books on Greek religion, especially his *Greek Popular Religion*. In these books, the ‘coerciveness’ of the primordial properties of object, the ties of blood and common territory was very strikingly portrayed.⁷³

Shils continues to write on the spiritual and mystical relationship of primordial ties in the Roman Republic. Both he and Geertz suggest that primordial ties hold sacred, given attributes that should be recognized in anthropological analysis.

In Clifford Geertz’s book *The Interpretation of Cultures* he often uses the word primordialism in his study of nationalism. The key to Geertz’s primordialism is the claim to primordial ties based on blood (whether real, attributed, or perceived). Geertz writes,

By a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the ‘givens’ – or more precisely, as a culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed ‘givens’ of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language . . . and following particular practices. These congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering coerciveness in and of themselves. One is bound to one’s kinsman, one’s neighbor, one’s fellow believer, ipso facto; as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself.⁷⁴

Primordial ties can be emphasized for political purposes in modern society to increase national unity, or to cause disturbances in national unity. Geertz understands the core of ethnicity (the ethnic sentiment and physical/cultural features) to be outright and given.

⁷²Shils, "Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties," 142.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 259.

Primordialism is significant for Geertz because he negates the possibility of identity construction through interaction with others. Geertz writes, “For virtually every person, in every society, at almost all times, some attachments seem to flow more from a sense of natural – some would say spiritual – affinity than from social interaction.”⁷⁵ Geertz’s denial of interactive ethnic identity construction is very different from what is proposed by the instrumentalists.

Instrumentalists see ethnic identity not as a given in society, but as situational and contextual. Culture and ethnicity are social constructs, although members of an ethnic group may feel like their ethnic identity is sacred and ineffable. Eller and Coughlan provide a good example of ideas promoted by instrumentalists:

Sociologists and anthropologists should not assume that ethnic attachments simply 'happen', any more than they would assume that culture simply happens, or psychologists would assume that personal attachments simply happen. Rather, they can look for the cultural-symbolic practices from 'apprenticeship through simple familiarization' to 'extreme and express transmission by precept and prescription' which produce and reproduce identity and attachment: the stories that are told, the objects that are displayed and revered, the history that is remembered, the activities that are engaged in (walking in parades, carrying banners or weapons, etc.), and any of an indefinite number of specific practices.⁷⁶

According to Eller and Coughlan’s critique, anthropologists who assume primordial bonds between kin groups abort the enterprise of conducting ethnographic research. Ethnographers should not assume ethnic identity is *a priori* or ineffable. Instead researchers should recognize that ethnicity is situational and contextual in character. Researchers can then study the development of ethnic identity in relation to others. Ethnic identity is distinct from material or instrumental issues, it is an emotion that is developed by groups instead of an inherent part of a group’s identity. Eller and Coughlan also write, that when minority groups face opposition they often turn to their “own ethnic history

⁷⁵Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 259-60.

⁷⁶Jack David Eller and Reed M. Coughlan, "The Poverty of Primordialism: The Demystification of Ethnic Attachments," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16, no. 2 (1993): 199.

and culture and intensify its attachment to these actual and or symbolic phenomena.”⁷⁷

The ethnic history minority groups turn to is one of their own construction, not something primordial. Other instrumentalists try to avoid the use of words such as ‘group,’ ‘category,’ and ‘boundary’ because they connote fixed identities, when in reality ethnic identities are mercurial.⁷⁸ Ethnic groups come into being and dissolve all the time; ethnicity is not an essential part of what it means to be human.

One early instrumentalist, Fredrik Barth, proposed that ethnic identity is a feature of social organization, not culture (which is tenuous). Barth focused on boundaries, the maintenance of boundaries and recruitment across boundaries instead of the things that make up a culture within the boundary. Ethnic groups are situational, not primordial. Ethnic groups are a creation of particular interactions, history, economic, and political circumstances. Barth writes, “Ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves, and thus have the characteristic of organizing interaction between people.”⁷⁹ Ethnic identity manifests itself in the exchange or negotiation of the group’s physio-cultural features at the boundaries that divide ethnic groups. Some ethnic groups are more resistant to change and exchange in boundary negotiation. The groups more resistant to change tend to preserve their ethnic identity. Others are more fluid and flexible in negotiating boundaries between groups. The flexibility of boundaries and identities is emphasized by many instrumentalists.

Diaspora studies are popular with instrumentalists because diaspora peoples are not easily categorized and tend to be characterized by hybridity. Stuart Hall is an influential writer among instrumentalists and in diaspora studies.⁸⁰ In *Cultural Identity*

⁷⁷Eller and Coughlan, “The Poverty of Primordialism,” 198.

⁷⁸Cohen, “Ethnicity,” 386.

⁷⁹Barth, introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 9.

⁸⁰James Clifford is also an influential instrumentalist writer in diaspora studies. His article “Diasporas” is often quoted in books and journal articles about diasporas. Both Clifford and Hall emphasize hybridity and fluidity in ethnic identity among diaspora peoples.

and *Diaspora* Hall wrote about the cultural identities of Caribbean peoples. Hall proposes two ways to think of cultural identity. The first, sees cultural identity as “one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self,’ hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves,’ which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common.”⁸¹ Post-colonial peoples of the Caribbean have used this conception of cultural identity. Caribbean peoples have been imaginatively rediscovering and producing ethnic identities divorced from their history of enslavement and colonization. The second “position recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of difference that constitute ‘what we really are’; or rather – since history has intervened – ‘what we have become.’”⁸² Cultural identity is a matter of becoming and being, something that transcends time. Hall writes, “In this perspective, cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. It is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made no fundamental mark.”⁸³ Cultural identity is not something black Caribbean peoples can excavate from history. The Africa Caribbean peoples were taken from is no longer there, but it can be rediscovered in “imagined communities” borrowing the term used by Benedict Anderson.⁸⁴ Diaspora peoples’ cultural identity is not defined by purity, but by hybridity. Identity is something blended and mixed by the community. The black people of the Caribbean do not have a pure cultural identity, but they have identities. No fixed binaries with hard lines making distinction between one group and another exist. Hall, like other instrumentalists, is heavily influenced by postmodernism.

⁸¹Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 234.

⁸²Ibid., 236.

⁸³Ibid., 237.

⁸⁴Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 1991).

The instrumentalists are deconstructing the scientific viewpoints of earlier anthropologists and sociologists.⁸⁵ Instrumentalists say that the categories and labels used by anthropologists are nothing more than historical constructs, inventions of western anthropologists that are not authentic. Authenticity, or the denial of authenticity, is a common theme in the writings of instrumentalists. Instrumentalists do not perceive new ethnic movements as having a basis in history, so they deny ethnic movements' authenticity. Instrumentalists also accuse essentialists of forcing western categories on diaspora groups. Instrumentalists are part of the larger postmodern project that is dedicated to accommodating disparate, often irreconcilable, viewpoints. Friedman questions all this deconstruction,

All deconstructionist/constructionist critique is predicated on the assumption of something that is ultimately more real, and which reifies absolutely the notion of authenticity. If the constructed cannot be opposed to anything else, if all identity is constructed, then it is meaningless, even absurd, to criticize people for engaging in self-essentialization. To claim anti or non-essentialist identity is, in such terms, equally essentialist, since it still defines the subject in opposition to others, and thus bounds the subject in the same way as all other forms of identity. All distinctions essentialize. Even prototypes with fuzzy boundaries essentialize since they are defined in more or less terms with respect to the pure type.⁸⁶

Friedman and other anti-anti-essentialists are not advocating a return to essentialism in their writings, but are advocating a more balanced approach to the issue of ethnic identity. Some essentialism exists in reality and cannot be done away with just because postmodern anthropologists think it sounds colonial or racist. Friedman writes, "Cultures are substances that flow into one another from disparate origins producing mixtures that

⁸⁵Douglass writes that the scientism is built on three dogmas: "(1) to all genuine questions there is one and only one true answer, that (2) the true answer is knowable, and that (3) true answers cannot clash with one another." William A. Douglass, "In Search of Juan De Onate: Confessions of a Cryptoessentialist," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 56, no. 2 (2000): 153-54.

⁸⁶Jonathan Friedman, "The Politics of De-Authentification: Escaping from Identity, a Response to 'Beyond Authenticity' by Mark Rogers," *Global Studies in Culture and Power* 3, no. 1 (1996): 130.

maintain the properties of those origins.”⁸⁷ Diasporas are not made up of bounded groups, but they are also not total hybrids without any ethnic identity.

William Douglass asserts that some essentialism required in anthropological studies. Douglass writes, “The overriding essentialist premise of the discipline is the anthropocentric one that humankind is unique within the planet’s animal kingdom – *Homo sapiens*’ cultural capacity, writ broadly, being the discriminator.”⁸⁸ Human beings are *essentially* unique in the animal kingdom. Humans are born into socio-cultural groups, babies are not just born into individual families. Ethnic identities are not ideas created in the minds of individuals, but they are created from cultural products such as language, food, and clothing. But, identities are not based on authentic Platonic forms, with some being more authentic and others being less authentic. Most diaspora peoples do have multiple identities are used in different times and in different circumstances, as is pointed out by the instrumentalists. Diaspora people also often look back to a time when things were different. Diaspora groups looking back and “excavating” their ethnic history for direction does not make them a less authentic than tribal peoples living in homogeneous villages.

Deconstructionists like Eller and Coughlan, never mention the “necessary existence of the *objects* of emotions and feelings that is to say with regard to ethnicity and nationality, *beliefs* about ancestry and territory.”⁸⁹ Grosby goes on to point out that “it is remarkable that nowhere in their article is there a single attempt to explain what the authors mean by their repeated use of the term ‘identity’ in ‘ethnic identity’. To do so would have brought the authors face to face with the existence of what they seek to deny

⁸⁷Jonathan Friedman, "The Hybridization of Roots and the Abhorrence of the Bush," in *Modernities, Class, and the Contradictions of Globalization*, ed. Kajsia Ekholm Friedman and Jonathan Friedman. (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press), 271.

⁸⁸Douglass, "In Search of Juan De Onate," 148.

⁸⁹Grosby, "The Verdict of History," 167.

but which is all around them, namely the significance which human beings attribute to relations of descent, the ties of primordiality.”⁹⁰ “Primordialism light” is necessary for ethnic studies. Early primordialists may have erred in placing clear boundaries around people and their identities. The instrumentalists were right on some points of their critique of primordialism, but their critique went too far and left researchers with nothing.

The writings of essentialists, instrumentalists, and anti-anti-essentialists will be helpful for this dissertation. Ethnic identity is not the only way to understand who people are. Missionaries need to take the time to discover who the people are in relation to others in their communities. Where do diaspora peoples draw boundaries? The people within a boundary might not have a single, agreed upon ethnic group name and these boundaries can change based on “others”. Missionaries working with diaspora communities need to stop trying to place diaspora peoples into bounded categories of people groups that can be checked off as reached so Jesus can return.

Conclusion

Hiebert and Reapsome’s critiques of people group strategy are valid when applied to diaspora peoples. People group strategy is dependent on individuals having a master identity and, “much research still assumes that individuals have a ‘master,’ overarching identity that is fundamentally rooted in a single place.”⁹¹ Identity is not rooted in a single place for diaspora peoples. Diaspora peoples often develop fluid, and sometimes conflicting, identities without a tie to place. Lewicki notes, “People in the Himalayan regions of Nepal and Bhutan navigate multiple identities every day because both countries are so linguistically and ethnically diverse.”⁹² Sometimes people in the

⁹⁰Grosby, "The Verdict of History," 168.

⁹¹Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers*, 202.

⁹²Zoe Lewicki, “One Community, Many Identities: Language, Ethnicity, and Nationality among Bhutanese Refugees in South Philadelphia” (Master’s thesis, Swathmore College, 2010), 9.

Himalayan regions of Nepal identified themselves based on their caste, sometimes based on language, and other times based on their geographic location. For example, when talking about the refugees from Bhutan, case workers and evangelical Christians in Louisville usually call them Nepalis, but the Nepali label fails to account for the diversity of this group. The same applies to the people sometimes referred to as Burmese. Neither group can be easily categorized as single people groups without seriously distorting reality. Diaspora groups have multiple, fluid identities that change based on the people with whom they are interacting. This concept has not been explored in depth in relation to the way evangelicals use the term “people group.”

CHAPTER 3

REFUGEES FROM BURMA IN LOUISVILLE

Introduction

This chapter begins with an overview of the research methodology used particular to this case study followed by an overview of the history of refugees from Burma in Louisville. The context of the case study will be provided by a history which describes where the refugees came from and how they arrived in Louisville. The case study will include biographical studies, from different ethnic perspectives. The biographical studies provide different perceptions on the diversity of this group. The chapter will identify the way the people in this this group categorize themselves and place boundaries between themselves and others.

Research Methodology

The research methodology used particular to this case study mainly included my use of ATLAS.ti to analyze the data collected into categories and to find themes from the data. The research began with interviews with people I already knew. After giving participants an opportunity to review what was going to be written, the interviews were transcribed in ATLAS.ti and sorted into document groups. The document groups included male, female, self-identified ethnic group, and age. Friese says, beginning one's research "project this way, literally speaking, we will frame it."¹ She uses the analogy of a puzzle. The corners and edges frame the puzzle; so people normally begin with the corners and

¹Susanne Friese, *Qualitative Data Analysis with Atlas.Ti*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014), 115.

edges. The primary documents were sorted to form the corners and edges of the puzzle in this case study.

The second step, according to Friese, was entering the research questions in a research question memo “initial ideas for coding can be derived from our research questions, from theories, from the literature or from the interview guideline.”² The initial codes were sorted into the family codes that will be used in both case studies. The initial codes had to do with ethnic identity (varied, not varied), marriage (restricted, not restricted), discrimination (Karen against Burmese or Burmese against Karen), and others. These codes and categories were changed and updated as more interviews were conducted.

Interviews were considered complete after a saturation point was reached. Existing codes were dragged and dropped from the code manager onto quotations from interviews, instead of creating new codes and categories to describe the data. When the researcher begins dragging and dropping existing codes instead of creating new codes, a saturation point has been reached. The final coding system included 37 codes separated into 4 coding families. The primary document manager included 22 documents and 19 individual interviews. More information about the findings will be included after a history of refugees from Burma in Louisville. The history of refugees from Burma in Louisville will be illustrated by Su Su’s experience of being forced to leave Burma. As Pat Caplan writes, “The purpose of publishing such personal narratives may be less the story of an individual or family, than the utilization of aspects of lives to illustrate wider social processes.”³ Su Su and other’s life stories will illustrate the history of these people and also illustrate some of the ideas proposed in this dissertation.

²Friese, *Qualitative Data Analysis with Atlas.Ti*, 116.

³Pat Caplan, *African Voices African Lives: Personal Narratives from a Swahili Village* (London: Routledge, 1997), 15.

History of Refugees from Burma in Louisville

Burma or Myanmar? The military junta changed the name of Burma to Myanmar in June 1989. The junta also changed the names of several cities including Rangoon (Yangon), Pegu (Bago), and Moulmein (Mawlamyine). Steinberg writes, “This change was insisted on by the military to lessen (in its view) ethnic problems.”⁴ Today, opposition groups insist on using the older names and many countries who support the opposition groups still insist on using Burma instead of Myanmar, including the United States. Most of the literature about Burma and refugees from Burma continue to use the term Burma in preference to Myanmar, so Burma was used instead of Myanmar in this dissertation.⁵

The history of refugees from Burma in Louisville is impossible to separate from the politics involved in refugees move from Burma to the United States. The refugees’ history can be broken up into three eras: the first era being the pre-colonial era, the second is colonial Burma, and the last is armed conflict. This overview of Burmese history will not be a comprehensive survey of the history of Burma, but will focus on ethnicity as it was conceived in these periods.⁶

Pre-Colonial Burma

Kings who ruled multi-ethnic kingdoms that had overlapping centers of power controlled pre-colonial Southeast Asia. The royal center resided in the main cities and went out to the distant villages scattered throughout the mountains. The tribal peoples in the mountains paid tribute to the royal center in the form of soldiers, services, and products in exchange for protection from neighboring kings and warlords. According to

⁴David I. Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), xxi.

⁵Ashely South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma: States of Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 2008), and Mikael Gravers, ed. *Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Burma* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2007).

⁶Several comprehensive surveys of Burmese history are available in English. These include South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, and Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Zed Books, 1999).

South, it was not unusual for “a Tai-speaking petty principality to be subject of a Mon (or Khmer) speaking prince, or for Karen animists – and especially Pwo Karen Buddhists – to trade with (and incorporate elements for religion from) prestigious lowland Mon or Tai city-states.”⁷ Thongchai Winichakul describes such overlapping boundaries as natural buffers between the kingdoms of Siam (Thailand) and Burma. The buffer zones were necessary because of the long history of warfare between Siam and Burma. Winichakul writes, the boundary was not really a boundary at all, more like a corridor “a frontier or border is a zone which lies along *each* side of the boundary or interfaces a neighboring country – that is, a boundary is *in between* two sides of borders.”⁸ The areas far away from the central part of the kingdom could be given away without hesitation to preserve the peace. The idea of a boundary, instead of hard and fast borders, is referred to as *mandala*. *Mandalas* did not have borders in the modern sense, but spheres of domain and influence

The kingdoms of Southeast Asia did not conform to western views of territory or political boundaries. Polity was defined by a center of power rather than boundaries.

O.W. Wolters writes,

The *mandala* represented a particular and often unstable political situation in a vaguely definable geographical area without fixed boundaries and where smaller centers tended to look in all directions for security. Mandalas would expand and contract in concertina-like fashion. Each one contained several tributary rulers, some of whom would repudiate vassal status when the opportunity arose and try to build up their own networks of vassals.⁹

This polity helped maintain buffer zones between kingdoms and also led to a tradition of rebellion. Differences between peoples in the kingdoms in modern day Thailand and Burma were not based on ethnicity, but on power. People who lived in urban areas were

⁷South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 5.

⁸Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 1994), 77.

⁹O.W. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), 16-17.

seen as having a greater knowledge of religion (Buddhism) and greater wealth. Urbanites commanded a great amount of patronage from the tribal groups. The people who lived in the mountainous forests had a different kind of power. Rural power was over the animals in the jungle and knowledge of the spirits of local streams and mountains.¹⁰ The forested zones of power were also sources of rebellion. The tribal groups who lived in the forest were sources of rebellion because they were not beholden to one power throughout time. Rural people were part of the buffer zones between sources of royal power and were often used as hired militias by local warlords.

In sum, ethnicity was not part of the pre-colonial Southeast Asian model of power and control of kingdoms. Power was held by kings and warlords who ruled over networks of tributary rulers. This polity changed with the arrival of the British and other colonists from Western Europe.

Colonial Burma

The British controlled most of Burma for a little over 100 years. The colonization of Burma began with the first two Anglo-Burmese wars (1824-26 and 1852) and ended with Burmese independence in 1948. The British controlled the capital city and the surrounding lands but, the remote mountainous areas of northern Burma were not really administered from Rangoon until the early twentieth century.¹¹ Some would argue that these areas still are not administered from Rangoon, but are administered by local warlords as they were in the past.¹²

The British colonists, along with the missionaries, began separating one of the most ethnographically diverse landscapes into races or ethnicities soon after arrival. The

¹⁰Mikael Gravers, "Cosmology, Prophets, and Rebellion among the Buddhist Karen in Burma and Thailand," *Moussons* 4 (2001): 3-33.

¹¹South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 8.

¹²*Ibid.*

categorization of the peoples of Burma happened along with the mapping of state boundaries between China, India, and Thailand. Ethnic labels of this period are very broad and overarching. So much so, that the peoples within the same ethnic category speak many dialects and languages that are not mutually intelligible. Chin and Karen people are two ethnic group labels that are used in reference to very diverse populations. One older Pwo Karen man in Louisville referenced the diversity of the Chin people during an interview: “There are over 30 Chin groups. You can see one village and travel to another within a day and the language is unintelligible. Even eating and drinking is different . . . and they all call themselves Chin.”¹³ Taylor criticizes this reification of ethnic categories,

It became normal to speak of the Burmans, Chins, Shans, Kachins, Kayahs, Mons, Arakanese, Tavoyans and Karens as if they were unified national groups with ancient historical antecedents. This ascriptive conceptual mode for intellectually mapping the structure of Burma has been so widely accepted by Burma’s political elite that they, like the Europeans who created it, have tended to accept the broad ethnic categories as embodying living social formations with political prerogatives. Thus, the politically neutral Burmese word *lumyo*, literally meaning ‘kind of man’ came to be translated as the emotive terms for race or nation. In this century, ethnic categories have taken on a life of their own, shaping the political thought and behavior of central and regional elites. It is now impossible to avoid the use of broad ethnic labels even while attempting to demystify them.¹⁴

Categories assigned by colonists and anthropologists have become static and assumed as primordial by most of the people from these groups. Keyes writes that the Chin people are a great example of a people whose ethnic identity as Chin became, “frozen by the British during the colonial period, turned into stable and lasting chiefdomships.”¹⁵

The Chin people became a more cohesive group and developed a group identity after the growth of Christianity. Sakhong writes, “Christianity helped the Chin

¹³Pwo, interview by author, Louisville, KY, April 9, 2015. All the names of those interviewed have been changed to assure anonymity.

¹⁴Robert H. Taylor, "Perceptions of Ethnicity in the Politics of Burma," *Southeast Asia Journal of Social Science* 10, no. 1 (1982): 8.

¹⁵Charles Keyes, *The Golden Peninsula: Culture and Adaptation in Mainland Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1977), 38.

people – no longer as divided tribal groups, but as the entire nationality of Chin ethnicity – to maintain their identity . . . Christianity itself became a new creative force of national identity for the Chin people.”¹⁶ The Chin people developed a distinct group identity through similar worship patterns and Christian identity. The Chin people interviewed for this chapter automatically refer to themselves as Chin when asked about their ethnicity. But, after further discussion, they admit that Chin Christians worship in different congregations because of the differences in language, not differences in theology.

Another reason the tribal peoples developed separate, cohesive ethnic groups was due to problems with administration. The upland area of Burma, referred to by the British as the Frontier Area, was not included in the standard administrative authority of Burma proper. The separation of the upland area prevented the integration and Burmanization of the area because it was not administered by the Burmese.¹⁷

Burmanization is the integration of minority groups into the Burmese category. South provides a good example of Burmanization, “the 1921 census recorded 324,000 Mons “by race”, but only 189,000 Mon-language speakers of the Mon.”¹⁸ Later these Burmese speaking Mon people would self-identify as ethnic Burmese. Self-identification with ethnic Burmese also happened with Arakanese and other groups within Burma proper.

The separation of the Frontier Area and Burma proper set up major challenges for an independent Burma. The elites from the Karen, Chin, Shan, and other groups formed nationalist movements after Burma became an independent country. Ongoing tension with the Burmese government forced further integration of heterogeneous groups. Heterogeneous groups like the Karen felt forced to teach and emphasize what it meant to

¹⁶Lian H. Sakhong, "Christianity and Chin Identity," in *Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Burma*, ed. Mikael Gravers (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2007), 207.

¹⁷Burmanization is a term that is commonly used in the literature about Burmese society. Ashley South spells it Burmanisation while Mikael Gravers uses Burmanization. Gravers, *Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Burma*. South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*.

¹⁸South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 11.

be Karen as opposed to Burmese. They attempted to develop a homogeneous identity for a heterogeneous group.

Armed Conflict

During World War II the Japanese defeated the British in Burma and set up a puppet state led by an ethnic Burmese dictator, Ba Maw.¹⁹ Under the Ba Maw regime Burmese was made the official language of the country and the use of minority languages for education was outlawed. Taylor says that the state espoused the ideology of, “one voice, one blood, one nation.”²⁰ The assumed superiority of the ethnic Burmese chaffed the other ethnic groups in Burma and by the end of the war, “ethnicity, religion or Communism inspired more loyalty than the state.”²¹

Burma was declared an independent nation following World War II. Within a year several ethnic and political groups, including the Communist Party of Burma, took up arms against the new government. Civil war began because of the idea about a core Burmese identity, suppressing the reality of diverse social identities (Karen, Chin, Mon, etc.). Nick Cheesman writes,

To bind the *taingyntha* into a union, the state has relied upon a number of loose policy directives First, the state asserts that all ‘national races’ share both a common origin and sense of identity. The current regime encapsulates this principle in an ambiguous concept of ‘Union Spirit’ It was only with the advent of British colonial rule that the national brethren ‘became like strangers’ due to malicious divide and rule policies, that led to the subsequent outbreak of civil war Secondly, the state has constructed a ‘traditional’ public life that places Burman culture at the core and links other cultures together around the periphery Sanitised images of the eight principal ‘national races’ are daily woven into state media.²²

¹⁹Steinburg, *Burma/Myanmar*, 37.

²⁰Robert H. Taylor, *The State in Burma* (London: Hurst, 1987), 284.

²¹*Ibid.*, 285.

²²Nick Cheesman, "Seeing 'Karen' in the Union of Myanmar," *Asian Ethnicity* 3, no. 2 (2002): 216-17.

These eight national races reified ethnic identities for many of the ethnic groups. As Michio writes, “Once registration of an ethnic group is officially recognized by the government, any change of ethnic identity will be met with much more difficulty, and any performance of ethnic culture will tend to be planned according to ethnic boundaries at the time of registration.”²³ Refugees from Burma classified ethnic groups by the eight national races promulgated by the government in almost every interview conducted for this dissertation. The eight national races are Burman, Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan. Today the total official number is much higher, but the official groups are all included as subsets of these eight national races.²⁴ The list above was quickly recited by most people interviewed. Armed conflict also served to reify these ethnic identities.

One of the world’s longest running civil wars has been fought between many different ethnic armies in Burma since independence from Britain in 1948. Civil war has forced long term patterns of displacement among villagers throughout the country. Many people have moved so many times that it is impossible to locate their original home. After thirty-six in depth interviews with Karen refugees Ashley South writes, “Five people have been forcibly displaced more than 100 times, sometimes dating back to the 1940s. One old woman first fled to the jungle during the Second World War, when Japanese soldiers came into her village!”²⁵ Karen and other groups did not move from point A to point B, but they have moved from points A-Z during their lifetimes. Many Karen people moved to the borders of eastern Thailand to escape the war.

²³Takatani Michio, "Who Are the Shan? An Ethnological Perspective," in *Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Burma*, ed. Mikael Gravers (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2007), 197.

²⁴Yen Snaing, "Wary of Official Census, Burma's Ethnic Minorities Count Their Own," *The Irrawaddy*, accessed August 29, 2015. <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/wary-official-census-burmas-ethnic-minorities-count.html>.

²⁵South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 85.

The first refugee camps established in Thailand were in Tak province in 1984. Tak province borders Burma, and in the early days, the refugees could come and go as they desired. Camps were made up of Karen, Karenni, Mon, and a scattering of Burmese refugees. One refugee in Louisville said that in the early days he would travel back and forth out of Thailand into Burma to fight alongside the Karen National Union. His family remained in Thailand for their safety. Back and forth travel between Burma and Thailand began to stop in the 2000s when hundreds and thousands more refugees began crossing the border. By 2005 the Thai government granted permission for the refugees to be resettled in neighboring countries. In 2006-2007 most of the refugees were beginning the process of resettlement in the US and other western countries.

According to South, after people began to hear about the possibility of resettlement in the US, “some 2000 new arrivals from Tavoy town entered Tham Hinn refugee camp. Many of these people (who included college lecturers and business people, as well as ordinary villagers) reportedly entered the camp specifically for resettlement overseas.”²⁶ The new refugees were driven by push and pull factors. The people who had lived in the refugee camps for over twenty years came were pushed out by the Burmese military. Many of the late comers went to the refugee camp due to the pull of stability and freedom in the United States.

Thailand was not the only place people went when fleeing Burma. Tens of thousands of undocumented Chin and other refugees fled to India and Malaysia following years of human rights abuses. Human rights abuses included forced labor and religious repression. It is more difficult to document the number of the refugees in Malaysia and India because there are no official camps in these countries. The lack of camps does not mean the Chin were more welcome in Malaysia than Thailand:

From 2002 to 2008, 34,923 individuals were whipped for immigration offenses, of

²⁶South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 97.

whom 60.2 percent were from Indonesia, 14.1 percent from the Philippines, 13.9 percent from Burma, 3.6 percent from Bangladesh, 2.8 percent from Thailand and 5.4 percent from other countries. From 2005 to 2008, the Immigration Department detained 216,373 persons, of whom it had deported 191,583 by 2009; the largest numbers back to Indonesia (104,026), the Philippines (32,687), Burma (18,986) and Thailand (9,841).²⁷

The difficulty refugees face as they attempt to flee poverty and mistreatment in Burma is immense. The numbers of people that have fled Burma for Malaysia are staggering. Again, Nah writes, "There are now more than 100,000 asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless persons residing in Malaysia . . . 92 percent originated from Burma and are diverse in terms of their ethnic and tribal identities, dialects spoken and religious beliefs."²⁸ Many of the people from this diverse group have been resettled in Louisville, Kentucky. According to one report 2,240 refugees from Burma have been resettled in Kentucky since 2008.²⁹

People have been actively fleeing the civil war in Burma for over 20 years now. They flee to neighboring countries such as India, Thailand, and Malaysia. Many have been resettled to foreign countries because they no longer have a home in Burma or fear persecution. Politics and religion have been especially influential in the drawing of boundaries for these refugee communities. The Burmese feel the Karen hate them and many Karen openly said that they dislike ethnic Burmese people. Politics of ethnic differences have caused some communities to view their ethnic identities as "primordial with a static essence, erasing variation and individual agency . . . the role of religion in this process is often to provide a fundamental cosmological model, timeless as well as

²⁷Alice M. Nah, "Seeking Refuge in Kuala Lumpur: Self-Help Strategies to Reduce Vulnerability Amongst Refugees," in *The Other Kuala Lumpur: Living in the Shadows of a Globalising Southeast Asian City*, ed. Yeoh Seng Guan (New York: Routledge, 2014), 149.

²⁸Ibid., 150.

²⁹Chia Youyee Vang and Monica Mong Trieu, "Invisible Newcomers: Refugees from Burma/Myanmar and Bhutan in the United States," *APIASF Reports* (2014): 20, accessed August 30, 2015, http://www.apiasf.org/research/APIASF_Burma_Bhutan_Report.pdf.

overarching.”³⁰ The roles of religion and politics in ethnic identity for these various groups of refugees from Burma will be highlighted in the following narratives. The first is a narrative story told by Su Su.³¹ Her name was changed to protect her identity.

Narrative of Su Su. Su Su is a freshman in college in Louisville, Kentucky. She wants to be a doctor and came to Louisville as a refugee from Burma when she was 10 years old. She was born in the jungles between Burma and Thailand. Her family fled their home country because the Burmese army was burning villages in Dawei state and forcing other Burmese men to fight in the military. The military took men from Su Su’s village and burned the village to the ground. Su Su’s mom ran away, leaving her husband with the military because she feared for the life of her unborn daughter and young son. Su Su’s 18-year-old mother fled through the jungle with mostly Karen tribal people, although her family is ethnic Burmese.

Su Su’s mother told stories of disease and sickness as the group travelled through the jungle together. People were killed by land mines, poisoned rice, and other foods poisoned by the military. Su Su said when she was a little girl she did not have the right to cry because the military might find her family if she made any noises. Her family traveled with the Karen people because the Karen people knew where to hide in the jungle. One time Su Su was playing with her brother and a Burmese soldier found them and pointed his gun at her and her brother. Su Su’s mother cried touching the feet of the Burmese soldier begging for the life of her children. The soldier told them to run faster. Su Su’s mother and the Karen people ran through the hills with their young children until their feet were bleeding. By the time they arrived at Tham Hin refugee camp, many

³⁰Mikael Gravers, "Conversion and Identity: Religion and the Formation of Karen Ethnic Identity in Burma," in *Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Burma*, ed. Mikael Gravers (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2007).

³¹Su Su, interview by author, Louisville, KY, June 7, 2015.

people had died from lack of water and exposure to the elements. Su Su's father found his family several years later and was in poor health when he arrived at the camp.

Su Su spent most of the first ten years of her life in a refugee camp surrounded by Karen people. She is from the Dawei ethnic group that was traditionally subsumed under the Burmese ethnic label. The Dawei language is a Burmese dialect. The Dawei people follow basically the same rituals, holidays, and religion as ethnic Burmese. Ethnologue lists the language as *Tavoyan* with Dawei as an alternate name for the language. *Tavoyan* is classified as a Southern Burmese dialect.³² Su Su only speaks Dawei dialect with her parents. When asked if she would ever identify as Dawei she said no. Nobody knows what Dawei means and it is easier for her to identify as Burmese. In the camp she studied in Sgaw Karen, spoke Sgaw and Pwo Karen with her neighbors, Central Thai with Thai people, and Burmese with people who did not know any of these languages.

Su Su went to kindergarten and first grade in the refugee camp. After completing first grade her parents snuck out of the camp to work for Thai people. Her mother and father worked for a Thai family and another family adopted Su Su's older brother. After several years the Thai family would no longer pay Su Su's family for work, so they went back to the camp.

The only reason Su Su's family returned to the camp was a lack of work. None of them enjoyed life in the camp because they were very poor and were one of the only ethnic Burmese families in the camp. Everyone else was Pwo or Sgaw Karen. Su Su and her family were blamed by many of the Karen for the hardships the Karen people faced at the hands of the Burmese army. Su Su's family stayed apart from others as much as possible. Su Su's father said that he regularly worked with Karen people, but they would

³²*Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, ed. M. Paul Lewis, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig, 18th ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2015), accessed September 8, 2015, <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/tvn>.

say bad things about him, so he kept to himself. Su Su and her siblings had a hard time in school because the kids would make fun of them for being Burmese.³³ She and her siblings learned to pretend like they were Karen by learning the language well and wearing ethnic Karen clothing.

Su Su said that she would identify herself as Burmese when talking to Americans, but would also identify herself as Dawei when talking with people from Burma. Su Su's ethnic identity is contingent upon the other. When she is around Karen people she speaks Karen, dresses like a Karen girl, and takes on Karen culture. Su Su does the same around Burmese people. She can easily speak Burmese, dress like a Burmese girl, and take on Burmese culture. She admits that the topic of ethnic identity is difficult because of her background.

Su Su's brother identified with Pwo Karen people well enough that he married a Buddhist Pwo Karen woman from New York. Su Su and her brother regularly attend Karen festivals. She and her siblings speak Karen with one another as their main language. Even though Su Su's family has been around Karen people for over 20 years they are not readily accepted by the entire community in Louisville. After Su Su's graduation party several Karen men openly stated that they do not like Burmese people. Several of the former Karen National Union soldiers spit when they mentioned Su Su's family name. Even though Su Su and her family were persecuted by the Burmese government and lived around Karen people for over 20 years they are not accepted by the community.

Su Su was confused and angry that the Karen people treat her family badly. She said, "Some Karen people do not like Burmese. They will say they are not Burmese even though they are from Burma. We are from Burma, so we are Burmese. Some Karen people call themselves Thai because they were born in Thailand, but the ones from

³³Su Su, interview by author, Louisville, KY, June 7, 2015.

Burma will not call themselves Burmese.”³⁴ Exile and war often serve as means for the strengthening of ethnic identity and drawing sharper boundaries. Karen Dean writes, “The group that perceives its culture, religion, language, social position, economic resources or territory threatened by another group is inclined to construct and maintain boundaries for protection.”³⁵ The Karen, especially the Sgaw, have felt threatened by the Burmese for generations. Because of these threats to their territory, culture, and livelihood the Karen have developed strong boundaries to protect them from “others,” especially anyone that might be considered Burmese.

Narrative of So. Before the civil war began in Burma Karen people would regularly intermarry with ethnic Burmese. There are many refugees from Burma who struggle to be accepted into the Karen community. They may be only part ethnic Karen or, they do not speak the Sgaw Karen dialect. Some of the Karen people who readily identified themselves as Karen, and are recognized as Karen by the community, are part Burmese. When asking about marriage rules, a Pwo Karen man replied, “I am a Karen 75% and 25% Burmese. So, we are mixed. My family was already mixed. My family spoke Burmese as well as Karen.”³⁶ Everyone in the community is mixed.

So moved to the refugee camp on the border between Burma and Thailand in 1999. He was 20 years old when he left Burma with many other younger people escaping the civil war. So’s father was a Burmese Muslim and his mother was Pwo Karen. So’s family only spoke the Burmese language while he was growing up, so he never learned to speak Karen well. So does not know much about Burmese Muslims or Islam because he

³⁴Su Su, interview by author, Louisville, KY, June 7, 2015.

³⁵Karin Dean, "Mapping the Kachin Political Landscape: Constructing, Contesting and Crossing Borders," in *Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Burma*, ed. Mikael Gravers (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2007), 137.

³⁶Pwo, interview by author, Louisville, KY, April 9, 2015.

grew up around Pwo Karen Buddhists. So was different than most of his neighbors. His family never went to the mosque or the Buddhist temple. Religion was never a large part of his life growing up because his parents wanted to keep peace in their household.

Religion is an important boundary marker for tribal groups in Burma. The Chin and Kachin are 80-90% Christian, so Christianity has been a source of ethnic cohesion for these diverse groups. Gravers writes, “Chin, Kachin, and Karen are ethnic categories and conglomerates of diverse ethnic groups speaking different dialects and with significant cultural differences.”³⁷ The idea that Karen people are all Christians became powerful after the beginning of the civil war and the formation of the KNU (Karen National Union). At the beginning of the civil war the Buddhist and animist Karen fought alongside the Christian Karen. The unity of the Buddhists, animists, and Christians worked well until the Christian Sgaw Karen began to dominate the political process through the KNU. The Sgaw Karen headed by Bo Mya used the Christian faith and Sgaw dialect as a means of unifying the Karen people to fight. So was born into this world of ethnic strife.

The camp So fled to was dominated by Sgaw Karen people. Soon after he entered the camp he became a Christian and became active in the Seventh Day Adventist Church. So met his wife, who is also Pwo Karen, at the church in the camp. They found a sense of commonality because the majority population of Sgaw Karen did not understand why he and his wife did not speak their language. A sense of distrust existed in the community if the person only spoke Burmese. Both So and his wife were raised in households that only spoke the Burmese language. So said, “The Karen people do not understand that my wife and I do not speak Karen like the other Karen people here. We speak the Karen from the Irrawaddy.”³⁸ Karen from the Irrawaddy also means Pwo

³⁷Gravers, "Conversion and Identity," 228.

³⁸So, interview by author, Louisville, KY, July 12, 2015.

Karen. Pwo Karen are closer to the Mon and ethnic Burmese than the Sgaw Karen of the mountains.

So and his family have not felt completely welcomed by the majority Sgaw Karen community in Thailand, or in Louisville. So said, “They do not understand why we do not speak the same language. They think that because we speak Burmese we are Burmese. They don’t like the Burmese language because they don’t like Burmese people. My wife and I learned only the Burmese language in school. We spoke Burmese at home. At the camp Karen and Burmese language were spoken, but they don’t like the Burmese language.”³⁹ Although So and his wife were born and raised in Karen state they are not seen as full Karen, because they do not speak the Sgaw Karen dialect.

Historically, the Sgawization of the Karen people happened because of Bo Mya, the leader of the KNU from 1976 until 2000. Bo Mya died in 2006. So spoke of seeing Bo Mya in the camp where he lived and many of the Sgaw Karen people took Bo Mya’s word as law. Bo Mya was a member of the Seventh Day Adventist Church and advocated Karen people maintaining ethnic purity. Under Bo Mya, “The Karen people had to marry with Karen people. Nobody could live together without marriage. Some people have a wife and still have a girlfriend he would kill them for that. He killed a lot of people for this. He was very mean when he controlled a long time ago.”⁴⁰ The civil war drove the Karen people to draw tighter and tighter distinctions between themselves and “others.” Anyone who was not seen as being pure Karen was seen as suspect. Therefore, many people in this community still see another Karen as suspect if they do not speak the correct dialect. The Karen community have boundary markers that determine who is, or is not, a part of the community.

³⁹So, interview by author, Louisville, KY, July 12, 2015.

⁴⁰Ehk, interview by author, Louisville, KY, July 11, 2015.

Boundary Markers

Fredrik Barth proposed that ethnic identity is a feature of social organization, not culture (which is tenuous). Barth focused on boundaries, the maintenance of boundaries, and recruitment across boundaries instead of the things that make up a culture within the boundary. Ethnic groups are situational, not primordial. Ethnic groups are a creation of particular interactions, history, economic, and political circumstances. Barth writes, “Ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves, and thus have the characteristic of organizing interaction between people.”⁴¹ Ethnic identity manifests itself in the exchange or negotiation of the group’s physio-cultural features at the boundaries that divide ethnic groups. Some ethnic groups are more resistant to change and exchange in boundary negotiation. These ethnic groups tend to preserve more of what they see as their ethnic identity. Other ethnic groups are more fluid and flexible in negotiating boundaries between groups.

Language

Language is a powerful boundary marker for the refugee community from Burma that currently resides in Louisville. Self-reference as being Karen does not necessarily mean the Karen people will recognize one as authentic Karen. Many different refugees from Burma said the Karen hated them because they were suspected as being Burmese. One of the world’s longest continuous civil wars has led groups to become fixated on the question of ethnic identity. Francois Robinne and Mandy Sadan note that the political fixation on ethnicity in Burma

found its legitimacy in the two Constitutions of 1947 and 1974 and corollary developments during nearly half a century of civil war. Together with a tendency to institutionalize ethnic categories, the question of how to name oneself became particularly significant for local ‘ethnic’ leaders who claimed and sought geopolitical recognition in the newly independent state . . . The strength and ambiguity of the word ‘ethno-linguistic’ is that it presupposes a sociological

⁴¹Fredrik Barth, introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1998), 9.

continuity upon a linguistic category. It refers implicitly to a notion of common sociological stock derived from a linguistic basis. However, it is clear that the linguistic criterion has to fit also with the dynamics of economic networks, social relationships and religious interactions, each of which are daily involved in the process of social construction and re-composition . . . This does not entail denying the significance of ethnic categories when they are claimed by the people themselves; it requires just that they be introduced when they appear relevant and that we should not assume them to be an *a priori* determinant of identity and social coherency.⁴²

Ethnic categories should not be assumed before meeting the people with whom one is interacting. Even when they self-identify as one ethnic category, they might not be recognized as belonging to this larger ethnic group by the majority of the people in the group. Many of the people who self-identified as Karen in interviews are not readily accepted as Karen by the larger community. The Burmese and Karen languages are not the only ones spoke by this community.

The Thai language is commonly spoken by people who were refugees in Thailand. The refugees who speak Thai fluently often self-identify as Thai. The refugees from Burma readily admit that the Thai identifier is something that is dependent upon people and situations. One man said of his time in Thailand, "I worked with Thai people helping build churches. I also built furniture for a Thai company. I built the furniture from pictures my boss would give me. Sometimes I called myself Thai, sometimes Karen. It really depended on who I was with."⁴³ Charles Keyes writes, "Ethnic identities serve as adaptive strategies for people faced with certain social experiences . . . it is not necessary in Thai society for one to hold an exclusive ethnic identity."⁴⁴ Karen people working in certain industries felt compelled to use the Thai referent for ethnic identity so they could

⁴²François Robinne and Mandy Sadan, "Postscript: Reconsidering the Dynamics of Ethnicity through Foucault's Concept of 'Spaces of Dispersion'," in *Social Dynamics in the Highlands of Southeast Asia: Reconsidering Political Systems of Highland Burma* by E.R. Leach, ed. François Robinne and Mandy Sadan (Boston: Brill, 2007), 300-304.

⁴³Ta, interview by author, Louisville, KY, June 21, 2015.

⁴⁴Charles F. Keyes, ed., *Ethnic Adaptation and Identity: The Karen on the Thai Frontier with Burma*. (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1979), 19.

more readily fit into Thai society. The Karen people who lived in the mountains felt less pressure to conform to Thai society and usually preferred to use the Karen referent for their ethnic identity.

People from Chin state in Burma also use language as a referent for drawing boundaries between one group and another. The people in Louisville who speak Falam Chin greatly outnumber other Chin groups who speak different languages. The Falam Chin people in Louisville identify themselves first by the state they are from, Chin. One man explains that in addition to the state identifier:

Sometimes we say our language to classify which town we are from. I am from Falam, so I speak Falam. Some might say I am Falam Chin. In Louisville there are several different churches for refugees from Burma. The Tedim people have a church, the Hakah church meets at Crescent Hill Baptist and the Chin people from smaller groups without enough people to worship in their own language have a Burmese speaking congregation. There are three big Chin groups: Falam, Hakah, and Tedim.⁴⁵

Every Chin person interviewed said that they do not often associate with Americans or other people from Burma because of the language barrier. Enough people in Louisville speak the Falam Chin dialect that they can have their own church and their own community. The other small tribal groups from Burma use the Burmese language as a common language for worship and fellowship. It is interesting to note that not one Chin person interviewed identified themselves as Burmese, even those from the Burmese speaking congregation. One reason for this is political. Sakhon writes, when General Ne Win led a successful coup and took control of Burma he “not only expelled foreign missionaries but also intensified his military campaign against the Chin and other ethnic nationalist movements.”⁴⁶ The expulsion of missionaries caused a great disturbance in Chin society. The Chin were no longer able to receive support from Western missionaries

⁴⁵Chin, interview by author, Louisville, KY, March 29, 2015.

⁴⁶Sakhong, "Christianity and Chin Identity," 223.

to provide education. General Ne Win's coup led to a great many other factions in Burmese society.

Politics

Politics is another powerful boundary marker in this community. In the process of fighting the Burmese government for not allowing them to have freedom from persecution and Burmization (forced to study in the Burmese language and follow Burmese culture), leaders of these large categories of ethnic groups have attempted to homogenize the identity of these diverse communities. Leaders of the KNU have promoted the Sgawization of the Karen people. Ashley South taught at a Karen refugee high school in Thailand in the 1990s. There he saw that the teachers were instructed and expected to teach, "in S'ghaw Karen, and sometimes in English, but never in Pwo. One of only four Buddhists among the thirty-plus trainees converted to Christianity during the course of his studies."⁴⁷ That was during the time Bo Mya controlled the KNU. South felt driven to find a way to integrate the ethnically diverse Karen people. The KNU developed idealized pictures of what it means to be Karen and imposed these idealized pictures on the people.

Some Karen in the community felt that the ethnic Burmese discriminate against them. The Dawei and Burmese are separate categories on the chart, but are seen as the same by the Karen. The figure below illustrates how even some who recognized themselves to be Karen felt the majority group did not treat them like they belonged. The Karen rejected by the community did not speak Sgaw Karen, or did not sufficiently fit the majority's definition of Karenness.

⁴⁷South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 41.

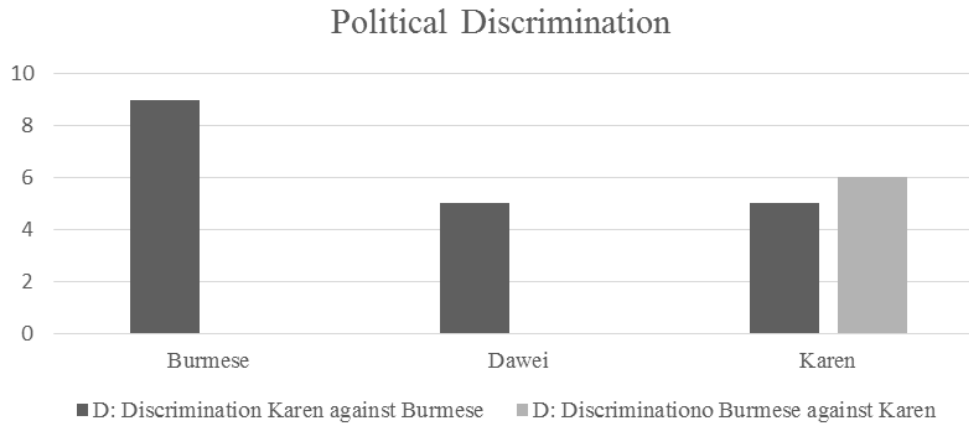


Figure 2. Political discrimination

An idealized picture of what it means to be Karen, or even Burmese, continues in Louisville. The refugee community from Burma continues to be influenced by their political past. The Karen community is suspicious of anyone who does not speak the Sgaw Karen dialect. The people who do not speak Sgaw Karen are perceived to be Burmese, or not really Karen. The people who identify as Burmese are usually Buddhist and feel like they are mistrusted and disliked by the majority Karen population. Sadan argues for the need to decolonize these ethnic categories. She believes that the leaders of these communities are perpetuating tensions between communities in Burma and in the diaspora. Sadan writes,

In some cases, the concern not to aggravate the internal tensions of particular groups has produced a tacit agreement on the part of researchers that certain issues relating to ethnic diversity are best kept out of the public domain This leads to a perpetuating of essentialising, reductionistic usage of terms such as ‘Kachin’, ‘Chin’, ‘Karen’ etc. These perpetuate the historical notion that ethnic categories are essentially unproblematic in the present and reflect coherent ethnic entities in the past. Nonetheless, for discussions of ethnicity and ethnic diversity in Burma to be able to transcend these limiting discourses, more nuanced understandings of these terms need to be developed.⁴⁸

⁴⁸Mandy Sadan, "Constructing and Contesting the Category 'Kachin' in the Colonial and Post-Colonial Burmese State," in *Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Burma*, ed. Mikael Gravers (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2007), 35.

Sadan is correct in noting that the notions of ethnic identity perpetuated by leaders of many ethnic communities in Burma are flawed, but she is mistaken in the notion that changes in ideas by leaders will change the notions held by the people themselves. Ethnic boundaries do not appear or disappear quickly. Categories of ethnicity are strongly held notions of group and individual ethnic identity that are not easily overcome.

Christians need to avoid this mistaken idea. Understand people where they are, not where you want them to be, when conducting cross cultural research. Only the gospel can bring about change in the heart. Oftentimes the big cultural shifts do not happen until the second generation. Religion is another powerful boundary marker in this diverse community of refugees from Burma.

Religion

Religion is a powerful boundary marker for people in this community. Pwo Karen Buddhists tend to be closer to ethnic Burmese Buddhists. The ethnic Burmese interviewed and observed often had Pwo Karen Buddhist friends stop by their house to visit, eat, and drink beer with them. These were the same ethnic Burmese people said the ethnic Karen do not like them, so they do not interact with the ethnic Karen. When the ethnic Burmese say Karen, it is usually in reference to the Christian Sgaw Karen. Gravers notes, “The violent conflicts involving Buddhism and Christianity have created boundaries defined by a mixture of religion and violence.”⁴⁹ New identity markers based on religious affiliation developed based on wide spread suffering and mistrust.

One of the best ways to determine whether something is a boundary marker in a society is marriage. Hiebert writes that endogamy, “is a rule that people must marry others of their own kind. While exogamy excludes marriage to kinsmen, endogamy excludes those who are culturally defined as ‘outsiders.’”⁵⁰ Hiebert goes on to use the

⁴⁹Gravers, "Conversion and Identity," 252.

⁵⁰Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 199.

caste system as an example of endogamy. The caste system as an example of endogamy will be more clearly seen in the next chapter about the Nepali-speaking refugees. The refugees from Burma are not Hindus and do not follow the caste system, but they still have a form of endogamy. The people of this community would not allow Buddhists to marry Christians or Christians to marry Buddhists, unless someone converts to the other's religion.

The only Burmese and Karen couple found in Louisville both came from Buddhist families. The husband spoke of racism against Burmese speakers in the refugee camp:

Yes, when we lived in Thailand they would definitely hate us because we are Burmese. They are Karen, we are Burmese, I could understand because they thought we killed their people. They were racist, they would threaten to kill us and tell us they didn't want us around. They wouldn't share food and told us to stay.⁵¹

He said their families allowed the marriage because their families are Buddhist. Her family is Pwo Karen and his family is Dawei, but most people in the community consider them Burmese. The story of this Dawei man, who be referred to as Win in this dissertation, will better illustrate the boundaries in this community.

Narrative of Win

Win was born in Dawei state in Burma. His mother was Dawei and his father was ethnic Burmese.⁵² His grandmother did not approve of this marriage, so she told Win's mother that she would have to give him to somebody else once he was born. Win's mother then left Dawei state and went to Karen state to find someone to take her son. When he was born she changed her mind and decided to keep him, so she raised Win in Karen state while she worked as a single mother separated from her extended family.

⁵¹Win, interview by author, Louisville, KY, October 4, 2015.

⁵²Ibid.

In 1997 the Burmese army attacked the people of Karen state and Win's family had to flee the military along with the Karen people. Win says that many people died as they fled for the Thai border. He grew up around many Karen people in Tam Kae camp. By this time his mother had another husband and Win now had several siblings. His step father got tuberculosis and Win had to leave the camp to make money to support his family because his step-father was too sick to work.

Win left the camp and went to live with a Thai family. He lived in their home doing work around the house for two years. In the camp, Win learned to speak Thai and went to Thai school, but the people in this town did not consider him Thai. The people in this town knew Win was from the camp so they thought of him as one of the Karen people. Karen people in the camp considered Win and his family to be Burmese, even though they were Dawei, and the Thai people considered him to be Karen because he came from a camp dominated by Karen people. Win said, "In the camps there were 80% of Karen people, 20% are Burmese people. The Dawei people were counted as Burmese people because we are the same. In Tam Hai camp there were only Burmese and Karen people. There were other camps for Karenni people."⁵³ Win's ethnic identity is something that is dependent on the others in his context.

Win also spoke of corruption in the camp. This was some heard from other sources, but he spoke more directly than anyone else interviewed. Corruption allowed many people to enter the US without actually being refugees. Win said,

At the end, many people wanted to come to the camp for a month, two months. They were illegal and paid the Thai people to do paper work so they could come here illegally. Many Burmese people did this even though they didn't live in the camp very long. They paid money under the table so they could come here. The Thai people made an ID for them. Lots of people here were not refugee people. At least 20-30% of the people who came here paid money under the table to come here. They are now legal here. Donald Trump wants to keep refugee people from Syria from coming here. I agree with them, they might be terrorists. Burma and Thailand they won't cause problems in America, but the Muslim terrorists, we don't need

⁵³Win, interview by author, Louisville, KY, October 4, 2015.

them here. It's easy to come here illegally as a refugee.⁵⁴

Win also spoke of Burmese people who purchased paperwork from legitimate Karen refugees and passed themselves off as being Karen refugees. The same Burmese people now identify themselves as Karen when speaking with Americans, but the Karen population knows they are not legitimate Karen.

After spending nine years in the camp and working in Thailand, Win learned to speak five to six languages comfortably. Win's most familiar language is Karen, after growing up around Karen people and attending Karen school in the camp. Win moved to the US with his family when he was thirteen years old. After graduating from high school he went to college and worked for Catholic Charities part time. Catholic Charities paid for Win to travel around the U.S. as an interpreter for new arrivals. The Karen people who met him outside the context of the camp assumed he was Pwo Karen, not Burmese, because he spoke Karen very well. While travelling for work with Catholic Charities Win met a Pwo Karen girl and he asked her to marry him.

Win was allowed to marry this Pwo Karen girl because both families are Buddhist, but there is a catch. Win considers himself to be a Christian. This came up during our conversation about his marriage. Win said,

I met her in New York. I did lots of travelling for fun and work. I used to work for Catholic Charities as a translator. They sent me lots of places because I speak Karen and Burmese. I met lots of people in different places. I met her when I visited New York at a church where there was a Karen celebration. We liked each other, you know how it is. I believe in Christian, my mother gave up on telling me about Buddha. I believe in God. If somebody asks you if you believe in God, you have to say you believe in God. When I was in Thailand I lived in a temple for a few months. I used to be a monk for the two months in Thailand to earn merit for my mother. The oldest son is supposed to be a monk to earn merit for your mother.⁵⁵

Win continued talking about his various religious experiences and explained that he read the Bible and no longer bows to Buddha images, prays to the monks, or goes to the temple. I asked what his parents thought about his self-identification as a Christian. Win

⁵⁴Win, interview by author, Louisville, KY, October 4, 2015.

⁵⁵Ibid.

said his parents are tired of arguing with him about the Christian faith and they are happy that he married a Buddhist girl. He went on to say, “I believe in my heart that I am a Christian.”⁵⁶

Is Win a Christian? If he is a believer, he has not been discipled and does not have a good understanding of the gospel. Win readily identified as a Buddhist around Buddhists and as a Christian around Christians. Most conversions happening in this community are among the Karen people. Many are recent converts to Christianity. Seven converts to Christianity were interviewed from the Karen community, one from the Burmese, and one from Dawei. The figure below illustrates the differences.

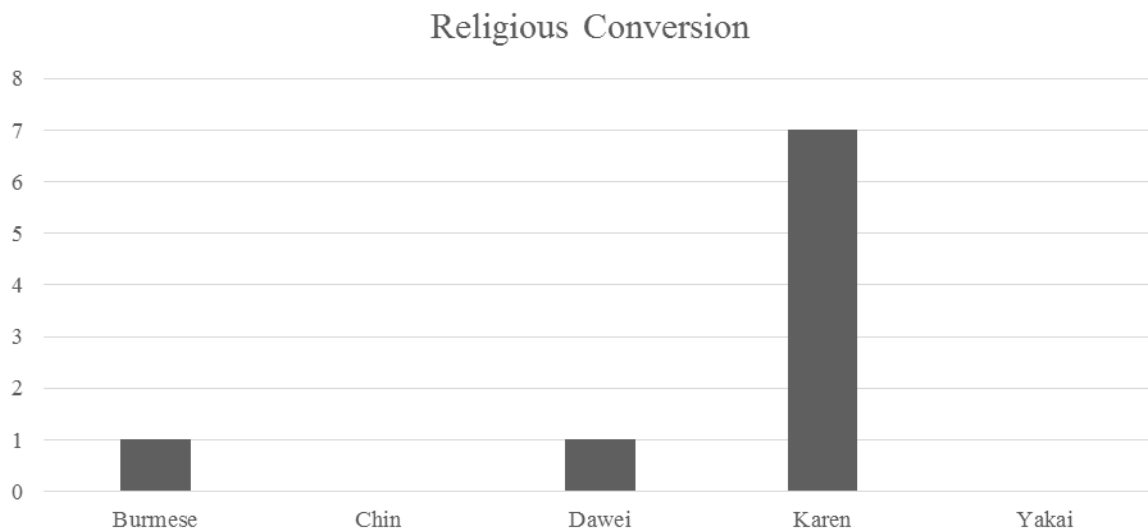


Figure 3. Religious conversion

Who is Win? Is he Burmese? Win’s Karen neighbors consider him as Burmese. Is he Karen? He is married to an ethnic Pwo Karen woman and readily admits that he speaks Karen with his wife and considers it his first language. Is he Dawei? Win’s mother and step father are Dawei and he speaks the Dawei language with them, but his father

⁵⁶Win, interview by author, Louisville, KY, October 4, 2015.

was Burmese and he was raised around Karen people. As Douglass says of Juan de Onate when answering the question about his ethnic identity, yes he is all the above.⁵⁷ Win's own ethnic identity is contextual, it depends on the time and space he occupies. He can self-identify as a Burmese person, Dawei, Buddhist, or Christian. These identities allow him to change boundaries between ethnicities, and even transcend them. But, boundaries are still important in church planting. The boundaries of politics, religion, and language dominate the refugee community from Burma.

Boundaries in this community that have developed among the diaspora from Burma do complicate the notion of people group focused church planting. But, this does not mean ethnic categories are useless. Ethnic categories of differentiation can still be useful in developing church planting strategies. Robinne and Sadan write, "Ethnic categories do, indeed, eventually have to be reintroduced, but only once the networks and their modes of articulation have been identified."⁵⁸ The next section will look at how to identify networks among the diaspora from Burma.

Interpreting the Refugee Community from Burma

The people in this community identified themselves differently in different circumstances and different locations. When this community was in Burma most identified themselves based on one of the eight national races. In Thailand or Malaysia it depended on the others they were around. In the United States they identify as one of the eight national races, or even, Thai. The ethnic identities used when conversing with outsiders was usually different than the ethnic identity used when conversing with insiders. For example, Su Su said that she would identify herself as Burmese when talking to Americans, but would also identify herself as Dawei when talking with people

⁵⁷William A. Douglass, "In Search of Juan De Onate: Confessions of a Cryptoessentialist," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 56, no. 2 (2000): 137-62.

⁵⁸Robinne and Sadan, "Postscript," 308.

from Burma. Identification depends on who she is interacting with, the preferred group name she hears from peers, or what she feels comfortable telling people. Su Su admits that the topic of ethnic identity is difficult because of their background.

As stated in the literature review, diaspora was originally used in reference to the Jewish dispersion from Israel or the Greek dispersion during the Hellenistic period. The experiences of these diaspora communities are used as an 'ideal type.'⁵⁹ The Jewish people clearly longed for their homeland during the diaspora, so many researchers assume everyone in the diaspora longs for a specific homeland. The community from Burma is not longing for a specific homeland. There was a time when this was true, many years ago. But, many have been forced to migrate for so many generations that they no longer know where home is. Today refugees from Burma have settled into life in the United States, while attempting to maintain ties with family members scattered across the world. The refugees from Burma are less concerned about their roots and homeland than about routes, a recreated group identity in multiple locations developed through transnational ties. Their identity is not coupled to people and land like the Jewish people, but to a new identity formed in a new land.⁶⁰

Diaspora people are marked by their hybridity. These refugees have hybrid, liminal identities that are negotiated depending on where they are living and the part of society they are interacting with. If these groups are marked by hybridity, what holds them together besides a category of difference? Instrumentalists would emphasize the fact that these people are hybrids and focus on their liminal identities. As Wimmer writes, they assert "That ethnicity is constructed, contextually variable, contested, and contingently eventful."⁶¹ People cannot chose any ethnic identity and form something out

⁵⁹William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991): 84.

⁶⁰James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1994): 308.

⁶¹Andreas Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 204.

of nothing. The anti-anti-essentialists are right when they say the instrumentalists vastly oversimplify ethnic identity by declaring everyone hybrids. Cultures do not mix together producing mixtures, but they maintain properties of older cultures.

Misconceptions are common for outsiders when observing people from this community living everyday life. Ethnically they have similar physical features and they all come from the same country. But, due to years of civil war, colonialism, and other factors they have developed boundaries between each other based on politics, religion, and language. To understand differences in this community, researchers need to take the time to discover the boundaries discussed above.

According to Barth, culture can move anywhere and be transmitted to anyone, but ethnicity is about social boundaries.⁶² How do the refugees that originated in Burma categorize themselves and place boundaries between themselves and other groups? The boundaries drawn by different groups within this group are based on religion, language, and politics. The best way to begin church planting and evangelism amongst people in this diverse community is to focus on religious and language groups. Language is an important part of the refugee community from Burma. Language determines who they will marry, who they will worship with, and their social groups. Language also determines political affiliation, or assumed political affiliation. If one only speaks Burmese, that person will not be readily accepted by the Sgaw Karen community. The refugees from Burma are not one community that can be reached with one strategy. Multiple strategies need to be devised for multiple groups.

People group lists are a helpful place to begin research for church planting but, more research should be done to discover boundaries. Evangelicals need to focus on determining what boundaries exist between different groups and those presently seen as one group. Ethnicity is a concept that should be defined by the people themselves as an

⁶²Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 15.

ethnographic phenomena rather than an analytic tool for separating people into distinct, labeled groups defined by missiologists.

It is tempting to say that Chin, Kachin, Karen, and other labels are just that, labels. Labels were developed by missionaries, anthropologists, and politicians to brand tribal groups in the mountainous regions of Burma. But, as Gravers writes, "If we deny (Karen identity) as a mere colonial invention, we simultaneously deny these people any active role in history."⁶³ Karen, Chin, and Kachin identity may be a mixture of ancient and more recently acquired elements of their identity, but the groups decided who they are. Individuals do not decide to be labeled Chin or Karen without group recognition. The refugees from Burma are groups of people who have been formed out of the fires of civil war, religious persecution, and mistreatment by government powers.

The anti-essentialists would argue that even the boundaries are disappearing, not just a mixture of ethnic hyphenations. But, as demonstrated in this study, boundaries are not disappearing. Friedman writes,

Rather, they seem to be erected on every street corner of every declining neighborhood of our world. It is true that a little bit of this and that are flowing across all sorts of boundaries, but they are not being used to celebrate hybridity. Quite the contrary, they are incorporated and naturalized by group formation that strives to homogenize and maintain social order within its own boundaries.⁶⁴

People in the Karen community are working hard to maintain these boundaries by teaching their children the importance of learning their language and history. The Burmese people are also maintaining their boundaries by emphasizing the importance of Buddhism.

The next chapter is a case study about another diaspora group in Louisville. The refugees from Bhutan were in refugee camps in Nepal for years before being

⁶³Mikael Gravers, "The Karen Making of a Nation," in *Asian Forms of the Nation*, ed. Stein Tonnesson and Hans Antlov (London: Curzon Press, 1996), 239.

⁶⁴Jonathan Friedman, "The Hybridization of Roots and the Abhorrence of the Bush," in *Modernities, Class, and the Contradictions of Globalization*, edited by Kajsa Ekholm Friedman and Jonathan Friedman. (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press), 277.

relocated across the world because they were forced out of Bhutan and neither India, nor Nepal would accept them. Thousands of people from this diverse community have been resettled in the Louisville, Kentucky area over the last few years. This case study will further illustrate the central concepts and ideas of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 4

REFUGEES FROM BHUTAN IN LOUISVILLE

Introduction

This chapter begins with an overview of the research methodology used particular to this case study followed by an overview of the history of Nepali-speaking refugees in Louisville. The history of the community will provide the context of the case study by describing where they came from and how they arrived in Louisville. The case study includes two biographical studies, one from a higher caste person and another from a lower caste person. The biographical studies provide different perspectives on the diversity of this group. This chapter identifies the way the refugees from Bhutan group categorizes themselves and places boundaries between themselves and other groups.

Research Methodology

The research methodology used particular to this case study includes the use of ATLAS.ti to analyze the data collected into categories and to find themes from the data. Research began with interviews with people from the higher castes and proceeded to lower castes. After giving participants an opportunity to review what was going to be written, the interviews were transcribed in ATLAS.ti, and sorted into document groups. The document groups included male, female, caste (low or high), and age. Friese says, beginning the research “project this way, literally speaking, we will frame it.”¹ She uses the analogy of a puzzle. Puzzles are solved more rapidly when one begins with the

¹Susanne Friese, *Qualitative Data Analysis with Atlas.Ti*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014), 115.

corners and edges of the puzzle. The primary documents were sorted to form the corners and edges of the puzzle in this case study.

Friese says that the second step in sorting the research is entering the research questions in a research question memo, “initial ideas for coding can be derived from our research questions, from theories, from the literature or from the interview guideline.”² The initial codes were sorted into the family codes that will be used in both case studies. The initial codes had to do with ethnic identity (varied, not varied), caste (low caste, high caste, caste unimportant, caste, important), and others. These codes and categories were changed and updated as more interviews were conducted. More categories may be found in the appendix of the dissertation.

Interviews were considered complete after reaching the point of saturation. Existing codes were dragged and dropped from the code manager onto quotations from interviews instead of creating new codes and categories to describe the data. At the point of saturation, the coding system was reviewed. The final coding system included 53 codes separated into four coding families. The primary document manager included 31 documents and 23 individual interviews. More information about the findings will be included after a history of Nepali-speaking refugees from Bhutan in Louisville. The history of Nepali-speaking refugees from Bhutan in Louisville will be illustrated by Raj’s experience of being forced to leave Bhutan. As Pat Caplan writes, “The purpose of publishing such personal narratives may be less the story of an individual or family, than the utilization of aspects of lives to illustrate wider social processes.”³ Raj’s life will illustrate the history of these people and also illustrate some of the ideas proposed in this dissertation.

²Friese, *Qualitative Data Analysis with Atlas.Ti*, 116.

³Pat Caplan, *African Voices African Lives: Personal Narratives from a Swahili Village* (London: Routledge, 1997), 15.

History of Nepali-speaking Refugees from Bhutan in Louisville

Accounts vary about the history of Nepali-speaking people in Bhutan. The government of Bhutan said no historical record of Nepali-speaking people in Bhutan can be found until the twentieth century.⁴ A 1994 report by AHURA (Association of Human Rights Activists) Bhutan claims that the settlement of peoples from Nepal began in the 17th century. Historical accuracy and conflicting reports are common for refugee communities. Hutt writes, “A struggle over historical truth commonly arises when people become refugees.”⁵ The refugee community from Bhutan struggle over historical truth. Some refugees have paperwork and oral histories about their people immigrating in the distant past, while other refugees interviewed claim their families did not immigrate to Bhutan until the beginning of the twentieth century. Michael Aris reports that Nepali people first began moving to Bhutan from the Kathmandu valley in 1620. These Nepali people were artisans called to help construct a silver stupa to contain the ashes of the king’s father.⁶ Later in 1624 the king of Bhutan went to Nepal and took fifty Nepali-speaking families to Bhutan to work the farms in the southern part of the country. The king wanted to develop the southern part of the country, but the Northern Bhutanese people would not move south.⁷ By 1930 Southern Bhutan was the country’s main supplier of food and most farmers spoke Nepali as their primary language.

The peace between the Nepali-speaking people of the south and the majority culture people of the north began to wane during the census of 1988; all Nepali-speaking peoples were listed as non-citizens. According to The Royal Government of Bhutan, “The

⁴Royal Government of Bhutan, *The Southern Bhutan Problem: Threat to a Nation's Survival* (Thimphu, Bhutan: Ministry of Home Affairs, 1993), 3.

⁵Michael Hutt, *Unbecoming Citizens: Culture, Nationhood, and the Flight of Refugees from Bhutan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 25.

⁶Michael Aris, *Bhutan, the Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom* (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1979), 215.

⁷History about the development of the southern part of Bhutan comes from interviews that I conducted.

1988 census not only identified a substantial number of illegal immigrants but also revealed an unprecedented rise in the *Lhotshampa* population.”⁸ Census operations continued after 1988 and it “became a tool not only for the eviction of illegal immigrants but also for the dispossession and banishment of various categories of *Lhotshampa* citizens.”⁹ Also the government began to force Nepali-speaking people in the south to follow northern customs. On January 16, 1989, the king issued a decree requiring all citizens to observe the traditional *Drukpa* code of dress, and etiquette called *driglam namzha*. Then in February 1989, the government removed Nepali language from the curriculum in all schools.¹⁰ The Bhutanese government wanted one language, one nationality. The people of the north wear different clothing than the Nepali speakers and they are also Buddhists, whereas most of the southern Nepali-speaking people are Hindus. For the Nepali-speaking people being a Bhutanese citizen was not about language and culture, but about owning a home and being born in Bhutan. One informant is a Hindu priest and was involved in a rebellion against the government. Raj is the name used in this dissertation to protect his identity.¹¹

Narrative of Raj

Raj is a Hindu priest. He began studying to be a priest when he was 13. Raj is a high caste Hindu and in Bhutan he would go Hindu temple every morning and evening to lead prayers, conduct rituals for people in his village, and teach his followers. Everything changed when a political movement began in Bhutan regarding Nepali-speaking Bhutanese people. According to Raj, the King of Bhutan went to Nepal in 1624 and took

⁸Royal Government of Bhutan, *Anti-National Activities in Southern Bhutan: An Update on the Terrorist Movement* (Thmphu, Bhutan: Department of Information, 1991), 2.

⁹Hutt, *Unbecoming Citizens*, 159.

¹⁰Katinka Ridderbos and Human Rights Watch, "Last Hope: The Need for Durable Solutions for Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal and India," *Human Rights Watch* 19, no. 7 (2007): 15.

¹¹Raj, interview by author, Louisville, KY, March 21, 2013. All the names of those interviewed have been changed to assure anonymity.

50 Nepali-speaking families to Bhutan to work the farmland in the southern part of the country. The king wanted to develop the southern part of the country, but the Northern Bhutanese people were unwilling to move south. Fast forward to 1988 and the government took a census listing all Nepali-speaking citizens as non-citizens. The government wanted to have a culturally homogeneous society that was like the *Drukpa*, or Northern Bhutanese people. All activities that were not part of traditional *Drukpa* culture were banned. Banned activities included Nepali language and the wearing of traditional Nepali attire. Raj's son said he remembers the military entered his school, took all the Nepali books, and burned them in the school yard.

A movement formed against the government to regain the right to speak and teach the Nepali language in August 1990. The government made a list of the people involved in the movement and arrested them. Raj was taken to jail and told he would remain there for thirteen years, unless he gathered his family and left Bhutan within seven days. The Bhutanese government would not allow Raj to sell his property or take anything with him. Before the government released him, they tortured him by piercing his feet with pins and crushing his thigh between two boards. Raj was badly injured, but led his family and religious followers out of Bhutan to India, and eventually to Nepal. Life in Nepal and India was difficult because Raj was sick and in pain, disabled from the torture for seven years. Raj's oldest son was only eight years old when the life of their family was turned upside down.

Raj lived in a camp in Nepal for eighteen years. Raj's role in the community did not change when he moved from Bhutan to Nepal. He continued to lead morning and evening prayers in the temple and perform rituals for people in the camp. In 2008 Raj's family was relocated to Louisville, Kentucky. When asked about the move from Nepal to the U.S. Raj said, "The Nepali people have had to come in learning to crawl like a baby

and slowly learn to walk and interact with Americans.”¹² I met Raj soon after he arrived and became friends with his family. Raj currently lives in a house owned by his oldest son. Raj has six children and most of them are grown. One of his daughters was married before the family left Nepal, and her family was resettled in another state. Raj currently leads a Wednesday night worship service for higher caste Hindus that live in his neighborhood. People call on Raj to conduct funerals, weddings, and other ceremonies that require a ritual expert. Raj’s story is typical for Nepali-speaking refugees from Bhutan, although most were not directly involved in the rebellion against the government. Several informants actually disagree with Raj and think the people should not have rebelled against the government of Bhutan.

Stories like Raj’s are corroborated by ethnographic publications about the refugees. Michael Hutt says the government wanted the nation to be ethnically united as one nation and one people. The Bhutanese government wanted everyone to be like the *Drukpa*, or Northern people of Bhutan. Villages, activities, and national dress deemed foreign (not *Drukpa*) were all banned.¹³ The desire for everyone to be Buddhist and speak only the majority language led many Nepali-speaking Hindus to rebel. Many Nepali-speaking people were arrested and harassed by the government. In late 1990 the first refugees from Bhutan began to arrive in eastern Nepal.¹⁴

The Nepali-speaking Bhutanese community first began moving to Louisville in 2008 through the UN Refugee Agency. The U.S. offered to resettle 60,000 of the estimated 107,000 Bhutanese refugees of Nepalese origin that were living in seven U.N. camps in southeastern Nepal, that had been their home for about seventeen years. Six

¹²Raj, interview by author, Louisville, KY, March 21, 2013.

¹³Hutt, *Unbecoming Citizens*, 175.

¹⁴More information about the contested history of Nepali-speaking Bhutanese people may be found in Aris, *Bhutan, the Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*, Hutt, *Unbecoming Citizens*, and various publications by David Gellner.

other nations including Australia, Canada, Norway, Netherlands, New Zealand, and Denmark offered to resettle 10,000 each.¹⁵ The UN attempted to keep families together; the UN was not concerned with keeping people from specific camps together. Hundreds of families, large and small, have been relocated to Louisville since 2008.

Once the refugees arrive in Louisville they are assigned to either Kentucky Refugee Ministry (KRM) or Catholic Charities. Both KRM and Catholic Charities distribute the refugees to several different apartment complexes throughout Louisville. Beginning in 2012, several Nepali families from apartment complexes on the south side of Louisville began buying houses in a new housing development near Fern Creek, Kentucky, a suburb of Louisville.

When Nepali refugees arrive in Louisville they normally struggle to find employment due to inadequate English and a lack of marketable skills. Nepali-speaking refugees usually arrive with large families of six to ten family members, and they typically live together in a single apartment. The families with older children who can work full time typically fare better than families with many young children who are in school. When a refugee family has four or five children working at Wal-Mart, or other low paying jobs, the family can pool their money and save for buying a home. The older Nepali people typically do not leave home except for English classes offered by churches and other organizations throughout the community. The elderly leave home to perform necessary *pujas* (ceremonies), or *bhajan*, where they worship together as a community. The elderly Nepali-speaking refugees use English only when they go to English class, so they usually cannot speak English well. The first Nepali-speaking refugees met were older people interested in learning about American culture, English, and Christianity. Free English lessons offered by Kenwood Baptist Church provided the means for entering the

¹⁵Manesh Shrestha, "First of 60,000 Refugees from Bhutan Arrive in U.S.," CNN, last modified March 25, 2008, accessed May 4, 2013. <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/03/25/bhutan.refugees/index.html>.

Nepali community in Louisville. *Bhajan, pujas*, and other Hindu ceremonies are usually segregated by caste. The continuation of the caste system is not universal, but it is widespread across the Nepali-speaking refugee community. The term caste presented a unique challenge when speaking with people from this community about ethnicity.

Peoples and Bailey write, different cultures divide the world differently and, “Language reflects how a culture divides up the world. And cultures often divide the world differently, constructing categories of natural and social reality out of ‘natural’ properties of things and people.”¹⁶ Language not only reflects culture but also shapes perceptions and worldviews. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis says,

Language is a guide to ‘social reality’. Though language is not ordinarily thought of as essential interest to the students of social science, it powerfully conditions our thinking about social problems and processes. Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society . . . The fact of the matter is that the “real world” is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group . . . The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.¹⁷

No clear distinction is made between caste and ethnicity in the Nepali language. The lack of distinction causes some initial confusion when talking to Nepali speakers about their ethnic identity. The Nepali language shapes the way Nepali-speaking people talk and think about ethnicity. The Nepali words *jaat* (caste) and *jaati* (tribe, ethnic group) are often used interchangeably in this community, even though there is an official difference in definition.

Nepal itself is a diverse, multiethnic nation.¹⁸ The anthropologists and missiologists who conduct research in this country have a difficult time categorizing the

¹⁶James Peoples and Garrick Bailey, *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, 9th ed. (Belmont, CA: Cengage Learning, 2012), 61.

¹⁷Edward Sapir, "The Status of Linguistics as a Science," *Language* 5, no. 4 (1929): 209.

¹⁸Dave Beine, "Nepal-Then and Now: A Critical Appraisal of the Ethnography of Nepal," *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* 25, no. 2 (1998): 163-90.

people because of the country's ethnic diversity and fluid categories of self-identity. Like the Nepali people in Nepal, the Nepali-speaking refugees in Louisville easily navigate this complex mixture of caste and ethnicity. Within their own group they usually have no problem with a diversity of self-identification. People interviewed identified with one or more of the following ethnic categories: Chetri, Pokrel, Regmi, Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Aryan, Nepali, Bhutanese, Bhutanese-Nepali, etc. Some of these labels are clearly ethnic, especially Rai and Gurung. Rai and Gurung are used by higher caste people as caste identifiers. Rai and Gurung are used by people from the Rai or Gurung tribe as surnames. A Canadian government produced document about the caste system says,

The caste system is very prevalent and very complex among Bhutanese refugees. It is the same system followed in Nepal. There are a total of 64 castes, groups and parties represented in the camps. The Hindus, who make up the majority of the Bhutanese refugees have four castes: namely the Brahmins, Chhetris, Vaishyas and Sudras. The Brahmins are considered to be the top followed by the Chhetris, Vaishyas and the Sudras respectively. The Sudras are considered the lowest of all the castes. The Kirats are a different caste, which is also divided into sub-castes, the Rais and the Limbus being the main branches. Rais and Limbus belong the Mongolian race and look physically different.¹⁹

Nobody in the Nepali-speaking refugee community self-identifies as a Sudra and few identify as Brahmin. The members of these castes are descended from Indo-European language speakers and often refer to themselves as Aryans, to distinguishing themselves from Mongols. The Mongols are Tibeto-Burman peoples who look more like East Asians than South Asians. The Mongols live in Nepal and have been incorporated into the caste system. Identity complications require the next section to divide by both caste and ethnicity.

Higher Caste and Mongol Nepali Speakers

Caste is a boundary marker within the community. Caste determines who one will marry, who one worships with, and how one worships. Hutt writes that the various

¹⁹IOM, *Cultural Profile: The Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal* (Damak, Nepal: International Organization for Migration, 2008), accessed February 21, 2015, http://www.peianc.com/sitefiles/File/resources/cultural_profiles/Bhutanese-Refugees-in-Nepal.pdf.

subcultures among this community have, “their own kind of *samskar* and their own ritual specialists: the Limbus and their Phedangmas, the Rais their Bijuwas, the Tamangs and Sherpas their lamas, and so on.”²⁰ Ritual and religious distinctions will be seen more clearly in the interviews.

Higher Caste

The higher caste Hindus were targeted by policies instituted in 1989 to ‘Bhutanize’ the peoples of southern Bhutan. Hutt writes that around this time, “Bhutanese officials, and also certain foreign authors, tended to stress the heterogeneous nature of the *Lhotshampa* community and to show a distinct prejudice in favour of groups that were perceived as being more assimilable into Bhutanese Drukpa culture. . . . The high caste Parbatiyas were often portrayed pejoratively as cunning exploiters of the non-Parbatiyas.”²¹ The term *Parbatiya* refers to the higher caste people, *Bahun*s and *Chetris*, while the non-Parbatiyas are the lower castes that are often referred to as Mongols. The lower caste people did not, and still do not, place as much emphasis on the importance of the caste system. The Bhutanese government saw the caste system as being a barrier to the Nepali speaking community’s integration into larger society and “many Drukpas judge privately that a process of desensitizing to caste of southern Bhutanese is the necessary prerequisite for their full acceptance into ‘Bhutanese’ culture.”²² The boundaries created by the caste system are why the Bhutanese government believed the Nepali-speaking community was a threat to societal integration. Caste boundaries include religion, food laws, and marriage restrictions.

²⁰Hutt, *Unbecoming Citizens*, 107.

²¹*Ibid.*, 99.

²²Brian C. Shaw, "Aspects of the "Southern Problem" and Nation-Building in Bhutan," in *Bhutan: Perspectives on Conflict and Dissent*, ed. Michael Hutt (Stirlingshire, Scotland: Kiscadale Publications, 1994), 157.

The chart below compares codes from interviews with lower caste and higher caste people. First the data was collected, entered into ATLAS.ti, coded, and queried. The number are not an important part of analysis, but Friese points out, when doing qualitative research “the most important part of the results provided by these tools is the data behind them and not the numbers.”²³ Charts and other results from querying the data help the researcher better “see” the data. The boundaries between the Nepali-speaking community and their neighbors differ between the higher caste and lower caste. The higher caste people tend to restrict food, religion, and marriage more than their lower caste Nepali-speaking neighbors.

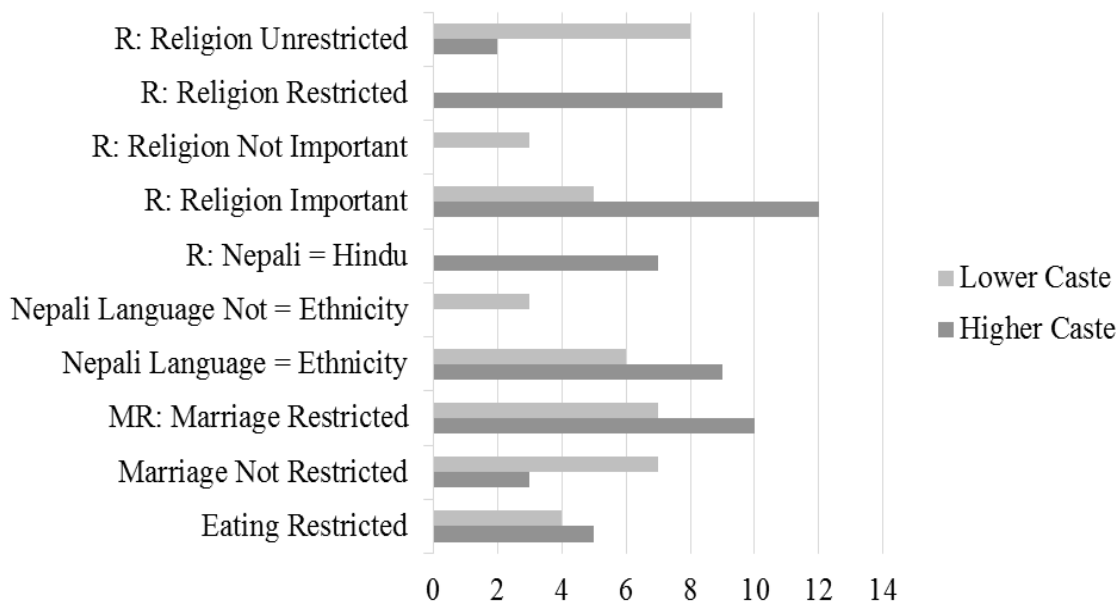


Figure 4. Boundaries

The higher caste Hindus in Nepali-speaking refugee community practice their own rituals, marry within their own caste, but work with people from different castes and

²³Friese, *Qualitative Data Analysis with Atlas.Ti*, 167.

different ethnic groups. Caste is still a major determinative factor in most of their lives, even in the diaspora. Most informants said that caste was still an important part of their lives. The higher and lower caste people do not worship or celebrate holidays together:

We have *bojan* (worship) on Wednesday nights. It is all people from the same caste. We celebrate festivals with family and friends from the same caste. We lived close to people from other castes in Nepal, Bhutan, and the US but we don't celebrate festivals with them or marry with them.²⁴

The higher caste people only worship with people from the higher castes, the lower caste people are not invited, and not welcome. Hindus from other castes said they have never been to a Hindu temple or worship ceremony in Louisville because that was only for higher castes.

Including the restrictions with whom they worship, the higher castes also see a tighter correlation of their ethnic identity being tied to Hinduism. Seven of the higher caste people said that being Nepali equals being a Hindu, none of the lower caste people responded this way. Only two people from higher castes said that someone from their family could become a Christian.

Dietary restrictions are also used to maintain boundaries. One informant said,

We have different castes: Brahmin/Chetri/others. Brahmins do not eat with people from different castes. In Bhutan some Brahmins would not let lower caste people into their homes, but that has changed in the camps and the US. The king of Bhutan tried to force everyone to be equal and act like Bhutanese people, so we left.²⁵

Brahmins will serve food to people from lower castes that come into their home out of common courtesy, but will not eat along with their visitors from a lower caste. A lower caste informant said,

The Brahmins discriminate more than us. They are aggressively teaching their children to follow the caste system. Brahmins hesitate to come to my church on Sundays in Louisville. Some do not allow me to enter their home or touch their food. One time a Chetri gave me some food the proper way by dropping it on my plate. I was full so I accidentally touched her arm. She gave me the food anyway

²⁴Binu, interview by author, Louisville, KY, August 13, 2014.

²⁵Reg, interview by author, Louisville, KY, August 5, 2014.

because she considered it polluted after I touched her arm and the food.²⁶

The same lower caste informant told the story of higher caste people not allowing him into, or near, their car. His presence would pollute the higher caste person's food.

Marriage is also restricted to caste. Only a few higher caste people said they would allow their children or grandchildren to marry people from lower castes. This contradicts what their children and grandchildren said. A grandchild and a niece of two higher caste informants said, "We are high caste people, we cannot marry people from a lower caste. My parents would never talk to me again if I married someone from a lower caste."²⁷

Another informant in the same age group said something similar when asked if he would allow his children to marry someone from another caste or culture:

Not supposed to, parents would not allow it. If I marry someone from a different caste I could not live around my parents. They would not allow my wife in the house and I would not be allowed to attend their funeral with my wife. They would make my life very difficult. One time I heard of someone who could not even attend his mother's funeral because he married someone from another caste. That is very shameful for a man not to be able to attend his mother or father's funeral. It's like he never existed.²⁸

Boundary markers are important because they determine who is and is not part of a homogeneous group. McGavran, a long time missionary in India writes, "Castes or tribes with high people consciousness will resist the gospel primarily because to them becoming a Christian means joining another people. They refuse Christ not for religious reasons, not because they love their sins, but precisely because they love their neighbors."²⁹ The boundaries drawn between who is and is not part of the same group may be determined by who they marry, who they will and will not eat with, who they

²⁶NBC, interview by author, Louisville, KY, July 21, 2014.

²⁷Binu, interview by author, Louisville, KY, August 13, 2014.

²⁸Kali, interview by author, Louisville, KY, August 14, 2014.

²⁹Donald A. McGavran and C. Peter Wagner, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 155.

worship with, and how they worship. The life story of Chetri will help illustrate some of these concepts.

Life story of Chetri. Chetri was interviewed in Louisville, Kentucky, two times in September 2014. The interviews were conducted in English, so the grammar is sometimes incorrect. Each interview was recorded with his permission. Chetri's narrative will include brief summaries with longer quotes from the interviews. Chetri's life provides a window into how Nepali-speaking people from Bhutan's self-conception changed across the diaspora. Hutt says, "In the absence of any substantive research on the social history of *Lhotshampas*, individual life histories provide an invaluable window."³⁰ Chase says the primary aim is not to discover how accurate the informant's account is, but to "understand the meanings people attach to those events."³¹

Chetri is a higher caste male in his 30s. He said his great-grandfather moved from Nepal to Bhutan, and three generations of his family saw Bhutan as their home. Chetri's great-grandfather's family left Sikkim (then part of Nepal) searching for a better life. Chetri says of his life in Bhutan:

I was so little, only 5. I don't know too much. I remember my grandma, she used to carry on her back, she used to walk with water from far away over the mountains on a small path through the jungle. They would bring water in the morning for use all day long. We had a big house with external kitchen. Nearby the house they had a small farmhouse for cattle. They had much land for farming. They farmed coconut, jackfruit, and a lot of things. I used to climb on the tree like, betel nut. That plant was tall and I would go all the way up and collect the fruit in a cup. They plant lots of betel nut, jackfruit, coconut, and guava. They had a very big farm. My grandfather was known for having a big house, big land, cattle, and goats. All the people knew him as an important person.³²

³⁰Hutt, *Unbecoming Citizens*, 108.

³¹Susan E. Chase, "Narrative Inquiry: Still a Field in the Making," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2011), 424.

³²Chetri, interview by author, Louisville, KY, September 7, 2014.

The Nepali-speaking farmers also sent their children to Nepali school in Bhutan. The teachers often came from other countries. Some were Indian, others Nepali people from Bhutan, and some were Drukpas. When asked about Drukpas he said,

Drukpas, they are real people from Bhutan. Drukpa were born in Bhutan. We know them as proper Bhutanese. They were born over there and lived there for many generations. They made the country. They brought Nepali people from Nepal to develop the country. I heard that they brought 16 houses from Nepal and used them as workers to build roads and the country by the *Lhotshampa*, Nepali people. The king of Nepal and Bhutan decided to bring people from Nepal to Bhutan and they moved them to develop the country. That's how we began moving to Bhutan.³³

Chetri saw the Drukpas as being “proper Bhutanese” and his own people as immigrants, separate from Drukpas. The Nepali-speaking people in the south of Bhutan were distinguishable from the Drukpas because the Nepali-speaking people had a unique language, common prehistory, and distinctive cultural practices. These distinctions and the idea of one nation, one language are what caused a rift between the “proper Bhutanese” and the Nepali-speaking people in the south.

Chetri’s family lived in Bhutan peacefully and prosperously for a long time. People from different castes lived around each other, working together on farms. The villages were not very large and some people lived quite far from one another. The people in the villages usually worked for the large land-owners. Chetri’s family owned a large farm and their house was two or three miles away from the nearest house. Chetri’s family life was peaceful and prosperous until Nepali-speaking people gathered to fight against the government to protect their culture and religion. The Bhutanese people wanted to integrate the Nepali-speaking community into their own community.

A lot of people gathered to fight against the government. Every person, every house, every single person needed to be out. Our people fought for our rights. They wanted democracy. Inside Bhutan the king ruled the country and they don't want that one. Our people needed support from them, they needed their rights. Like, actually, that's on them. Our political leaders know themselves, what they did for the king how he treated us like that. The political leaders they knew, but we didn't know what's wrong. Our father, grandfather, the educated people they listened to them. They

³³Chetri, interview by author, Louisville, KY, September 7, 2014.

went the way they were showed. They don't know about political or anything. They had no concept about politics before the trouble started. They created parties, everything and created big issues. My father used to say that the Bhutan government did nothing wrong. They did good. They provided everything for the needs of the people. I used to think, "What's wrong? They did good." My father had an education past grade eight. They provided English speaking education in school. You are supposed to learn the language and culture of the people you are around. I am in the US, I must learn your language and culture. It is important for me to get by. That was the problem in Bhutan. They want the people to speak Jonka. It must be. Our people don't like it. They don't want to wear dress, clothes, the national clothes. The Bhutan people have their own nationality. Before they don't want that one. They didn't want to be like Bhutanese people, they don't like it. Right now, we didn't see that. There were a lot of different things.³⁴

Chetri felt like his people failed when they rebelled against the Bhutanese people. The rebellion was a failure because they are now living in a new land where the Nepali-speaking people have to learn a new language and culture. The Nepali-speaking Bhutanese community lost all they had to protect their language and culture. Now the Nepali-speaking refugees have lost their property in Bhutan, plus they still have not been given the opportunity to maintain their culture free from outside influence. According to Chetri, if they had done what the Bhutanese government wanted, the Nepali-speaking community would still have their farms. When asked if this was correctly, that he and his father felt they should not have rebelled he said,

Our people did wrong. They are not supposed to do that. When the people were not leaving the country, before getting out of the country our life was good. We used to have land, home and they took our homes. They told us to go back to our country, go back to Nepal. That is your country. You can no longer be over here. They did like that. They did a lot of bad things to our people. They arrested, tortured people. My father got out. We moved from our house from Bhutan to India. We had no safety. He had to protect our family. If my father did not get out of the country they would have killed him. We went through India to get to Nepal. We got out to India. After that we were waiting for a good time to get back to Bhutan. The issue kept getting bigger. The government kicked us out. We could no longer be over there. We were scared about this. The Bhutanese government gave the army and police the freedom to do whatever they wanted with us. They could beat, kill, or anything to us. They did a lot of bad things. They burned houses, Nepali books, clothes, everything.³⁵

³⁴Chetri, interview by author, Louisville, KY, September 7, 2014.

³⁵Ibid.

The burning of books, houses, and random arrests is a common story in this community. The Nepali-speaking peoples of Bhutan left their homes to protect their families and their way of life. When Chetri was asked how his life changed in the move from Bhutan to Nepal he said, “Life was very hard in Nepal. In Bhutan we had everything we needed. We owned land, had houses, buffalo, and farms.”³⁶ In Nepal the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese people lived in bamboo huts with plastic roofs. Chetri’s family arrived before the camps were set up and they had to carve space out of the jungle to build huts. The people of Nepal did not accept the Nepali-speaking refugees as Nepali people. Nepali citizens did not give them food, shelter, or any help. When the UN arrived they began distributing food, but only enough to keep the refugees alive. Chetri said, “Many people got sickness, they died day by day. Like around five, ten, fifteen per day. Small kids and everyone got diarrhea, cholera, vomiting, and everything killed people.”³⁷ After some time, the UN and the Red Cross set up more permanent camps for the people to live in and provided better medical care.

How did Chetri’s family feel about the move from Bhutan to Nepal? Do they want to return to Bhutan? Chetri said that, initially, there were large protests demanding the return of their property in Bhutan. The large rallies did not produce any results. The community lost everything they had, and the Bhutanese government denied it all. Chetri said that many of the refugees in Louisville would go back if they could have their property back, but everything is gone. The Nepali-speaking Bhutanese community has given up hope and now sees Louisville as their home.

Chetri said the UN gave the refugees everything but meat. When asked Chetri if he eats meat, he said, “Yes I eat goat, chicken, duck fish that’s all. I don’t eat beef or pork or any other meat.”³⁸ Why do people in his family eat goat and Rai people do not eat

³⁶Chetri, interview by author, Louisville, KY, September 7, 2014.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

goat? He replied, “They don’t like it. They won’t even touch a goat. They have rules we don’t have.”³⁹ The Rai people are considered different from Chetri’s group, the higher caste Hindus. The higher caste people have different rituals, ceremonies, and religious rules. The Nepali-speaking community generally does not intermarry between groups. Even with a common language and prehistory these groups draw boundaries within the larger Nepali-speaking group. The groups are based on caste and tribe.

What did you call yourself when asked about your ethnic identity in Nepal?

This one is actually, I'm not able to say. I can't say what I am. What shall I say? What is my identity? I was born in Bhutan, I go to Nepal. I grew up in Nepal. I have education in Nepal. We lived there for 20-21 years. After that we came to the US. What is our identity? We know who we are ourselves. We have the Nepali tongue, speaking, language, and everything. Maybe we can say Bhutanese Nepali? Before they used to say Bhutanese. But right now they start saying Bhutanese Nepali. Some of them they say Nepali. I am confused. What do I say? We know that we are Nepali-speaking Hindus.⁴⁰

Chetri bases his family’s identity on Hinduism and the Nepali language. He does not like using ethnic labels like Nepali or Bhutanese because they do not match his self-perceived identity. Self-identity is even more problematic for Chetri’s children who attend public schools in Louisville. Chetri’s children spend much of their day learning from American teachers in English and playing with American children.

Chetri’s children attend American public schools where they play, eat, and learn alongside American children. What would Chetri think of his children marrying an American? His reply is informative,

Actually, nobody wants to marry someone from a different caste. Nobody wants that one. According to the religion, it’s not good. If they are married, we are to accept it. If they make their future right, we accept it. They have to live a long time, for their whole life.⁴¹

³⁹Chetri, interview by author, Louisville, KY, September 7, 2014.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

Chetri does not believe his children would want to marry someone from a different caste because their community believes it is not good to marry outside one's own caste. But, Chetri knows a marriage that breaks caste rules is something that might happen because his children are being raised in the United States. If his children marry someone from a different caste or ethnic group he would accept it, under the right circumstances.

Chetri's life story provides interesting insight into the cultural identity of the Nepali-speaking refugees from Bhutan. Chetri finds his identity in the Nepali language and Hinduism. Language and religion are two things that have followed he and his community in their movement from Bhutan to Nepal and finally to the United States. Chetri and his family believe the rebellion against the Bhutanese government was wrong and now believe that their community should have attempted to learn the language of the majority population of Bhutan. If the Nepali-speaking community in Bhutan had gone along with what the Bhutanese government wanted, they would still have their homes and farms. Today the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese are learning the language and culture of the majority population in a very different land. They also had to start with almost nothing.

How should evangelical missiologists categorize someone like Chetri? It does not seem the issue of ethnic identity can be solved by "definitional fiat," but by more and better research concentrated on specific communities in specific locations.⁴² When Chetri is asked about his ethnic identity he gets frustrated because he does not know which label to use. Chetri was not accepted as Nepali in Nepal and he does not feel he can self-identify as Bhutanese because he believes Drukpa people are "proper Bhutanese" people. This will be explored in more detail following the life story of Rai. Rai is from a tribal group that has their own distinct religious and cultural practices. The Rai's are often identified with the larger Nepali-speaking community because of their common language

⁴² Andreas Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 208.

and history of migration from Nepal to Bhutan, back to Nepal, and finally to the United States.

Mongol

In Pommaret's book, *Ethnic Mosaic: Peoples of Bhutan*, he recognizes the difference between the higher caste Nepali speakers and those referred to as "Mongols." The Mongols "originally spoke languages of the Tibeto-Burman family. The religious background of these groups is diverse: they can be Buddhist or Hindu; a few are Christian. Even if they belong to one of the major religions, shamanistic practices are still prevalent among some of them."⁴³ The Mongols consists of Rais, Limbus, Mangars, Sunuwars, Gurungs, Sherpas, Tamangs, and others. Most of the Mongols in Louisville are Rais and Limbus who are "Hindus with a low status in the caste hierarchy."⁴⁴ Pommaret also mentions that they do not commonly intermarry between different groups and have maintained their own shamanistic practices.

Ethnic identity is situational in character therefore, there is a need to study inter-group boundary mechanisms. Some of these inter-group boundary mechanisms include religion, marriage, and food laws. The Mongols are not as strict in maintaining these boundaries as the higher caste Nepali-speaking refugees. The lower castes are not as strict as the Brahmins about marriage and religion. Comparisons of how the different cast groups maintain boundaries can be seen in the following figure. Figure 5 displays boundaries maintained by Nepali-speaking refugees in Louisville.

⁴³Francoise Pommaret, "Ethnic Mosaic: Peoples of Bhutan," in *Bhutan: Mountain Fortress of the Gods*, ed. Christian Schicklgruber and Pommaret Françoise (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1998), 58.

⁴⁴Ibid., 58.

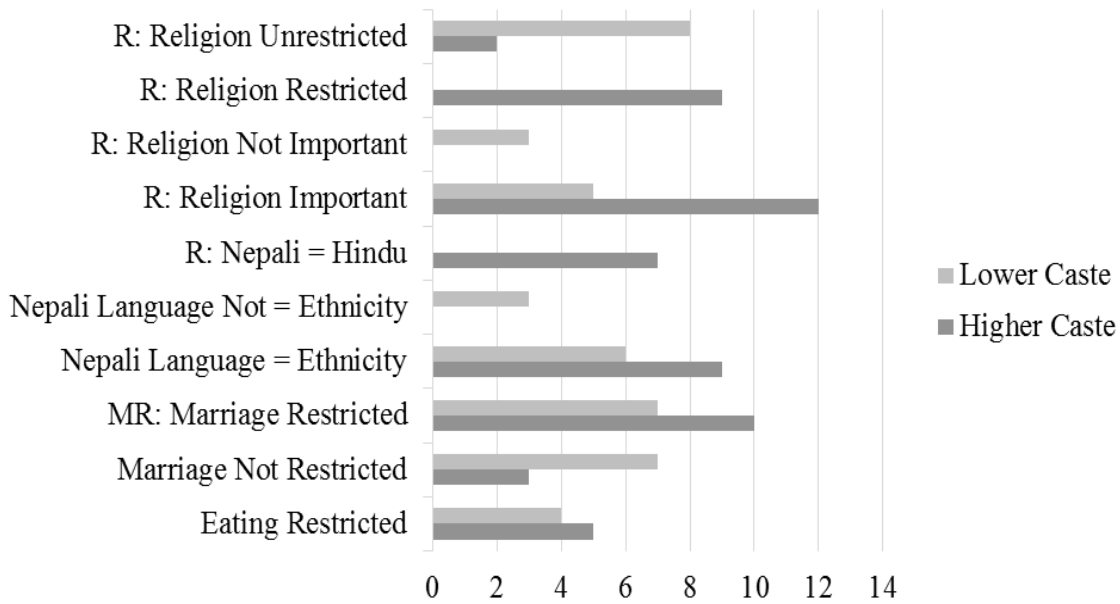


Figure 5. Boundaries

The Mongols tended to see religion as something that is based on individual preference. Most lower caste people did not see Hinduism as part of their ethnic identity. One girl whose younger brother recently became a Christian said,

Rai clan people can follow any religion they like. I fast on Tuesdays and pray to Ganesh. We don't do anything with Hindu priests. Religion is not an important part of being Nepali, we follow what we like. It is our choice.⁴⁵

Christians from among this group tended to have a different answer to this question. More than one responded by saying that they now find their identity in Christ. Christian Mongols now view Christianity as an important part of their ethnic identity. Christianity as a part of ethnic identity is illustrated well by one man's story about the role of caste and Christianity among the Mongols:

In grade 2 or 3 I ate and lived with a lower caste boy. I was told that my teeth would fall out, turn black and I would die from doing this. I was scared for a long time and when 2 or 3 years passed and my teeth didn't turn black I rebelled against the system. Older generations are convinced caste is important, but newer generations not as much. The Brahmans discriminate more than we do. They are aggressively

⁴⁵Brai, interview by author, Louisville, KY, August 22, 2014.

teaching their children to follow the caste system. Brahmans hesitate to come to my church on Sundays in Louisville. Some do not allow him to enter their home or touch their food. One time a Chetri gave him some food the proper way by dropping it on his plate. He was full so he accidentally touched her arm. She gave him the food anyway because she considered it polluted after he touched her arm and the food. Many lower caste people are finding their identity in Christ and being lifted up out of the system. Brahmans are wondering why their former servants have changed.⁴⁶

Many lower caste people have become Christians and abandoned the caste system. The abandonment of the caste system allows lower caste people upward mobility. It has also given them a new identity found outside the system where they have been identified by Brahmans as being sub-human. The lower caste people do not see religion as part of their ethnic identity, but there are other boundaries.

Marriage is restricted among lower caste Nepali-speaking people, but in ways that are different from higher caste people. One lady's answer to a question about marriage is illustrative of this point.

Yes, I would let my children marry someone from another caste or cultural background. My daughter is married to an American man. But, I would not let my children marry someone from the Chetri or Brahmin caste. They have bad thoughts and discriminate against people from other castes/cultures.⁴⁷

She was adamant that her children could not marry someone from one of the higher castes. She did not want the problems that would bring into her family. She was very open to her children becoming Christians or any other religion, but marriage was something she wanted to control. The other way marriage was restricted by Mongols was by religion. Christians all responded by saying they would allow their children to marry anyone, as long as their spouse was a Christian.

The people referred to as Mongols are not a homogeneous group. Mongols have marriage restrictions within the group. One informant from the Rai clan said that he had trouble with his family when he married a Subba woman. The Subba people eat goats and speak a different language than the Rai people. This man's family was angry with

⁴⁶NBC, interview by author, Louisville, KY, July 21, 2014.

⁴⁷Mon, interview by author, Louisville, KY, August 7, 2014.

him for marrying a woman from a different ethnic group. The groups have different rituals and dietary habits, so they normally do not intermarry.

Dietary restrictions are also used to maintain boundaries. Goat meat was a common restriction among people from the Rai clan.

We eat pork, chicken, fish but not beef or goat meat. We believe Rai people will not live a normal life and will get sick from eating goat meat. It will affect not only you but also your children. They will have problems because our ancestors forbid the eating of goat meat. One time my husband ate goat meat and got really sick from it.⁴⁸

The Mongols restrict the eating of goat meat and most will not eat beef. They do not have restrictions on who they will eat with, but they restrict what they will eat. Mongols are allowed to eat with anyone, unlike the Brahmans.

The life story of Rai will illustrate the differences between the higher caste Nepali-speaking refugees and the lower caste Nepali-speaking refugees originally from Bhutan. Rai's life will also illustrate some of the boundary markers between groups within the Nepali-speaking refugees that were forced out of Bhutan.

Life story of Rai. Rai was interviewed in Louisville, Kentucky twice in September 2014. The interviews were conducted in English, so the grammar is sometimes incorrect. Each interview was recorded with his permission. This section will include brief summaries with longer quotes from the interviews. Rai's life provides a window into how Nepali-speaking Mongol people from Bhutan's self-conception changed across the diaspora. Rai is a married man in his 40s who lives with his wife, children, and father in Louisville. Rai's wife is from a different Mongol clan and her insights along with those of his father are included in Rai's life story.

Rai was thirteen years old when his family was forced to flee Bhutan. He said that his great-grandfather's generation was the first to move their families to Bhutan.

⁴⁸Brai, interview by author, Louisville, KY, August 22, 2014.

Rai's great-grandfather's family moved from Nepal to become farmers. Rai's family raised corn, millet, rice, potatoes, ginger, and cattle. His family had bulls and buffaloes used to plow the fields, but they did not own goats. When asked why they did not have goats he replied, "Rai people don't eat goat."⁴⁹ Rai's wife laughed when he said this and said that her people eat goats. She also said her people speak a different language from Rai's people, even though both clans moved from Nepal to Bhutan at around the same time. Rai and his wife said in Bhutan they referred to themselves as *Lhotshampa* when interacting with Bhutanese people, but among themselves by their family, or clan name.

Rai comes from the Rai clan. The Rai people from Bhutan are mostly Nepali speakers, but they also have many dialects within the Rai language. Rai's father speaks the Rai language, but he does not speak it well. Rai said that his people worship different gods than the higher caste people. Before Rai became a Christian his family would sacrifice pigs and chickens during the Hindu holiday *Dussehra*. The family would eat the sacrificed animals together. Rai's father was a priest for his family because he would sacrifice the animals to the gods so the gods would be happy and bless his family. In Bhutan they sacrificed animals to appease the gods and their ancestors.

When Rai was asked about his life in Bhutan, he replied,

It was hard sometimes. My mom had to do work, my father had to do different type of work. He had a big family. I have 4 brothers above me and two sisters. Seven children. On that type we had problem with money. He was only working on a farm so we didn't have much money. It was difficult.⁵⁰

What was difficult about your life in Bhutan besides problems with money? Did you have problems with other castes?

Yes, there were problems. The high caste Brahmins did not allow us to go to their temple. The same problem in Nepal too. We didn't worry too much about their system. I don't know much about conflicts, but we had conflicts. I don't have examples. They did not allow us to join their worship and meet with them. They did not allow us to enter the temple and worship their gods. We worked together as a

⁴⁹Rai, interview by author, Louisville, KY, September 16, 2014.

⁵⁰Ibid.

team, but we didn't interact outside work. During my father's time there were big problems with the caste system. But the schools helped people understand we need to go to school together, work together because we are all people. We built a bridge together so we could go to school. We ate together at the school but not in homes. During my father's time caste was very bad. Second generation it was ok. All the children from different castes ate together, studied together everywhere but in the homes.⁵¹

Going to public schools together helped Rai's generation have better relations across castes than his father's generation. The Nepali-speaking community worked and studied together, but did not worship together, or go to one another's homes. Besides going to school and working together, the higher and lower castes also share similar stories about the end of life in Bhutan.

Can you tell me about how your family left Bhutan?

I don't know much about the conflict between the Bhutanese government and Nepali people. They wouldn't let us celebrate our religion, teach culture. There was a war between the Nepali people and Bhutanese people about this. So, after one or two years when the war started in 1989 or so. In 1992 we left the country. I don't know much about that but my parents feared the people from the army. They would come into our house and ask if we had been to the political meeting. They were harassing us. My dad decided to get his family out of the country. We stayed in India for about one week at the border. The bus took us to the camp in Nepal. We rode with a big group.⁵²

The Nepali-Speaking Bhutanese people rebelled because they could no longer celebrate their own religion, or teach their own cultural heritage to their children. Even though Rai's father was not involved in the political side of the rebellion, he was harassed by the Bhutanese military enough that he no longer felt safe and fled to India. He left everything behind in Bhutan. Rai's father said of the rebellion against the Bhutanese government:

The Bhutanese government did nothing bad, some of the people made the government unhappy. We had to leave our country because Nepali people made the Bhutanese people unhappy. For us, the Bhutanese did not do bad. It was the Brahmin leaders who did not like the Bhutanese telling them they had to change. We were alright and happy.⁵³

⁵¹Rai, interview by author, Louisville, KY, September 16, 2014.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

Rai's father's statement is similar to Chetri's, except Chetri did not associate the people who led the rebellion with caste. Rai saw the leaders of the Nepali-speaking people as Brahmins who were unwilling to change. The Bhutanese government recognized this as well. The Bhutanese government saw the caste system and Nepali language as something that would prevent this community from integrating with larger Bhutanese society. After the Nepali-speaking community left Bhutan they had to accept more change.

Life in Nepal was difficult for Rai's family. In Bhutan they had their own home, rice, and everything they needed for life. When Rai's family arrived in the refugee camp they were placed in a bamboo hut with a plastic roof. Rai said that many people died due to the change in weather. Besides a change in environment, they had to adjust to a change in neighbors. Now the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese were no longer in a country that had a different majority language and culture, but they were surrounded by people much like themselves.

Unlike Chetri, Rai said that sometimes the Nepali people were kind to his family. Nepali people helped Rai's family find work to provide for themselves. He said,

When I was studying life was good in Nepal, but there was nothing for me to do. I got rice from the UN every fifteen days. It was good for me while I was learning. After I was married I had to do many things. First it was good, secondly we had to do many things. We had to earn money. Did many different jobs, not only one job. First I started working on the road. Then we did labor carrying wood, big logs and worked in coal mines in India. I worked in coal mines for 3 years. We had no problems with caste in the coal mine. There were many Christians. I first heard the gospel in the coal mines. In the camp there were Christians. They had a different type of faith in the camp. They had a different type of faith. They did everything different.⁵⁴

Rai was first exposed to Christianity while working at a coal mining camp in India. Rai's Christian faith is an important part of his journey from Bhutan, to Nepal, and finally to the United States.

⁵⁴Rai, interview by author, Louisville, KY, September 16, 2014.

Rai and his family moved to the United States as refugees in 2011. He and his family became Christians shortly after they moved to Louisville. Rai said that in Nepal they had many problems worshipping different kinds of gods, trying to discover things that would make the gods happy. Rai found hope in the fact that God does not require animal sacrifice; God's own son was sacrificed for sin.

My life has changed a lot. I was very bad in Nepal. Now I do not have hate. I wonder because of my own life when I realized the real life in Jesus my life was different. Now I am different. In Nepal I used to work and have difficulties all my life and with my family. But when I became a Christian in the US its different things happen to me. I am trying to be a good father and husband now. I'm not good, but I'm trying to. I'm still a sinner, but God is helping me.⁵⁵

Now Rai finds his identity as a Christian. Rai's father still clings to their old gods and follows their old ways. Rai's father still practices Rai cultural practices while the rest of his family has changed and adapted to life in a new world.

The Rai people have a distinct language, common prehistory, and distinctive cultural practices that have been maintained at different levels in different families. Rai (the man) now works with mostly Americans and his children attend public school. Rai's family speaks the Nepali language well, but is mostly unaware of their Rai cultural heritage. Rai even admits that he does not know much about being Rai because he grew up around other Nepali-speaking people, instead of a Rai majority. Is Rai part of the Rai people, Nepali people, or Bhutanese-Nepali people? As Douglass says of Juan de Onate when answering the question about his ethnic identity, yes he is all the above.⁵⁶ Rai's own ethnic identity is contextual; it depends on the time and space he occupies. He can self-identify as a Rai person, Nepali, Bhutanese-Nepali, Christian or any of these identities. These identities allow him to change boundaries between ethnicities and even transcend them. But, boundaries are still important in church planting. What are the

⁵⁵Rai, interview by author, Louisville, KY, September 16, 2014.

⁵⁶William A. Douglass, "In Search of Juan De Onate: Confessions of a Cryptoessentialist," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 56, no. 2 (2000): 137-62.

boundaries between higher caste Aryan Nepali-speaking refugees from Bhutan and the lower caste Mongols that many place into the same group? Boundaries between the Mongols and higher caste people will be explored in the next section.

Interpreting the Nepali-speaking Diaspora Community

The people in this community identified themselves differently in different circumstances and different locations. When the Nepali-speaking refugees were in Bhutan most identified themselves as Nepali, in Nepal as Bhutanese, and in the United States as Bhutanese-Nepali, or some variation of a hyphenated ethnic group name. The ethnic identities used when conversing with outsiders were usually different than the ethnic identity used when conversing with insiders. For example, Chetri said they would identify themselves as Nepali in Bhutan, but in the United States he sometimes identifies himself as Aryan from the Chetri caste, or Bhutanese-Nepali. Identification depends on who he is interacting with, the preferred group name he hears from peers, or what he feels comfortable telling people. Chetri admits that the topic of ethnic identity is difficult because of their complicated background.

As stated in the literature review, diaspora was originally used in reference to the Jewish dispersion from Israel or the Greek dispersion during the Hellenistic period. The experiences of these diaspora communities are used as an ‘ideal type.’⁵⁷ The Jewish people clearly longed for their homeland during the diaspora so you often find references to other diaspora communities longing for their homeland. The Nepali-speaking diaspora community from Bhutan does not long for a homeland. This was true in the past, many years ago, when the Nepali-speaking refugees first arrived in Nepal. But, the refugee community from Bhutan has long since given up on the idea of returning to Bhutan. Today this community has settled into life in the United States while attempting to

⁵⁷William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991): 84.

maintain ties with family members scattered across the world. The refugees from Bhutan are less concerned about their roots and homeland than about routes, a recreated group identity in multiple locations developed through transnational ties. The Nepali-speaking Bhutanese identity is not coupled to people and land like the Jewish people, but to a new identity formed in a new land.⁵⁸

For example, the weekend of February 14, 2015, I recorded a four-day ceremony for the death of my friend's mother. This particular ceremony is held one year after the death of the person's parent. His mother died in Bhutan and she lived with his younger brother. Since most of their family now lives in the United States and he is the oldest brother, he was responsible for paying for the ceremony. He asked me to record most of the ceremony so he could copy the video on DVD and post it on You Tube for his family in the diaspora. By performing this ceremony and posting it on the internet, he maintains ties with his family in the diaspora.

Diaspora people are marked by their hybridity. These refugees have hybrid, liminal identities that are negotiated depending on where they are living and the part of society they are interacting with. If refugees are marked by hybridity, what holds them together besides a category of difference? Instrumentalists would emphasize the fact that these people are hybrids and focus on their liminal identities. As Wimmer writes, they assert "that ethnicity is constructed, contextually variable, contested, and contingently eventful."⁵⁹ People cannot choose an ethnic identity and form something out of nothing. The anti-anti-essentialists are right when they say instrumentalists vastly oversimplify ethnic identity by declaring all diaspora peoples hybrids. Cultures do not mix together producing mixtures, but the mixtures maintain properties of older cultures.

⁵⁸James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1994): 308.

⁵⁹Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making*, 204.

The Nepali-speaking diaspora community has different labels in different contexts, but people in this community have maintained many of the boundaries they have had for centuries. The boundaries are different between different groups in this community; the higher caste people focus on caste distinctions more than the lower caste people. For example, the lower caste people do not participate in the Hindu ceremonies performed by the higher caste Brahmins. The Brahmins have weekly worship services in various homes within their community emphasizing their Hindu identity. The lower caste people from this community do not see Hinduism as part of their cultural identity. Not one lower caste person saw Hinduism as part of their ethnic identity.

Besides religious differences, the Mongols and higher caste people also have different food boundaries and marriage boundaries. The lower caste Nepali-speaking refugees cannot eat with Brahmin people and different tribes amongst the lower caste refugees have different food laws. The Subba eat goat meat, while the Rai clan people generally avoid it. Also, these two clans usually do not intermarry. The lower caste people have fewer marriage regulations than the higher caste people. The higher caste Brahmin do not allow their children to marry people from lower castes and say that nobody would want to marry across caste anyway.

It is easy to assume this group is homogeneous. The Nepal-speaking refugees appear to be homogeneous when one observes them from the outside. The Nepali-speaking people from Bhutan have lived next door to one another for many years across different countries; they work together, and speak the same language. To understand differences in this community researchers need to take the time to discover the boundaries discussed above.

According to Barth, culture can move anywhere and be transmitted to anyone, but ethnicity is about social boundaries.⁶⁰ How do the Nepali-speaking refugees that

⁶⁰Fredrik Barth, introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1998), 15.

originated in Bhutan categorize themselves and place boundaries between themselves and other groups? The boundaries drawn by different groups within this group are based on caste, tribe, and the regulation of food and marriage. The best way to begin church planting and evangelism among people in this diverse community is to focus on castes. Caste is an important part of the Nepali-speaking refugee community. Caste determines who they eat with, who they worship with, and who they marry.

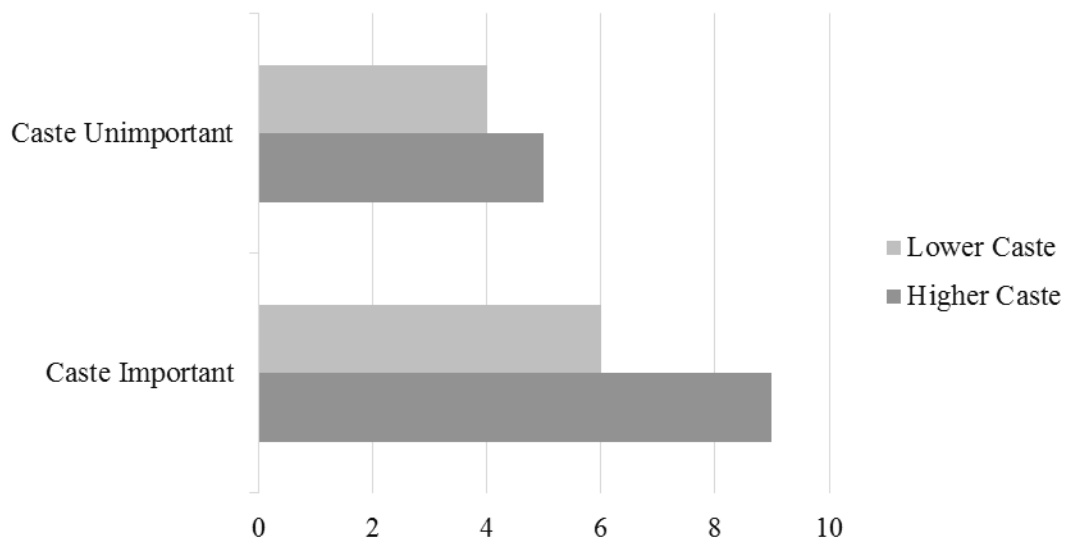


Figure 6. Caste across both groups

Separate evangelism and church planting strategies among each group including Brahmins, Chetris, Vaishyas, Sudras, and Kirats (Mongols) is not needed. But, there needs to be a strategy that distinguishes between castes. People from Brahmin and Chetri caste worship together, intermarry, and eat together. But, people from the Kirats (Mongols) do not marry people from higher castes like the Brahmins and Chetris, but they do often associate with people from Vaishyas and Sudras. Caste is the most distinct

ethnic boundary within this community. This is not one community that can be reached with one strategy.

Evangelical church planters need to be more careful about how the concept of people groups is used in church planting strategy. A broadly defined people group is a good place to start, but one needs to take the time to discover boundaries within groups. Missiologists also need to be more humble in labeling people groups. Ethnicity is a concept that should be defined by the people themselves as an ethnographic phenomena rather than an analytic tool for separating people into distinct, labeled groups defined by missiologists.

The anti-essentialists would argue that even the boundaries are disappearing, not just a mixture of ethnic hyphenations. But, boundaries are not disappearing. Friedman writes,

Rather, they seem to be erected on every street corner of every declining neighborhood of our world. It is true that a little bit of this and that are flowing across all sorts of boundaries, but they are not being used to celebrate hybridity. Quite the contrary, they are incorporated and naturalized by group formation that strives to homogenize and maintain social order within its own boundaries.⁶¹

People in the higher caste Bhutanese-Nepali community are working hard to maintain these boundaries by teaching their children the importance of the caste system. The lower caste people are also maintaining boundaries by forbidding marriage to higher caste people.

Unreached people group lists are still useful in identifying where large groups of unbelievers live, so missionaries can know where to begin. But, missionaries need to be aware of what unreached people group lists are, incomplete maps of the world. Maps do not tell details about road conditions, construction, or every curve in the road. The correspondence between a map and reality is symbolic and analogical, not a perfect

⁶¹Jonathan Friedman, "The Hybridization of Roots and the Abhorrence of the Bush," in *Modernities, Class, and the Contradictions of Globalization*, ed. Kajsia Ekholm Friedman and Jonathan Friedman. (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press), 277.

picture of reality itself.⁶² The way ahead in applying what is known about people groups and what has been demonstrated in these studies will be heavily influenced by Paul Hiebert's writings on critical realism. Critical realism will be discussed in the concluding chapters of this dissertation where cross-case conclusions will be drawn. The cross case conclusions will be about these different diaspora groups and how missiologists can best move forward in the cause of reaching peoples on the move across the world.

⁶²Paul G. Hiebert, *The Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 77.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this dissertation has been to investigate the validity of traditional people group strategy when working with diaspora peoples. This dissertation has two main research questions:

1. Diaspora peoples cannot be placed into distinct groups without seriously distorting reality. What does this mean when trying to reach diaspora peoples in North America?
2. How do diaspora people draw boundaries between their group and the “others”? Do they draw boundaries?

The distinct boundaries between people groups are eroded by diaspora peoples moving to urban areas in North America. The desire to reach people groups has driven missiologists to place diaspora peoples into distinct categories of ethnic groups; categories that do not exist in reality. Modern nation states have not even been able to exist as homogeneous wholes. Anthony Smith writes, “Most modern states have been ethnically plural and heterogeneous, and most nationalists have sought national unity, and only rarely national homogeneity.”¹ Diaspora peoples have often been forced to move from one country to the next; surrounded by different majority groups in each new location. People determine their identity based on the ‘other.’ The changes have often caused diaspora peoples to have fluid identities.

The theory that diaspora peoples have fluid identities as described by anti-anti-essentialists such as Douglass, Friedman, and others puts a major wrinkle in the idea that diaspora peoples can be placed into distinct categories.

¹ Anthony Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 147.

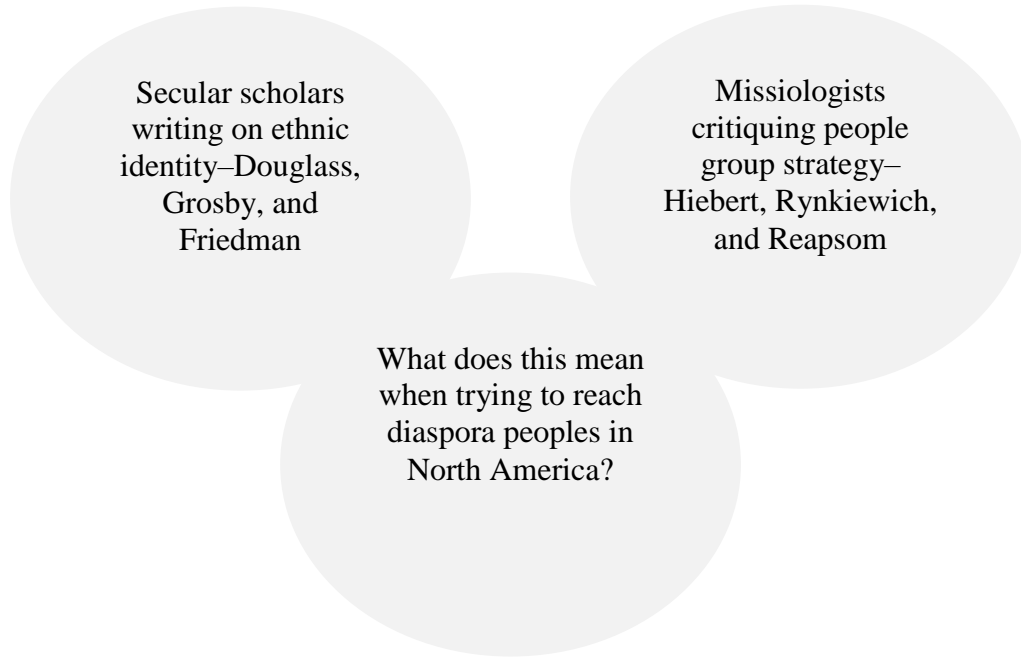


Figure 7. Research map

The figure above provides what Creswell calls a “research map – of existing literature.”²

The research map shows how this research fits into existing literature.

Paul Hiebert wrote that people group strategy is based on early theories of sociology. Early anthropologists focused on studying small societies and viewed them as closed systems. Hiebert says that today anthropologists have realized “peasant and urban societies cannot be cut up into distinct, bounded people groups without seriously distorting the picture . . . consequently, we cannot really speak of distinct people groups or hope to generate people movements in complex settings.”³ Hiebert’s statement fits with the findings in the literature review. Cultural anthropology has moved on in their assessment of people groups in diaspora settings while missiology has not. Therefore,

²John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013), 133.

³Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 92.

people group strategy is not helpful when attempting to reach diaspora peoples. Diaspora peoples have fluid, liminal identities. Peoples in the diaspora cannot be categorized by people groups without severely distorting reality. The qualitative research in this dissertation attempted to answer the following question: what does this mean when trying to reach diaspora peoples in North America?

Chapter 1 was focused on laying out the research methodology for this dissertation. The research methodology included a literature review, semi-structured interviews, narrative research, grounded theory, and participant observation.

Chapter 2 provided a framework for relating findings of this dissertation to other related works in the same field of study. It was a summary and analysis of the relevant literature from the fields of missiology and cultural anthropology, especially as it concerns diaspora and ethnic identity. The literature review came from secular and evangelical sources.

Hiebert's critiques of people group strategy are valid when applied to diaspora peoples. People group strategy is dependent on individuals having a master identity. Levitt writes, "Much research still assumes that individuals have a 'master,' overarching identity that is fundamentally rooted in a single place."⁴ Identity is not rooted in a single place for diaspora peoples who often develop fluid and sometimes conflicting identities. Lewicki notes, "People in the Himalayan regions of Nepal and Bhutan navigate multiple identities every day because both countries are so linguistically and ethnically diverse."⁵ Sometimes people in the Himalayan regions of South Asia identified themselves based on their caste, sometimes based on language, and other times based on their geographic location. For example, when talking about the refugees from Bhutan case workers and

⁴Peggy Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 202.

⁵Zoe Lewicki, "One Community, Many Identities: Language, Ethnicity, and Nationality among Bhutanese Refugees in South Philadelphia" (Master's thesis, Swathmore College, 2010), 9.

evangelical Christians in Louisville usually call them Nepalis. But this label fails to account for the diversity of this group. The same applies to the people sometimes referred to as Burmese. Neither of these groups can be easily categorized as homogeneous people groups without seriously distorting reality. Diaspora groups have multiple, fluid identities that change based on the people with whom they are interacting. Ethnic identity amongst diaspora peoples has not been explored in depth in relation to the way evangelicals use the term “people group.”

Chapter 3 focused on the refugee community from Burma in Louisville. It included a history of the community, describing where the refugees came from and how they arrived in Louisville. Chapter 3 also included biographical studies from different ethnic perspectives. The biographical studies demonstrated different viewpoints from people within this group. This case study identified the way this group categorizes themselves and draw boundaries defining the “other.”

Chapter 4 sought to address the complexity of the refugee community from Nepal. It included a history of the community; describing where they came from and how they arrived in Louisville. Like chapter 3, it included biographical studies from different perspectives within the community. Chapter 4 concluded with how Nepali-speaking refugees from Bhutan identify and categorize themselves and place boundaries between themselves and other groups.

Research Findings

The two case studies have demonstrated that peoples in the diaspora community have developed multiple, sometimes overlapping, identities used in a variety of circumstances. Sometimes refugees from Burma who lived in camps in Thailand refer to themselves as Thai when speaking with their American neighbors, but would refer to themselves as Karen when interacting with people from Burma. Refugees from Nepal sometimes refer to themselves as Nepali, Bhutanese, or even by caste designation. Self-

identity is important for evangelical mission strategists because evangelical mission strategy is dominated by a desire to reach “people groups” and diaspora peoples are not easily broken up into distinct people groups.

This dissertation investigates the validity of traditional people group strategy when working with diaspora peoples. The main research questions are, diaspora peoples cannot be placed into distinct groups without seriously distorting reality. What does this mean when trying to reach diaspora peoples in North America? How do diaspora people draw boundaries between their group and the “others”? Do they draw boundaries?

The refugees from Burma and Nepali categorize themselves differently within each group. Each group has different boundaries. The refugees categorize themselves using non-ethnic modes of classification. The refugees from Burma and Nepal are not necessarily bounded by the label Burmese, Karen, Dawei, or Nepali. But they are bounded by language, religion, caste, etc. Therefore, when prayerfully deciding which ethnic group to work with, one must be careful and not assume the group is one homogeneous unit. As Wimmer writes, “What ethnicity and race are – how stable, how consequential, how politically relevant, etc. – cannot be resolved by definitional fiat, as in both primordial or constructivist theories, but only by careful analysis.” The church planter/missiologist must take the time to discover boundaries in the community. A lower caste Nepali-speaking refugee is going to have a difficult time reaching the Brahmins from the same community. The same applies to the Christian refugees from Burma. Most of the Buddhists in this community view religion as a cultural boundary marker in the community.

Boundary Markers

Ethnic groups are situational, not primordial. Ethnic groups are a creation of particular interactions, history, economic, and political circumstances. Ethnic identity

manifests itself in the exchange or negotiation of the group's physio-cultural features at the boundaries that divide ethnic groups. Some ethnic groups are more resistant to change and exchange in boundary negotiation and tend to preserve more of what they see as their ethnic identity. Others are more fluid and flexible in negotiating boundaries between groups. What follows is an overview of the boundaries in the refugee communities from Burma and Nepal.

Burma

The lives of the refugees from Burma have been shaped by war, politics, and the diaspora. Across the different tribes from Burma they have been soldiers; children forced from their homes due to war or were born in refugee camps in Thailand. The people in this community identified themselves differently in different circumstances and different locations. When they were in Burma most identified based on one of the eight national races, in Thailand or Malaysia, it depended on the others they were around. In the United States the refugee sometimes identified as one of the eight national races, or even Thai. The ethnic identities used when conversing with outsiders was usually different than the ethnic identity used when conversing with insiders. The boundaries in this community were based on language, politics, and religious identity.

Language. Language is a powerful boundary marker for the refugee community from Burma that currently resides in Louisville. Self-reference as being Karen does not necessarily mean the Karen people will recognize someone as really being Karen. Many different refugees from Burma said the Karen hated them because they were suspected of being Burmese. One of the world's longest continuous civil wars has led some ethnic groups to become fixated on the question of ethnic identity.

Ethnic categories should not be assumed before meeting the people with whom one is interacting. Even when someone self-identifies as belonging to a certain ethnic

group, this same person might not be recognized by members of said group. For example, some people in the community identified as Karen, but are not recognized as Karen by the larger community.

Thai language is commonly spoken by people who were refugees in Thailand. The refugees who speak Thai fluently often self-identified as Thai. The Thai speaking refugees readily admitted that the Thai identifier is something that is dependent upon people and situations. Karen people working in certain industries felt compelled to use the Thai referent for ethnic identity so they could more readily fit into Thai society.

People from Chin state in Burma also use language as a referent for drawing boundaries between one group and another. The people in Louisville who speak Falam Chin greatly outnumber other Chin groups who speak different languages. The Falam Chin people in Louisville identify themselves first by the state they are from, Chin state. Enough people in Louisville speak the Falam Chin dialect that the Falam Chin speakers can have their own church, and their own community. The other small tribal groups from Burma use the Burmese language as a common language for worship and fellowship.

Not one Chin person interviewed identified themselves as Burmese, even those from the Burmese speaking congregation. One reason for this is political. Sakhong notes that when General Ne Win led a successful coup and took control of Burma he “not only expelled foreign missionaries but also intensified his military campaign against the Chin and other ethnic nationalist movements.”⁶ The expulsion of missionaries caused a great disturbance in Chin society. The Chin church leadership was no longer able to receive support from Western missionaries to provide education. General Ne Win’s coup led to a great many other factions in Burmese society.

⁶Lian H. Sakhong, "Christianity and Chin Identity," in *Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Burma*, ed. Mikael Gravers (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2007), 223.

Politics. Politics is another powerful boundary marker in this community. In the process of fighting the Burmese government for not allowing them to have freedom from persecution and Burmization (forced to study in the Burmese language and follow Burmese culture) leaders of these large categories of ethnic groups have attempted to homogenize the identity of these diverse communities. Leaders of the KNU have promoted the Sgawization of the Karen people. The KNU developed idealized pictures of what it means to be Karen and imposed these idealized pictures on the people.

The idealized picture of what it means to be Karen, or even Burmese, continues in Louisville. The refugee community from Burma continues to be influenced by their political past. The Karen community is suspicious of anyone who does not speak the Sgaw Karen dialect. The non-Sgaw speakers are seen as being Burmese, or not really Karen. The people who identify as Burmese are usually Buddhist and feel like they are mistrusted and disliked by the majority Karen population.

Categories of ethnicity are strongly held notions of group and individual ethnic identity that are not easily overcome. Understand people where they are, not where you want them to be when conducting cross cultural research. Discrimination and hatred between groups can only be overcome by the gospel. Sometimes big cultural shifts, like putting aside deeply held prejudices, do not happen until the second generation of believers. Religion is another powerful boundary marker in this diverse community of refugees from Burma.

Religion. Religion is also a powerful boundary marker for people in this community. Pwo Karen Buddhists tend to be closer to ethnic Burmese Buddhists. The ethnic Burmese interviewed and observed often had Pwo Karen Buddhist friends stop by their house to visit, eat, and drink beer with them. These were the same ethnic Burmese people said the ethnic Karen do not like them, so they do not interact with the ethnic Karen. When the ethnic Burmese say Karen, it is usually in reference to the Christian

Sgaw Karen. New identity markers based on religious affiliation developed based on wide spread suffering and mistrust from the civil war.

One of the best ways to determine whether something is a boundary marker in a society is marriage. Hiebert writes that endogamy “is a rule that people must marry others of their own kind. While exogamy excludes marriage to kinsmen, endogamy excludes those who are culturally defined as ‘outsiders.’”⁷ Hiebert goes on to use the caste system as an example of endogamy. The refugees from Burma are not Hindus and do not follow the caste system, but they still have a form of endogamy. The people of this community would not allow Buddhists to marry Christians or Christians to marry Buddhists, unless someone converts to the other’s religion.

Interpreting the refugee community from Burma. Ethnically the people in this community look similar and they all come from the same country. But, due to years of civil war, colonialism, and other factors they have developed boundaries between each other based on politics, religion, and language. To understand differences in this community researchers need to take the time to discover the boundaries discussed above.

According to Barth culture can move anywhere and be transmitted to anyone, but ethnicity is about social boundaries.⁸ How do the refugees that originated in Burma categorize themselves and place boundaries between themselves and other groups? The boundaries drawn by different groups within this group are based on religion, language, and politics. The best way to begin church planting and evangelism amongst people in this diverse community is to focus on religious and language groups. Language is an important part of the refugee community from Burma. This determines who they will marry, who they will worship with, and who they spend time with.

⁷Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 199.

⁸Fredrik Barth, introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1998), 15.

Some would say Chin, Kachin, Karen, and other labels are just that, labels. They are labels developed by missionaries, anthropologists, and politicians to label tribal groups in the mountainous regions of Burma. Gravers writes, “If we deny (Karen identity) as a mere colonial invention, we simultaneously deny these people any active role in history.”⁹ Karen, Chin, and Kachin identity may be a mixture of ancient and more recently acquired elements of their identity, but the groups decided who they are. It is not just individuals deciding they can be labeled African American or Asian without group recognition. These are groups of people who have been formed out of the fires of civil war, religious persecution, and mistreatment by others.

The next section will review findings from research on the refugees from Nepal. The Nepali-speaking refugee community that originated in Bhutan is quite different from the refugee community from Burma. They are primarily Hindu and the caste system is an important part of their identity.

Nepal

How do the Nepali-speaking refugees that originated in Bhutan categorize themselves? How do they place boundaries between themselves and other groups? The boundaries drawn by different groups within this group are based on caste, tribe, and the regulation of food and marriage. The regulation of food and marriage are also tied to the caste system. People in different castes have different rules for what to eat and who to marry.

Higher caste. Caste is a boundary marker within the community. Caste determines who one will marry, who one worships with, and how one worships. The lower caste people did not, and still does not, place as much emphasis on the importance

⁹Mikael Gravers, "The Karen Making of a Nation," in *Asian Forms of the Nation*, ed. Stein Tonnesson and Hans Antlov (London: Curzon Press, 1996), 239.

of the caste system. The reason the Bhutanese government saw the Nepali-speaking Hindus as a threat to integration with society are the boundaries created by the caste system. These boundaries include religion, food laws and marriage restrictions.

The higher caste Hindus in this community practice their own rituals, marry within their own caste, but work with people from different castes and different ethnic groups. Caste is still a major determinative factor in most of their lives, even in the diaspora. Most informants said that caste was still an important part of their lives. The higher caste people do not worship or celebrate holidays with lower caste people:

We have *bojan* (worship) on Wednesday nights. It is all people from the same caste. We celebrate festivals with family and friends from the same caste. We lived close to people from other castes in Nepal, Bhutan, and the US but we don't celebrate festivals with them or marry with them.¹⁰

The higher caste people only worship with people from the higher castes, the lower caste people are not invited and not welcome. Hindus from other castes said they have never been to a Hindu temple or worship ceremony in Louisville because that was only for higher castes.

The caste system restricts who the higher caste people worship with and the higher castes also see a tighter correlation of their ethnic identity being tied to Hinduism. Seven of the higher caste people said that being Nepali equals being a Hindu, none of the lower caste people responded this way. Only two people from higher castes said that someone from their family could become a Christian.

Marriage is also restricted by caste. Only a few higher caste people said they would allow their children or grandchildren to marry people from lower castes, but this is probably because they perceive this to be the correct answer for Americans.

Boundary markers are important because they determine who is and is not part of a homogeneous group. McGavran, a long time missionary in India writes, "Castes or tribes with high people consciousness will resist the gospel primarily because to them

¹⁰Binu, interview by author, Louisville, KY, August 13, 2014.

becoming a Christian means joining another people. They refuse Christ not for religious reasons, not because they love their sins, but precisely because they love their neighbors.”¹¹ The boundaries drawn between who is and is not part of the same group may be determined by who they marry, who they will and will not eat with, who they worship with, and how they worship.

Lower caste. Susan Hangen writes of the lower caste people sometimes referred to as Mongol, “The terms ‘Mongol’ and ‘Aryan’ are derived from eighteenth and nineteenth century colonial categorizations of South Asians.”¹² Much like the refugees from Burma, modern classifications used by the people came from those assigned to them by colonial leaders and anthropologists. The Mongols have a more Asian appearance than the Aryans. The Mongol group consists of Rais, Limbus, Mangars, Sunuwars, Gurungs, Sherpas, Tamangs, and others. Most of the Mongols in Louisville are Rais and Limbus who are, “Hindus with a low status in the caste hierarchy.”¹³ Pommaret also mentions that Mongols do not commonly intermarry between different groups and have their own shamanistic practices.

Ethnic identity is situational in character therefore there is a need to study inter-group boundary mechanisms. Some of these inter-group boundary mechanisms include religion, marriage, and food laws. The Mongols are not as strict in maintaining these boundaries as the higher caste Nepali-speaking refugees.

Even though the lower caste peoples who originated in Bhutan are not in one sense (marriage) a homogeneous group, they are in another sense. The Mongols tend to

¹¹Donald A. McGavran and C. Peter Wagner, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 155.

¹²Susan I. Hangen, *The Rise of Ethnic Politics in Nepal: Democracy in the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 53.

¹³Francoise Pommaret, "Ethnic Mosaic: Peoples of Bhutan," in *Bhutan: Mountain Fortress of the Gods*, ed. Christian Schicklgruber and Pommaret Françoise (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1998), 58.

celebrate festivals together, worship together, and eat together. They have a sense of solidarity based on their treatment by the higher caste Hindus.

Interpreting the Nepali-speaking diaspora community. The best way to begin church planting and evangelism amongst people in this diverse community is to focus on castes. Caste is an important part of the Nepali-speaking refugee community. Caste determines who they eat with, who they worship with, and who they marry. The chart below demonstrates that most of the higher caste Nepali-speaking Hindus believe caste is important. Even the people who said caste was unimportant demonstrated that it was still an important part of their lives by their actions. These same people would not eat, worship with, or allow their children to intermarry with someone outside their caste.

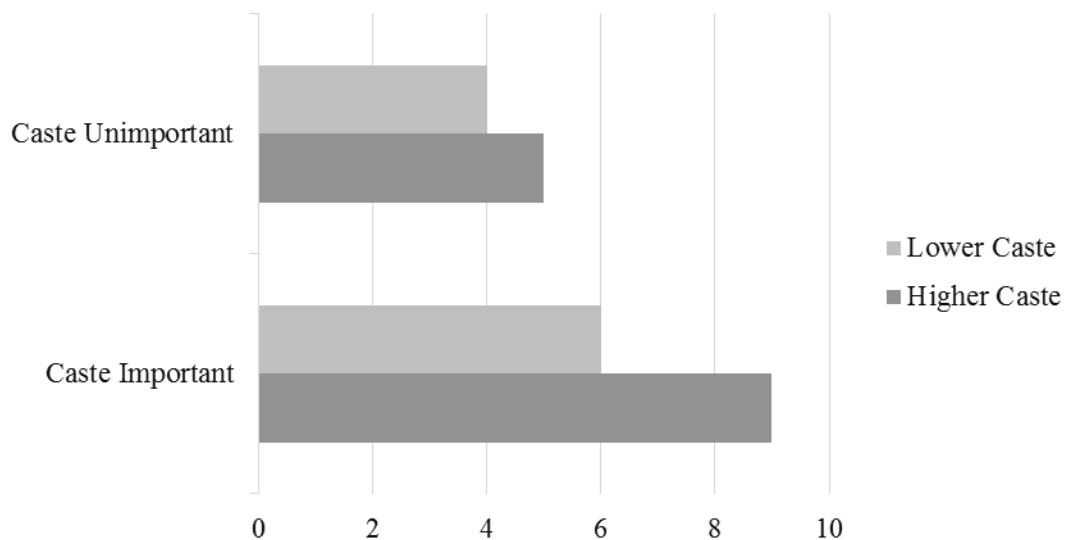


Figure 8. Caste across both groups

Separate evangelism and church planting strategies among each group
Brahmins, Chetris, Vaishyas, Sudras, and Kirats (Mongols) are not needed. But, a

strategy that distinguishes between castes is warranted. People from Brahmin and Chetri caste worship together, intermarry, and eat together. But, people from the Kirats (Mongols) do not marry people from higher castes like the Brahmins and Chetris. Caste is the most distinct ethnic boundary within this community. The Nepali-speaking diaspora community is not one group that can be reached with one strategy.

Conclusion

As stated in the literature review, diaspora was originally used in reference to the Jewish dispersion from Israel or the Greek dispersion during the Hellenistic period. The experiences of these diaspora communities are used as an “ideal type.”¹⁴ The Jewish people clearly longed for their homeland during the diaspora, so writers often refer to other diaspora communities longing for their homeland. This is not the case with the Nepali-speaking diaspora community from Bhutan or the community from Burma. This was true in the past, many years ago for the refugees from Nepal. But, they have long since given up on the idea of returning to Bhutan. The community from Burma has been forced to migrate for so many generations that they no longer know where to call home. Today these communities have settled into life in the United States while attempting to maintain ties with family members scattered across the world. These communities are less concerned about their roots and homeland than about routes, a recreated group identity in multiple locations developed through transnational ties. Their identity is not coupled to people and land like the Jewish people, but to a new identity formed in a new land.¹⁵

Diaspora people are marked by their hybridity. These refugees have hybrid, liminal identities that are negotiated depending on where they are living and the part of

¹⁴William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991): 84.

¹⁵James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1994): 308.

society they are interacting with. If they are marked by hybridity, what holds them together besides a category of difference? The instrumentalists would emphasize the fact that these refugee communities are hybrids and focus on their liminal identities. As Wimmer says, “Ethnicity is constructed, contextually variable, contested, and contingently eventful.”¹⁶ People cannot just chose any ethnic identity and form something out of nothing. The anti-anti-essentialists are right when they say that this vastly oversimplifies ethnic identity by declaring them all hybrids. Cultures do not mix together producing mixtures, but they maintain properties of older cultures.

These diaspora communities are made up of peoples that look similar to people from Burma or Nepal, but they have had very different experiences from the peoples of Burma or Nepal. The refugees have developed, or maintained, different boundaries. Boundaries are also different between the refugees from Nepal and the refugees from Burma. The refugees from Nepal have food and caste boundaries that do not exist in the community from Burma. The refugees from Burma have political boundaries that do not exist in the community from Nepal. Boundary differences developed over time due to war, religion, and other factors. To understand these differences missiologists need to take the time to discover the boundaries within the communities they are trying to reach with the gospel. For example, refugees from Burma that were mixed Karen and ethnic Burmese often felt that they did not belong in the broader Karen community. The Karen greatly outnumbered any other ethnic group from Burma in Louisville. The ethnic Burmese that were mixed with Karen were often not “Karen” enough for the broader community. This discrimination was due to the political history between the ethnic Burmese and Karen.

Evangelicals need to put aside the need for clear labels for people groups when attempting to reach peoples in the diaspora. Instead, church planters should focus on

¹⁶Andreas Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 204.

determining what boundaries exist between different groups, and those presently seen as one group. Missiologists need to be more humble when approaching new groups and assume the role of learner. Ethnicity is a concept that can only be defined by the people themselves. Ethnicity is not an analytic tool for separating people into distinct, labeled groups defined by missiologists.

The anti-essentialists would argue that even the boundaries are disappearing, not just a mixture of ethnic hyphenations. But, as one can see from this study, boundaries are not disappearing. Wimmer writes,

Ethnic identity will be ‘thicker’ in other contexts, and group members will be prepared to incur high costs to defend the culture and honor of their community and the authenticity of its culture, thus stabilizing a boundary even in situations of profound social change.¹⁷

People in the higher caste Bhutanese-Nepali community are working hard to maintain these boundaries by teaching their children the importance of the caste system. The lower caste people are also maintaining boundaries by forbidding marriage to higher caste people. The Karen community is working hard to maintain these boundaries by teaching their children the importance of learning their language and history. The Burmese people are also maintaining their boundaries by emphasizing the importance of Buddhism.

People group lists are useful in identifying where large groups of unbelievers live so missionaries can know where to begin. But, church planters do need to be aware of what people group lists are, incomplete maps of the world. Maps do not tell the details about road conditions, construction or every curve in the road. The correspondence between a map and reality is symbolic and analogical, not a perfect picture of reality itself.¹⁸ The way ahead in applying what is known about diaspora groups as demonstrated in this dissertation. The next chapter is heavily influenced by Paul Hiebert’s writings on critical realism.

¹⁷Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making*, 104.

¹⁸Paul G. Hiebert, *The Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 77.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Introduction

The first five chapters of this dissertation demonstrate that diaspora peoples cannot be divided into digital categories. They have overlapping and sometimes contradicting ethnic identities used contextually. Diaspora peoples draw boundaries between themselves and others. Boundaries drawn by diaspora peoples are not the same in all groups. The refugees that originally came from Bhutan have developed a strong sense of identity from the caste system. The caste system is used to determine who one worships with, shares meals with, and marries. The refugees that came from Burma tend to draw boundaries based on language, politics, and religion.

People groups are not deemed useless by this schema. People group lists are one place missionaries can use to start research. For example, research for this dissertation began with two “groups” and then the groups were divided by their respective boundaries. Research beyond people group lists should be conducted before devising church planting strategies. This is especially so when developing strategies for reaching diaspora groups in urban settings.

A better way of understanding the ethnic identity of diaspora peoples must be developed so missionaries present the gospel clearly, by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The goal of the Church Growth Movement, as presented by Donald McGavran in his classic book *Understanding Church Growth*, is still worthy of repeating. The goal of the Church Growth Movement “is the discipling of *panta ta ethne* (all peoples), to the end that rivers of the water of eternal and abundant life flow fast and free, to every tongue

and tribe and people in all the earth.”¹ What is needed is a new model for understanding how the *panta ta ethne* in the diaspora categorize themselves.

Critical Realism

Chapter 2 of this dissertation includes an overview of the epistemological history of cultural anthropology including secular and Christian anthropologists. Anthropologists use three basic approaches to when writing about ethnic identity. The first is the essentialist theorists who posit that ethnicity is something one acquires at birth. The instrumentalist theorists disagree with the essentialists and say that all people are mixed and live in a hybrid world marked by liminality. The anti-anti-essentialists say that the instrumentalists have vastly oversimplified ethnic identity by declaring everyone hybrids. Nobody lives as a hybrid in reality. Cultures do mix together producing new mixtures, but they maintain properties of older cultures.

Instrumentalists have played a part in deconstructing the ideas and theories posited by early anthropologists while deconstructing the scientific viewpoints of early anthropologists. Instrumentalists say the categories and labels used by anthropologists are nothing more than historical constructs, inventions of western anthropologists that are not authentic. Authenticity, or the denial of authenticity, is a common theme in the writings of instrumentalists. Instrumentalists deny the authenticity of new ethnic movements. New ethnic movements are not perceived as having a basis in history. Instrumentalists also accuse essentialists of forcing western categories on diaspora groups. They are part of the larger postmodern project that is dedicated to accommodating disparate, often irreconcilable viewpoints. Friedman questions all this deconstruction,

All deconstructionist/constructionist critique is predicated on the assumption of something that is ultimately more real, and which reifies absolutely the notion of authenticity. If the constructed cannot be opposed to anything else, if all identity is constructed, then it is meaningless, even absurd, to criticize people for engaging in

¹Donald A. McGavran and C. Peter Wagner, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), xv.

self-essentialization. To claim anti or non-essentialist identity is, in such terms, equally essentialist, since it still defines the subject in opposition to others, and thus bounds the subject in the same way as all other forms of identity. All distinctions essentialize. Even prototypes with fuzzy boundaries essentialize since they are defined in more or less terms with respect to the pure type.²

Friedman and other anti-anti-essentialists are not advocating a return to essentialism in their writings, but are advocating a more balanced approach to the issue of ethnic identity. Some essentialism exists in reality and cannot be done away with just because postmodern anthropologists think it sounds colonial or racist. Friedman writes, "Cultures are substances that flow into one another from disparate origins producing mixtures that maintain the properties of those origins."³ Diasporas are not made up of bounded groups, but they are also not total hybrids lacking ethnic identity.

Critical realism is the best way to avoid the instrumentalist ditch of labeling everyone a hybrid and the essentialist ditch of placing everyone in digital categories that cannot overlap. Critical realism, as a means of interpreting social phenomena, is important because "meaning has to be understood, it cannot be measured or counted, and hence there is always an interpretive or hermeneutic element in social science."⁴ The hermeneutic element in social science cannot be ignored. Research in this dissertation is not concerned with statistics and bounded sets, but fuzzy sets. The research problems addressed in this dissertation include: diaspora peoples cannot be placed into distinct groups without seriously distorting reality. What does this mean when trying to reach diaspora peoples in North America? How do diaspora peoples draw boundaries between their group and the "others"? Do they draw boundaries? These questions can only be answered by reading the people; through observation, interviews, etc.

²Jonathan Friedman, "The Politics of De-Authentication: Escaping from Identity, a Response to 'Beyond Authenticity' by Mark Rogers," *Global Studies in Culture and Power* 3, no. 1 (1996), 130.

³Jonathan Friedman, "The Hybridization of Roots and the Abhorrence of the Bush," in *Modernities, Class, and the Contradictions of Globalization*, ed. Kajsa Ekholm Friedman and Jonathan Friedman. (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press), 271.

⁴Andrew Sayer, "Key Features of Critical Realism in Practice: A Brief Outline," in *Realism and Social Science*, ed. Andrew Sayer (London: Sage Publications, 2000), 17.

Critical Realism

This is not intended to be an all-inclusive overview of critical realism as an epistemology, but how it should be when researching diaspora groups in North America. Critical realism affirms objective truth, arguing that there is a world that exists independent of our knowledge of that world. The separation of objects and ideas from our knowledge of them affirms the fallibility of knowledge. There is no one-to-one correspondence between our knowledge and reality. Charles Peirce, an early proponent of critical realism, argues,

There are Real things, whose characters are entirely independent of our opinions about them; those Reals affect our senses according to regular laws, and, through our sensations are as different as are our relations to the objects, by taking advantage of the laws of perception we can ascertain by reasoning how things really and truly are; and any man, if he have sufficient experience and he reason enough about it, will be led to the one True conclusion. The new conception here involved is that of Reality.⁵

Critical realism distinguishes between reality and our knowledge of reality and claims that knowledge of reality can be true. The world people observe and study is orderly and can be comprehended through human reason. The difference between reality and people's knowledge of reality is related to Bhaskar's distinction between the intransitive and transitive dimensions of knowledge.⁶ The objects of scientific study (propositional knowledge) form the intransitive dimension. The theories and ideas of science are part of the transitive dimension because they can be studied. Rival theories such as essentialism, instrumentalism, and anti-anti-essentialism have different transitive objects (theories), but the world they are describing is the same. If the world was not the same, they would not be rivals.⁷ Sayer writes, "When theories change (transitive dimension) it does not mean that what they are about (intransitive dimension) necessarily changes too: there is no

⁵Charles S. Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief," in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 18.

⁶Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁷Andrew Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy* (New York: Verso, 1994), 51.

reason to believe that the shift from a flat earth theory to a round earth theory was accompanied by a change in the shape of the earth itself.”⁸ The shape of the earth did not change, just the human perception of the earth.

Another way to think about this is Peirce’s use of triadic symbols. Knowledge of the world is partial, but the world is real and exists outside of human perception. A way is needed to understand the signs that mediate human perception of reality. Triadic symbols in Peircian semiotics are explained well by Hiebert. Peircian semiotics

holds that signs are not dyadic, as in formal linguistics, where signs point to objective realities, or as in Saussurian linguistics, where signs are linked to subjective images in the mind, but instead are triadic. Charles Peirce argues that signs point to objective, external realities and link these to subjective images in the mind. They have forms, realities and meanings. This linkage makes it possible for humans to gauge whether what they mean corresponds to what others mean by examining the external realities in question.⁹

Peirce’s triadic symbols include the sign (signifier), the mental concept (signification), and the reality the sign refers to (signified). Signs link mental images to reality and if only two dimensions are present it is not really a sign.

As Hiebert said above, signs see meaning not in objective reality or subjective mental images, but in correspondence between ideas and reality that is mediated to us through sign systems (languages). Correspondence between reality and ideas are different when the relationship between the sign and reality is referring to something in the physical world. Formal signs are when there is a direct reference between the sign and reality. When referring to things like the name of a people group correspondence is more complex. This requires the use of analogies. Signs are used to make sense of the world because “it is hard for us to see things for which we have no categories.”¹⁰ The categories must be tested to determine their fit.

⁸Sayer, "Key Features of Critical Realism," 11.

⁹Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 259.

¹⁰Paul G. Hiebert, *The Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 72.

Analogies are an important part of critical realism and hermeneutics in social science research. Much of the research done in the social sciences is subjective. The objects studied in social science research, including ethnic identity, are the products of multiple forces (political, social, economic, etc.). Unlike the natural sciences these components cannot be removed and examined in a laboratory. Sayer writes, “We therefore have to rely on abstraction and careful conceptualization, on attempting to abstract out the various components or influences in our heads, and only when we expect to return to the concreated, many-sided object and make sense of it.”¹¹ The abstractions used in ethnographic research among diaspora peoples are only helpful when researchers avoid “categories used in official statistics” because these are based on bad or incoherent abstractions.¹² The category “Burmese” is often used in reference to the refugees resettled in the United States that originally came from Burma. Many of these people were born in Thailand and refer to themselves as Thai. Are they Thai or Burmese? It depends on the context they find themselves in; the “others” they interact with in the community. In critical realism the feelings, values, and ideas of the people being studied are real and the researcher seeks to understand them as human beings in social systems. This involves dialogue in which diaspora peoples learn about the researcher and the researcher learns about the diaspora peoples.

Maps are a helpful way of thinking about analogies in social science research. Critical realism affirms that human knowledge does not have a one to one correspondence to reality. Human knowledge only represents reality, much like a map represents the streets and roads in a city. Maps are true, but in a way that is different from the correspondence between a photograph and reality. A map is a model of reality that conveys accurate, but limited information about reality. Hiebert writes,

¹¹Sayer, "Key Features of Critical Realism," 19.

¹² Ibid.

Unlike literal representations, maps have information that does not correspond literally to the external world. A schematic map, such as that of Chicago freeways, does not show every curve and bridge on the roads, nor are the lengths on the map proportionate to distances in reality. Such information poses no problem so long as we know that no correspondence is intended. We do not reject the map as false simply because every detail of reality is not included and accurately represented.¹³

Meaning in maps is not found in the way they present every pothole and turn on the road, but in their correspondence to reality. Correspondence to reality may also be found in how urban church planters should categorize diaspora groups. The government may classify resettled peoples as Burmese, Vietnamese, Nepali, etc. for statistical purposes. These are helpful places to begin when doing research, but the labels used for government statistics are bad abstractions when used with individuals and networks in urban areas. What do the people call themselves? Do they use different labels in different situations? Who are their children allowed to marry? Who do they worship with? Binaries, dualisms, and overlapping identities will be common when doing ethnographic research among diaspora peoples.

Critical realists expect binaries and dualisms. Fuzzy distinctions are “not necessarily fatal. Some of our most useful distinctions, like that between night and day, cannot be drawn sharply, but most of the time we have little difficulty with them.”¹⁴ For example, the researcher might posit that the people they are working with are Nepali only to discover that the people refer to themselves as Bhutanese in some situations and Bhutanese-Nepali in other situations. Fuzzy sets are necessary for understanding the diaspora peoples in North America. In the past anthropologists and missiologists “saw each society as a unique, sui generis, organic whole. Each is discrete, bounded, and self-contained.”¹⁵ Diaspora people have overlapping identities that are interchangeable based on circumstances and the “other.”

¹³Hiebert, *The Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts*, 77.

¹⁴Andrew Sayer, introduction to *Realism and Social Science*, ed. Andrew Sayer (London: Sage Publications, 2000), 4.

¹⁵Hiebert, *The Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts*, 49.

Fuzzy Sets

Digital sets or bounded sets are “associated with propositional logic, Euclidian geometry, and Cantorian algebra. Objects in bounded sets are seen as uniform in their essential characteristics.”¹⁶ The use of fuzzy or analogical sets recognizes that “although human beings break up their world into categories, they often use categories with blurry edges and gradations of membership.”¹⁷ The founder of fuzzy set theory, Lofti Asker Zadeh, noted that most categories we use in everyday life do not have fixed, digital boundaries. He writes,

More often than not, the classes of objects encountered in the real physical world do not have precisely defined criteria for membership. For example, the class of animals clearly includes dogs, horses, birds, etc. as its members, and clearly excludes such objects as rocks, fluids, plants, etc. However, such objects as starfish, bacteria, etc. have an ambiguous status with respect to the class of animals . . . A fuzzy set is a class with a continuum of grades of membership.¹⁸

An example of a digital set would be the way North Americans classify people as “white” or “black.” There is no room for mixed races. Mixed races have caused a great deal of consternation for the US Census Bureau. The U.S. Census Bureau has found that Americans are finding it more difficult to identify themselves according to the racial categories on the census form. The authors of the Pew Research article write, “Many communities, including Hispanics, Arabs and people of mixed race, have said they’re unsure of how to identify themselves on census forms.”¹⁹ The U.S. Census Bureau still organizes the population according to digital sets, but people see themselves as being part of a fuzzy set where races and ethnicities are shaded from one to the other without clear dividing lines.

¹⁶Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 33.

¹⁷Michael Smithson and Jay Verkuilen, *Fuzzy Set Theory: Applications in the Social Sciences* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), 1.

¹⁸L. A. Zadeh, "Fuzzy Sets," *Information and Control* 8 (1965): 338-39.

¹⁹Jens Manuel Krogstad and D'Vera Cohn, "U.S. Census Looking at Big Changes in How It Asks About Race and Ethnicity," *Fact Tank: News in the Numbers* (March 14, 2014, accessed November 10, 2015), <http://pewrsr.ch/1iJMkoT>.

Since there are no pure races, there can be no sharp lines drawn between one ethnic group and another. Boundaries between one group and another are fuzzy and one may belong to more than one set at a time; there are no bounded sets. Krogstad and Cohn write, “A person may be one-quarter African-American, one-quarter white, and one-half Hispanic . . . A thing may belong to both the sets A and *not-A* at the same time.”²⁰ Another characteristic of fuzzy sets that is important for researching boundaries among diaspora peoples is that “ontologically, a fuzzy-set world sees reality as continuums and fields that flow into one another.”²¹ Ethnic groups are not seen as bounded sets, but variations within one ethnicity, humanity.

Boundaries

All people belong to groups or networks of relationships, but many of the ethnic groups diaspora peoples belong to overlap with one another without clear boundaries. Barth writes in the introduction to his classic work entitled *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: the Social Organization of Culture Difference*,

The critical focus of investigation from this point of view becomes the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff it encloses. The boundaries to which we must give our attention are of course social boundaries, though they may have territorial counterparts. If a group maintains its identity when members interact with others, this entails criteria for determining membership and ways of signaling membership and exclusion. Ethnic groups are not merely or necessarily based on the occupation of exclusive territories; and the different ways in which they are maintained, not only by a once-for-all recruitment but by continual expansion and validation, need to be analysed.²²

Barth highlights that ethnic identity is a matter of social organization not only cultural differences. Ethnic identity is also a matter of self-ascription and ascription by others, not the labels the researcher uses to analyze the groups culture. The final point is that

²⁰Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 119.

²¹Ibid.

²²Fredrik Barth, introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1998), 15.

boundaries are determined by the standards the community uses to determine who is “playing the same game.”²³ This might be religion, marriage, dress, language, political ideology, or all of the above.

The idea that peoples belong to fuzzy sets might lead one to think that ethnicity is unimportant for peoples in the diaspora. If one person can belong to both set A and not-A at the same time does, is ethnicity really important? Yes, ethnicity matters because the boundaries are not disappearing in a world of multiplying diasporas. Bits of culture are flowing from one group to another including the pervasiveness of rap, rock, and other entertainment from the West. But, boundaries are a matter of social organization, not only cultural differences. It might appear diaspora peoples are assimilating to the culture they are surrounded by because they enjoy the same entertainment and attend the same schools, but the boundaries remain. Instead of celebrating hybridity, boundaries “are incorporated and naturalized by group formation that strives to homogenize and maintain social order within its own boundaries.”²⁴ The teenagers in the refugee community from Burma and Nepal dress much the same as their American neighbors and enjoy many of the same activities. At the same time they maintain their food laws and rules about marriage. Pieterse writes, “Can we identify any culture that is not creole in the sense of drawing on one or more different historical sources?”²⁵

All cultures are hybrids and have probably always been hybrids. If all cultures are hybrids, then there is no clear way to distinguish between one culture and another. The term has no clear significance in this case. The refugee from Burma who is mixed Karen and ethnic Burmese would say that the discrimination he faces from the “pure” Sgaw Karen people is real. Boundaries are drawn based on the question, “Who belongs to

²³Fredrik Barth, preface to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1998), 6.

²⁴Friedman, "The Hybridization of Roots," 277.

²⁵Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "Globalization as Hybridization," in *Global Modernities*, ed. Mike Featherstone, Scott M. Lash, and Roland Robertson (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 64.

our group?” The question is often answered based on discrimination, or a sense of discrimination. The one being discriminated against by the larger group feels the separation and categorization. Wimmer says, people often develop a “conscious culture of opposition aimed directly at negating or inverting . . . what they perceive to be the dominant culture.”²⁶ The lower caste people from the Nepali-speaking refugee community are not allowed to eat with, marry or worship with the Brahmin community. The refugees from Burma tend to draw boundaries based on language, religious, and political background. These boundary markers cannot be discovered without taking the time to research and get to know people in these communities. There are often non-ethnic modes of classification and association within diaspora communities.

The Homogeneous Unit Principle

It might appear that this dissertation presents a good argument against the homogeneous unit principle. Diaspora groups are made up of fuzzy sets that overlap and people group labels are often misleading. But, boundaries are the homogenous unit in the diaspora, not the ethnic groups themselves. Donald McGavran writes,

The homogeneous unit is simply a section of society in which all the members have some characteristics in common. Thus a homogeneous unit (or HU, as it is called in church growth jargon) might be a political unit or sub-unit, the characteristic in common being that all the members live within certain geographical confines.²⁷

McGavran goes on to say, “The homogeneous unit is an elastic concept, it’s meaning depending on the context in which it is used. However, it is a most useful tool for understanding church growth.”²⁸ His definition of the homogeneous unit principle was born during his long service as a missionary in India working with Hindus who followed

²⁶Andreas Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 210.

²⁷McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 95.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 96.

the caste system. McGavran noticed that people came to Christ through the witness of people from the same caste and tended to separate themselves based on caste in church.

Homogeneous Unit Principle focused church planting does not have to be focused on specific ethno-linguistic people groups, but can be focused on sociological groupings of people. Church plants can be multi-ethnic and homogenous at the same time. This can be seen in the success of international churches planted in major urban areas all over the world. Corwin writes, “The often-overlooked phenomenon is that members of these churches, as ethnically diverse as they usually are, also represent a unique people group themselves. They are a heterogeneous amalgam of people who share a significant common characteristic, they see themselves as internationals, people who have experienced and understand the culture and ways of a globalized modernity.”²⁹ The members of these churches are their own homogeneous unit.

The homogeneous unit principle should therefore be used alongside the discovery of boundaries among diaspora peoples. Again Corwin rightly states, “Ethnicity is not the only characteristic that binds people together.”³⁰ Common experience, caste, common sense of prejudice from those outside their group and marriage endogamy can all be factors in determining where to begin outreach.

Recommendations for Future Research

While conducting dissertation research one often discovers areas that deserve more research. One such area would be case studies about the ethnic makeup of diaspora churches in urban areas. Are they ethnically diverse while remaining homogeneous in nature as suggested above? Do people in these congregations think of their current location as home, or do they have plans to return to another homeland in the future?

²⁹Gary Corwin, "A Second Look: Is It a Heterogeneous or Homogeneous Unit Principle?" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (2014): 262-63.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 263.

Another area is ethnic identity amongst tribal peoples in Burma. The country has recently become more open to evangelicals and anthropologists. Do the people in these tribal groups continue to identify as with the tribal names given to them by the British colonial government and anthropologists of the nineteenth century? Or, have there been changes researchers are unaware of due to the lack of access to tribal areas in Burma? Most current scholarship about Burma, and the tribal groups in Burma, has been with the Burmese diaspora, not with peoples who currently live in Burma.³¹ Most research conducted with tribal groups in Burma is from the 1960s and earlier.³²

The use of fuzzy sets in social science research as proposed by Charles Ragin is an interesting tool used in social science for diversity-oriented research. Ragin writes, in his introduction to fuzzy sets in social science,

In conventional set theory, a case is either in or out of a set (e.g., the set of males, the set of democratic countries, the set of not-for-profit organizations, and so on); a case cannot be partially in or partially out. Everyday experience indicates that this “in-or-out” conception of set membership is too restrictive; membership in sets is often partial. Thus, while a great deal of diversity is revealed when researchers examine configurations of set membership, a lot is hidden when membership in sets is constrained to be crisp – either in or out. In fact, the membership of most social phenomena in the sets social scientists use to characterize them is usually fuzzy, not crisp. That is, cases (e.g., countries) exhibit varying degrees of membership in categories (e.g., democracies).³³

This theory of social science research might prove to be a fruitful tool in conducting research among diaspora peoples. Diaspora peoples are diverse groups that cannot be broken up into digital (crisp) categories. This methodology could enrich missiological research among the urban diaspora groups scattered across the world.

³¹Examples include Mikael Gravers, ed., *Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Burma*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2007, and Charles Keyes. *The Golden Peninsula: Culture and Adaptation in Mainland Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1977).

³²E. R. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967).

³³Charles C. Ragin, *Fuzzy Set Social Science* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 16.

Conclusion

The refugees from Burma and Nepali categorize themselves differently within each group. They have different boundaries. The refugees often categorize themselves using non-ethnic modes of classification. They are not necessarily bounded by the label Burmese, Karen, Dawei, Nepali but based on language, religion, caste, etc. Therefore, when prayerfully deciding what ethnic group to work with one must be careful and not assume they are one digital entity. As Wimmer writes, “What ethnicity and race are – how stable, how consequential, how politically relevant, etc. – cannot be resolved by definitional fiat, as in both primordial or constructivist theories, but only by careful analysis.”³⁴ The church planter/missiologists must take the time to discover boundaries in the community. A lower caste Nepali-speaking refugee is going to have a difficult time reaching the Brahmins from the same community. The same applies to the non-Karen refugees attempting to reach Karen refugees. There is a great deal of mistrust between these communities.

At the conclusion of his dissertation Anthony Casey, encourages missiologists to read more broadly in the secular social sciences.³⁵ Most of the bibliographic research for this dissertation was from the secular social sciences. Missiologists, theologians, and other Christian researchers cannot continue to cite research conducted by the greats of the past including Paul Hiebert, Ralph Winter, and others. Missiologists need to continue to study the Bible, and the people they are trying to reach, so the gospel may be presented clearly.

³⁴Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making*, 208.

³⁵Anthony Francis Casey, “How Shall They Hear? The Interface of Urbanization and Orality in North American Ethnic Church Planting” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013), 205.

APPENDIX 1
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Refugees from Nepal General Questions

1. How do you identify yourself when someone asks about your ethnicity? How do you reply in different contexts (countries)?
2. What does the word ethnicity mean to you?
3. How Is/was your ethnic/cultural heritage celebrated in your home where you grew up?
4. How many languages do you speak? What languages do you speak?
5. Do you equate any of these languages with your ethnic identity? Why or why not?
6. Do you identify more with your cultural heritage or with that of the majority culture?
7. What role does caste play in your everyday life and interaction with other people from South Asia?
8. What does the word caste mean to you?
9. Would you let your children marry a person from another caste or cultural background? Why or why not?
10. How is religion an important part of your cultural identity?
11. Who should I talk to in order to learn more?

Refugees from Nepal Life History

1. Life in Bhutan – how many generations of your family lived in Bhutan? Can you tell me anything about your ancestors? What was life like in Bhutan? Who taught in the schools in Bhutan? Was life different for Brahmins and lower caste people?
2. Life in Nepal – how and why you and your family moved to Nepal? How did your life change when your family moved to Nepal? How did you feel about the move from Bhutan to Nepal?

3. Life in the US – How has your life changed since moving to the US? How did you feel about the move from Nepal to the US? Do you think your life will be different now that you are living in the US? What do you think about the future for your family? How has your ethnic identity changed? Has it changed?
4. Could you tell me how you came to be a refugee? What was life like in Bhutan and Nepal? How did your life change when you left Bhutan?

Refugees from Burma General Questions

1. How do you identify yourself when someone asks about your ethnicity? How do you reply in different contexts (countries)?
2. Is/was your ethnic/cultural heritage celebrated in your home where you grew up?
3. How many languages do you speak? What languages do you speak?
4. Do you equate any of these languages with your ethnic identity?
5. Do you identify more with your cultural heritage or with that of the majority culture?
6. Where were you born?
7. What language was spoken in Malaysia or Thailand?
8. Would you let your children marry someone from a different tribe or cultural group?
9. Is religion an important part of your cultural identity?

Refugees from Burma Life History

1. Life in Burma – how many generations of your family have been Christian (if applicable)? Can you tell me anything about your ancestors? What was life like in Burma? Who taught in the schools in Burma? Was life different for Burmese from different ethnic groups? Why did you leave Burma? Where did you go when you left? Did you rebel against the Burmese government? Who was the leader of the KNU when you were fighting the government (if applicable)? Who did you fight with/command (if applicable)?
2. Life in Malaysia/Thailand – how and why you and your family moved to Malaysia/Thailand? How did your life change when your family moved to Malaysia/Thailand? How did you feel about the move to a new country?
3. Life in the US – How has your life changed since moving to the US? How did you feel about the move from Malaysia/Thailand to the US? Do you think your life will be different now that you are living in the US? What do you think about the future for your family? Do you teach your children traditional customs/language from your home country?

4. Could you tell me how you came to be a refugee? What was life like in Burma/Thailand/Malaysia? How did your life change when you left Burma?

APPENDIX 2

OPEN CODING FREQUENCY REPORT

Table A1. Open coding frequency report

Codes	Description	Burma Case	Nepal Case
C	Caste Mentioned	0	23
CI	Caste Important	0	17
CU	Caste Unimportant	0	9
CE	Equality Mentioned	0	6
CHC	Higher Caste Brahmin	0	15
CLC	Lower Caste	0	17
DR	Discrimination	0	2
DC	Caste Based Discrimination	0	10
CUL	Cultural Discrimination	0	8
D	General Discrimination	4	8
DKB	Karen Discriminating Against Ethnic Burmese	14	0
DBK	Ethnic Burmese Discriminating Against Karen	6	0
E	Food Mentioned	0	6
EFL	Food Laws for Boundaries	0	7
ER	Certain Food Restricted	0	8
IDNV	Identity Does Not Vary	0	0
IDNVN	Nepali Identity Does Not Vary	0	2
IDNVB	Burmese Identity Does Not Vary	5	0
IDNVCH	Chin Identity Does Not Vary	2	0
IDNVK	Karen Identity Does Not Vary	8	0
IDNVY	Yakai Identity Does Not Vary	2	0
IDNVA	Identity is Sometimes Aryan	0	1
IDNVBH	Identity is Sometimes Bhutanese	0	14
IDNVBHA	Identity is Sometimes Bhutanese Nepali American	0	1
IDNVBHN	Identity is Sometimes Bhutanese Nepali	0	2
IDNVBR	Identity is Sometimes Bhutanese Refugees	0	1
IDV	Identity Varies	0	0
IDVL	Identity is Sometimes Lhomi	0	1
IDVLH	Identity is Sometimes Lhotshampa	0	5
IDVN	Identity is Sometimes Nepali	0	16

Codes	Description	Burma Case	Nepal Case
IDVR	Identity is Sometimes Rai	0	3
IDVB	Identity is Sometimes Burmese	8	0
IDVCH	Identity is Sometimes Chin	2	0
IDVFCH	Identity is Sometimes Falam Chin	2	0
IDVK	Identity is Sometimes Karen	12	0
IDVTH	Identity is Sometimes Thai	6	0
IDVY	Identity is Sometimes Yakai	3	0
IDVD	Identity is Sometimes Dawei	2	0
MNR	No Marriage Restrictions	9	10
MR	Marriage Restricted	3	17
MRR	Marriage Restricted Based on Religion	12	5
MRB	Marriage Restricted Based on Higher Caste	0	10
MRNB	Lower Caste Parents Not Allowing Their Children to Marry Higher Caste	0	1
MRE	Marriage Restricted by Ethnicity	7	0
LI	Language Important Part of Ethnic Identity	6	15
LNI	Language Not Important Part of Ethnic Identity	2	3
MXKB	Mixed Burmese and Karen	14	0
RNHIN	Nepali People are Hindus	0	7
RI	Religion Important Part of Culture	11	18
RNI	Religion Not an Important Part of Culture	1	3
RR	Cannot Change Religion	3	9
RNR	Can Change Religion	2	10
R	Religion Mentioned	0	16
RBB	Burmese People Are All Buddhists	3	0
RCB	Chin People are All Baptists	2	0
RC	Religious Convert	8	0
Totals		159	308

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ABSTRACT

ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONG DIASPORA PEOPLES: HOW GLOBALIZATION AND MIGRATION RESHAPE THE PEOPLE GROUP PHENOMENON

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The research in this dissertation reveals that Nepali refugees in Louisville have developed several identities that sometimes overlap and contradict one another when one tries to classify this population into distinct units or ethnic groups. Self-identity is important for evangelical mission strategists because evangelical mission strategy is dominated by a desire to reach “people groups” and diaspora peoples are not easily broken up into distinct people groups.

Chapter 1 presents the research questions and methodologies. The research questions are,

1. Diaspora peoples cannot be placed into distinct groups without seriously distorting reality. What does this mean when trying to reach diaspora peoples in North America?
2. How do diaspora people draw boundaries between their group and the “others”? Do they draw boundaries?

The research methodology includes a literature review, semi-structured interviews, narrative research, grounded theory, participant observation, and the data was analyzed producing two case studies.

Chapter 2 provides a framework for relating findings of this dissertation within this field of study. It summarizes and analyzes the relevant literature from the fields of missiology and cultural anthropology especially as it concerns diaspora and ethnic identity. The literature review comes from secular and evangelical sources.

Chapter 3 concentrates on the refugee community from Burma in Louisville. It includes a history of the community describing where the refugees came from and how they arrived in Louisville, including biographical studies from different ethnic perspectives. The biographical studies demonstrate different viewpoints from people within this group. The case study identifies the way this group categorizes themselves and draw boundaries defining the “other.”

Chapter 4 addresses the complexity of the refugee community from Nepal, including a history of the community describing where they came from and how they arrived in Louisville. Like chapter 3, it includes biographical studies from different perspectives within the community. Chapter 4 concludes with how Nepali-speaking refugees from Bhutan identify and categorize themselves and place boundaries between themselves and other groups.

The last two chapters conclude with research implications and the conclusion. The distinct boundaries between people groups are eroded by diaspora peoples moving to urban areas in North America. In missiologists desire to reach people groups they often place diaspora peoples into distinct categories of ethnic groups where they do not exist in reality. The theory that diaspora peoples have fluid identities as described by anti-anti-essentialists such as Douglass, Friedman, and others puts a major wrinkle in the idea that diaspora peoples can be fit into distinct categories. This dissertation a presents a new methodology for missiologists studying ethnic groups and planting homogenous churches among diaspora populations in North America based on fuzzy set theory.

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