

## Nepali-Speaking Bhutanese Refugees in Canada: How to be Hindu in a regional Quebecois city?

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In May 2007, Canada officially welcomed 5,000 Bhutanese refugees. During autumn 2012, another 500 Bhutanese refugees with relatives in Canada were brought in. In March 2013, Canada began preparations to accept another 1,000 over the next two years.

The refugees find themselves scattered across different provinces. Their exact distribution has not been revealed to date, but according to my informal census,<sup>1</sup> as of 2008 around 2,000 refugees had re-resettled in Quebec, a French-speaking Canadian province with seven million inhabitants. The Quebecois context is a very particular one. On the one hand, regionalisation has been the dominant government policy since the beginning of the 1990s and therefore the resettlement locations are all in regional cities of 20,000 to 517,000 inhabitants, and not in Montreal, the biggest city. On the other hand, the fact that French is the dominant language obliges the refugees to learn it from scratch, which sets up a kind of competition with English. In fact, Quebec's linguistic situation may tempt refugees to move to English-speaking provinces of Canada and renders the resettlement of Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees<sup>2</sup> in Quebec fragile at best.

This study focuses on certain characteristics of the integration of Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees in Saint-Jérôme, a city of 68,456 inhabitants just north of Montreal. This paper presents the place of Hindu religion in the daily lives of the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees in this new context, and argues that Hindu rites and practices form a crucial component of their identity.

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1 Mathieu Boisvert, my research director, and I gave public conferences in Autumn 2011 in the four cities of Quebec in order to inform the local population about the challenges facing these refugees. There, we collected census information through the local integration organisations. I regularly updated these data through the same contacts.

2 I refer to 'Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees' to take into account both their culture and their place of birth (for those over 22 years old). I avoid the expression *Lhotsampa* because of the refugees' general resistance to this Dzongkha name.

### **Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees in Saint-Jérôme**

Saint-Jérôme began to welcome refugees in December 2008, and the community now consists of 224 people, with 15 born in the city. Women constitute 55% of the group and the elderly (60 years old and over) represent only around 5% of the total, a figure which may undermine the crucial role these persons usually play in their families and in the community. Most of the adults attend French classes or follow the High School curriculum, and their command of French improves constantly. All families speak Nepali, though some families speak another language, such as the Tibeto-Burman Tamang. In terms of caste, Brahmins are strongly represented<sup>3</sup> along with Chetri, Rai, Biswa and Darji families.

The resettlement process itself is led by the regional NGO *Le Coffret*, which specialises in accepting and establishing immigrants in the Laurentides region north of Montreal. Since 1990, this non-political and nondenominational NGO has been recognised and financed by Quebec's Department of Immigration and Cultural Communities (MICC). Its responsibilities include regionalising immigration, raising awareness to fight racial discrimination, and welcoming, installing and integrating new arrivals. Its employees, who are few in number, but dedicated, assist refugees during the first five years of resettlement. The NGO distributes families all around the city to avoid ghettoisation and pairs Bhutanese families with Quebecois families as much as possible. Given their very recent migration, no specific services have been given to or have been organised by Bhutanese refugees: there are no newspapers, no websites, and there is just one specialised shop in Quebec city.

Some observers, including *Le Coffret*, argue that Ontario, Quebec's neighbouring province, and other English provinces remain attractive destinations for Quebec-based refugees because many of them have relatives there they want to join, or friends that have already acquired stable financial situations, specifically because they weren't forced to master an entire second language. In fact, the question of professional integration looms large for many refugees; despite Quebec's low unemployment rate (7.7 % as of May 2013), they lack the language and professional skills that are necessary in the job market.

The majority of the refugees are Hindu, although around 29% of those

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3 As of 25 May 2012, 16 of the 41 families in Saint-Jérôme were Brahmins.

in Saint-Jérôme converted to Christianity in camps in Nepal. The two groups nevertheless share similar values and regularly partake in activities together. The only visible traits or attitudes that differentiate the Christians from the Hindus are the absence of *tika* on the Christians' foreheads and the tradition among Christians of using the greeting 'Jymasé' (from the Nepali name of Jesus Christ, *Issā Massīha*).

### **Hinduism in the context of migration**

The context of migration has very real consequences for Hindu practitioners. The temple plays an increasingly large role in this context, as it becomes both a religious and a social reference point for migrants and 'allows for a sentiment of continuity between the context of migration and the culture of origin' (Boisvert 2012: 169). The temple, then, has strong social functions in the migration context:

One of the more common conclusions from research among immigrants to Western countries like Canada and the United States is that those who have arrived in a country relatively recently will often find in their religious faith an important anchor and orientation for their ability and effort to establish themselves in their new homes (Beyer 2008: 29).

It is important to remember that Hindu practitioners among the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees must adapt to a new life context: that of a Quebecois city without a Hindu temple where people are mostly Christian. I conducted a field study from June 2010 to June 2012 which focused on the refugees' way of life and their feasts. Specifically, I sought to ascertain how Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees maintain their Hindu practices and to understand the role of religion in their new life. I asked what rites they maintained and how they have attempted to transmit these to the younger generation.

As I did not want to merely remain an observer, I worked to establish 'a situation where everybody finds his account and where nobody wastes the time and energy of others' (Fortin 1988: 28). As I am a teacher, I helped young people at least once a week in their studies (which ranged from French to High School studies to adult training courses). Moreover, I organised regular tutorial activities between Quebecois pupils and young

refugees studying in the same secondary school. Finally, I am particularly close to two Brahmin families who arrived in 2010 and I share different activities with them. So, my integration resulted in an interactional model in which 'subjectivity is not anymore an obstacle but a contribution' (Jaccoud and Mayer 1997: 220).

The meeting steps recommended by Selltiz, Wrightsman and Cook (1977) were followed: taking mental notes, supplementing with notes on paper when available, and writing a complete description of things learned upon returning home. The resulting log consists of both 'memory and distancing [...] the only way to keep track of conversations, stories, expressions that otherwise we would quickly forget' (Fortin 1988: 30).

Deeper, more specific data collection became possible in autumn 2011 through individual interviews with adults who live in Saint-Jérôme. The interviews were semi-structured, with an average duration of an hour and 45 minutes, and were conducted one-on-one. Six interviews<sup>4</sup> were conducted with three men and three women from three distinct age groups: a couple of over 60 years, representative of people who built a large part of their life in Bhutan; a man and a woman of 35 to 45 years old, who knew their native country as children or teenagers; and two young people of different sexes between the ages of 18 and 22 years, who were either born in the Nepalese camps or arrived there when they were no older than 4 years. The choice of three different generations for this study has helped identify patterns in perceptions of identity and of the new home of the refugees.

In order to focus on the generational differences, the interviews focus on Hindu Brahmins. Most of the respondents are permanent residents (the status Canada gives to the refugees at their arrival). Two of the interviewees were among the first who arrived in Canada and they have already begun the process of pursuing citizenship, an option which opens up to permanent residents after 1065 days of residence in Canada.

As far as education is concerned, the two men around 20 and 40 years old completed university, in Nepal and in India, respectively. The young girl had gone through part of her High School in the camps. The three other respondents (the older couple and the woman of 38) were illiterate.

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4 In defense of the small number, Salvador Juan writes 'that an individual may condense a large part of the meaning of a social given phenomenon' (1990: 107), concluding: 'a very small number of representatives is often sufficient' (1990: 108).

They explained that the local school was far from their Bhutanese home and that the refugee camps did not provide literacy classes for adults. The four oldest persons were married and the two youngest were single. Two of the interviews were conducted in French, one in English, and three in Nepali, using an interpreter. This translator himself is Nepali-speaking Bhutanese, and is one of the first 24 people who arrived in Saint-Jérôme in December 2008; he is considered as a leader in his community.

### The place of religion

#### *Experiencing religion at an individual level*

Defining their religion proved very difficult for our respondents, although they could provide significant examples of the effects their religious choice has on their daily life and decisions. The answers were of the same type: 'It's the continuation of the tradition that we live today', 'My parents are following [Hinduism] and it's the reason why I follow it'. The young man went further back in the generations, declaring: 'For me, being a Hindu is being the descent of my forefathers. Because every Hindu they have got their descent' [*sic*]. Here, he refers to a distant ancestor named Atri, a Vedic and mythical ascendant, and the *rishi* who defines his *gotra*, or ancestral lineage. This reflects the notion which Danielle Hervieu-Léger considers primordial in religion, that of belonging to an immutable order that existed before the individuals and even before the group (Hervieu-Léger 1999: 125). This situation confirms that the most important landmarks are those of lineage and of transmission (Tardan-Masquelier 1999: 78). This characteristic becomes even more encompassing here, as it is the very definition of religion for five of the six respondents. The pattern also agrees with Marcaurelle's assertion that since we must make do with an approximate definition of the religion, the Hindu is above all a person born in a Hindu family who does not renounce his religious lineage (Marcaurelle 1999: 10-11). The approximate definition refers here to the one that spontaneously comes to the interviewed persons' mind.

As far as beliefs are concerned, all respondents mentioned 'uncountable numbers of gods and goddesses'. The adult male added: 'It's the reason why it's so difficult to understand our religion'. Some names of gods appeared many times, mainly Vishnu, Krishna and Rāma, and, in some cases, Śiva and Ganeśa. The adult woman noted: 'Vishnu is the most

important', which makes sense considering the majority of Vaisnavas noticed during the participant observation. The young man stood out from this lineage, saying that he adhered to *sanātana* and that, according to him, *sanātana dharma*, or 'eternal dharma', is a generic type of Hinduism, not adhering to any particular branch or deity. Still, based on appearances, choices of deities and holy books used, the majority of the interviewed refugees seem to be Vaisnava.

Half of the respondents referred to the Om sound as 'the greatest *mantra*', and the older woman mentioned a belief that cows must be treated like gods, corresponding with the *pūjā* she described later. The older man was the only one to mention important books like the *Rāmāyana*, *Bhagavad-Gītā*, *Mahābhārata* and *Krishna Charitra*.

The respondents' definitions of religion and their beliefs seem rather cursory, omitting many notions that are often identified as the core of Hinduism: the individual and cosmic force, *atman-brahman*; the reincarnation cycle, *samsara*; the consequences of our actions, *karma*; spiritual liberation, *mokṣa*; and the individual and cosmic Law, *dharma* (Lambert 2007). But, even if their beliefs often seem implicit and their descriptions minimal, the refugees' practices are numerous and regular, supporting Boisvert's theoretical explanation of Hinduism as *henopraxy* rather than as orthodoxy (Boisvert 2013).

Numerous practices were observed and spoken of during the interviews, which aimed to identify the respondents' daily rites, or any actions they perform that are regulated, usual, minimally variable and executed with the solemnity which underlines an important, distinct moment (Ménard 1999: 77-78). All of the respondents referred to the daily *pūjā* made after washing their bodies in the morning: 'Every individual in the house has his prayer in the morning and in the evening. It's the most essential thing for individuals'. The young girl added: 'Every morning I have a bath and I pray to God. [...] My grandfather [who remains in Nepal] taught it to me'. In traditional Hindu households, this rite is usually conducted by the oldest man of the house, and the rest of the family join him at least for part of the ritual.

The older woman described a daily morning *pūjā* to the cow, with the application of *tika*, the singing of songs, the recitation of religious texts and finally an offering of food to the gods, while the oldest man described a daily ritual of which even the translator had never heard: when he rises,

he goes outside to pray to the sun, 'which is part of God in our religion'. He then pours a glass of water in the palm of his hand and gives it to Surya, the god of the sun; afterwards, he reads *Bhagavad-Gītā* passages before his domestic temple. Many of these rituals are performed in front of domestic shrines, supporting Louis Renou's thesis that 'the center of [Hinduism] is the home rather than the temple' (Renou 2004 [1951]: 81). The shrines seen in homes in St-Jérôme often house *shāligrām* stones as precious objects of worship. These stones, venerated by Hindus as divinities, symbolize Vishnu and were said to come from the Ganges or, as an old refugee told me, from the Nepalese rivers of Vishnumati, Gandaki and Bagmati. Regardless of its nature, the *pūjā* is highly important: 'all our daily activities [...] will prove successful if we make *pūjā* in the morning'.

The three women specifically mentioned fasting, or the *vrat*, 'periodic votive days and fasts which punctuate the Hindu religious year' (McGee 1996: 146) which is undertaken 'to realize a wish concerning childhood, their children's health, long life for their husbands or the well-being of their homes' (St-Germain Lefebvre 2008: 118). The regularity of this ritual varied from once a year for the young girl to once every two weeks for the two other women.

The intensity of each practice depends on the respondent's age. Indeed, the young man affirmed:

'The younger generations [...] still don't know what the value of the religion is, we don't know about our religion at the present time but our parents they know the value of our religion [...]. The day will come for us and we'll carry on what our parents have done in the past'.

The influence of age on religious practice is confirmed by the assertion that religion gains importance as years pass, a question of maturity for one respondent, which is often linked to family responsibilities. But, regardless of age, all the refugees realise the importance of religion in their decisions. The effects of religion seem particularly clear in two realms: the relationship between castes and the notion of an ideal marriage.

Caste belongs to the eight elements of the common background of Hinduism or the core of beliefs specific to the religion.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, this

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<sup>5</sup> Lambert distinguishes eight core elements of Hinduism: the Holy books (particularly

background updates itself in the context of resettlement in Quebec. The topic also proves a delicate one, as people wish to keep up appearances with their answers, which may not be fully representative of their daily actions. The responses, therefore, remained very general and consensual, not unlike this example: 'Every Nepalese is equal, but Brahmins, Chhetri, and Tamang form a more ancient class system, which is no longer current. We have to respect everyone equally'. Even so, participant observation revealed that some respondents do not adhere to such a mentality. As trust grew between the community and myself, more reliable information was obtained at different moments. Out of respect for certain traditions, a Brahmin cannot go to the house of a less pure caste family, welcome them at his own home, or accept food or drinks from them. This caste hierarchy is still strictly applied by several of Saint-Jérôme's inhabitants; mostly by older people, but also by persons of a slightly younger age who find themselves heavily emotionally invested in the tradition.

Ideas regarding marriage further reveal the effects of religion on actions and decisions. Adhering to an essential Hindu tradition, the young girl asserted: 'as a Hindu woman, I cannot marry a person of another culture'. She reveals her belief with striking honesty, since most of the respondents might feel uncomfortable affirming this same belief, which they do appear to share.

For every respondent an ideal marriage is necessarily religious and therefore Hindu. The ideal potential spouse is not just Hindu, she is Bhutanese Hindu, and she speaks Nepali. Even if the promised wife or husband had to be found in Halifax, Nova-Scotia, or in the deep South of the United States, these criteria were relevant for every marriage the refugees organized in Saint-Jérôme. Other conditions must also be fulfilled. For instance, an ideal spouse must belong to the same caste as her potential husband (Brahmin for the six respondents). Moreover, the spouse must not belong to the same *gotra*, or ancestral lineage, since 'gotra endogamy is banned because it is seen as a kind of incest' (Bennett 1983:

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*Veda* and *Upaniṣad*); the epics (*Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana*); the pantheon; the main celebrations (for example, *Dīwali* in October); the domestic rites derived from Vedism (mainly, the initiation rites, *samskāra*); notions that, according to the author, derive from the first *Upaniṣad*; the four paths to salvation (such as *Jñāna-yoga* and *Bhakti-yoga*) and their combinations; and the *varṇa* system, which holds society together and gives a particular role to each person (Lambert 2007: 430).



17). Lastly, each potential young couple must obtain their parents' permission: 'If [my parents] accept, I will get married with her. If they do not accept I will not marry her. It is important for us to respect our family and to discuss before with our family'. Not every young person agrees with their parents' opinion, decisions may even involve both young people and their parents: 'We will choose together'. Compared to previous generations, young people are given more freedom when choosing partners, but the role of the parents still holds a crucial importance.

As for the ideal age of marriage, this age increased as the age of the respondents decreased. The oldest woman got married at the age of 7 (and moved into her husband's house when she was around 18 years old) and the adult woman got married at the age of 16. Even though one marriage took place for a younger girl of 16 years old, the refugees agree on an ideal age. Today, everyone seems to agree that 20 years of age or older is ideal for marriage.

We observed that ancient conventions are still observed during a wedding ceremony, though there are some adaptations to the new environment. When two newlyweds arrived from Montreal (the husband bringing his new wife from Halifax to his town, Saint-Jérôme), the young man stopped near the local river and threw in a one dollar coin, some wood taken from the platform where the couple ritually met during the ceremony, and the *mahur*, the paper which crowned the *beula*<sup>6</sup>'s head and on which *mantra* are written. The young husband explained that he did this just as his ancestors would have done, for the protection of his new union and to make an offering to the Ganges, as any river can symbolically take the place of the Ganges:

'The Ganges is the holiest river of India, called our "Mother Gangâ," and its invisible course supposedly borders heaven and hell. But every type of water properly called upon as a substitute for the Ganges, is the Ganges' (Renou 2004 [1951]): 73).

The river in Saint-Jérôme did need a proper invocation to become a holy river and to substitute for the Ganges in order to become 'Mother Gangâ'.

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6 The word *beula* is not translated here because it has no equivalent in the Christian tradition; it refers to the newlywed on the day of his marriage.

The perception of marriage has evolved with each generation: the age of marrying has increased, and choices may now be made by young people and are not as strictly imposed by parents, even if parents still play an important role in the final decision and do sometimes entirely assume control. Furthermore, the concept of dowry appeared neither during the interviews nor during the participant observation (during which several people were asked about the subject). However, the woman will always follow the Hindu tradition of leaving her family to join her husband's. Some young girls are already married to Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees who resettled in the United States, and they await the citizenship they need to live in their husband's family. Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees who have converted to Christianity also partake in this tradition, as was seen with the marriage of two young people in Saint-Jérôme in 2011.

By studying marriage, we can deduce that the criteria for endogamous marriage are both religious and ethnic. Most of the unions<sup>7</sup> are between Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees. Religion and religious books clearly do not constitute a 'patrie portative', or portable homeland, as Heine describes the Torah for Jewish people (Heine 1853); instead, a mutual life story proves an essential determinant of ethnicity. The collective religious practices of the refugees, though, must constantly adapt to their new life context.

#### *The religious experience in a collective sphere*

The minority status which the Hindu Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees experience in Quebec and which mirrors the predicament faced by the oldest refugees in Bhutan, is generally very new for the migrants. In Nepal and Bhutan, the Dasain festival meant ten days of holiday, which gave them a chance to visit relatives, even those who lived far away, so that elders could offer *tika* and blessings to their children and family. In Quebec, these rituals are more difficult to organise because the festival days are not holidays for people attending language classes<sup>8</sup> and because family

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7 I have heard of three instances of Nepali-speaking Bhutanese marrying people from other communities: two with a Quebecois partner, in Quebec city, and one with a Nepalese Toronto resident, in St-Jérôme.

8 In Saint-Jérôme, they made an exception in October 2012: the school where most of the adult refugees were studying gave one day off to everyone in the community during the festival of Dasain.

members may live all over the world. Nevertheless, families do gather in the Quebecois city: in their first year of marriage the brides come back to their original family's home (*maiti*) to honour their parents and the parents may offer *tika* and blessings to all their children who are present, to their *dharma putri* or *putra* (adoptive daughter or son) if they have some, and even to the Quebecois surrogate family they may have in the city.

Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees in Saint-Jérôme organised a festive evening featuring the application of *tika*, singing, dancing, talking and enjoying a meal. Both Hindus and Christians were present, although only Hindus received the *tika*. The celebration aimed to bring together Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees, but also to invite Quebecois people who were selected among the relatives of people present. As one respondent put it:

‘We want to show our uniqueness to the people in Saint-Jérôme. We want to show that our culture is a unique one, is a different one,; we want to display our peculiarity, our differentness to the people here’.<sup>9</sup>

Given this goal, many people from Saint-Jérôme were invited to the celebration: some were involved in the Le Coffret association, others helped refugees in school or were members of a twin family. During the meal, elders and guests were always served first. More regularly, since spring 2010, the migrants have organised collective *bhajan* or hymn-singing in Saint-Jérôme. These rituals generally take place twice a month. At the beginning of the resettlement, the rituals took place at homes, were conducted by the hosts (either women or men), and were always followed by a snack shared by everybody. Since June 2011, the community has rented a room on the ground floor in the building in which Le Coffret has its office. Each family takes turns in being responsible for conducting the ceremony and provides an adequate amount of money for ritual materials. But some materials cannot be acquired:

‘Scarcity of elements, different kinds of material for making *pūjā*, everything. For example, we used to use bell, that is called *tchonka*,

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<sup>9</sup> During the first celebration in October 2012, this particularity had participants sing the Bhutanese anthem, as captured in Julie Corbeil's documentary (2012). They didn't sing the anthem in October 2011.

but it's not available here. In the time of our prayer, we used *damaru*, a small music instrument, to be played just with the hands, just like *madar*. Two small stones in a thread and you move them to get a sound. [...] People tried to bring them but as it was a fossil, the government didn't allow them to bring them'.

One major problem faced by the migrants has been the absence of a *pūjāri*, a Brahmin who can organise collective rituals. According to my informants, not every Brahmin can celebrate rites and a Brahmin cannot be a *pūjāri* if one of his male ascendants married twice. The only Brahmins that can serve as *pūjāri* are the *Upādhvāya* (e.g. Bennett 1983: 11) and the first *Upādhvāya* Brahmin family only arrived in Saint-Jérôme in March 2011. The community asked the man to become their *pūjāri*, because of his birth and his training in Varanasi when he was young. He accepted, even though he did not have this function in Nepal and ran a shop in Damak, Nepal. This *pūjāri* now takes charge of the birth rituals (fifteen births had taken place in Saint-Jérôme as of June 2013). He also officiates during marriages and the initiation rituals of young Brahmin boys.

In June 2011, I saw an *upanayana* rite, in which a young boy of 11 years old received *mantra*. This secret formula must be directly transmitted via uninterrupted oral tradition in order to be effective, from the seer who first originated them (Daniélou 1992: 505). Here, the *pūjāri* is the *mantra*'s recipient and has become its transmitter. The boy's grandfather also has an important role and will begin to teach the sacred books to his grandson. This young boy was born from a mixed marriage between a Brahmin man and a Chhetri woman but he still received his Brahmin cord and had his head shaved, except for a braid at the rear base of the neck. According to the father, this would have been the same in the refugee camps of Nepal. In Saint-Jérôme, the ceremony, which lasted one entire day, took place in the family's apartment.

The biggest issue for the refugees is the absence of a city temple. Several respondents enthusiastically expressed a desire to build a temple to replace the makeshift room they temporarily employ for temple functions. Many of the refugees even mentioned the issue to the Immigration Ministry agent when she still worked in Saint-Jérôme<sup>10</sup> for three days a

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10 Due to recent provincial decisions, this Ministry agent no longer works in Saint-Jérôme

week. She would answer, according to one respondent: 'We'll have to wait a little'. Of course, given Saint-Jérôme's context of a mainly Christian, French-speaking population, its previous inhabitants would need to be mentally prepared for the arrival of a Hindu temple.

While waiting for a temple, some Hindu refugees, headed by an organiser, turned to the Indian temples of Montreal. Accounting for this initiative allows for the observation of ethnicity and its boundaries, since it reveals the mesosocial dimension of the community, which could be considered an ethnic group (Barth 2000). A young Brahmin of around 30 years of age who arrived in Saint-Jérôme in March 2010 made arrangements with Montreal's Indian temples to make it easier for his relatives to go there the following autumn, saving them the trouble of crowding buses and metros. From January 2011 to June 2012, he himself organised a monthly bus to the city, asking each of the 48 passengers for the small fee of five dollars. The temple's organisation covered the remaining costs of the journeys. The bus also began serving Hindu refugees from other cities. The bus has given even those Hindus who resettled in two quite distant cities the opportunity to go to the Montreal temple, which is significant considering that no Hindu temple exists in either of these towns. The service was stopped in June 2012, as the temple's Board of Directors claimed to have no money left to finance it.

Why is having a temple of such importance? As Beyer emphasises, the temple is a place for socialization that can define a migration context (Beyer 2008). Respondents shared this idea: 'Many people are present, not only Bhutanese. We can meet priests, sing the *bhajan* together and meet other persons from Montreal'. The temple is thus a place for social exchange between people of similar cultures, metaphorically immersing partakers in their original contexts: 'When I arrive at the temple, I believe I'm in Nepal. Everybody speaks Nepali, the priest gives information ... I miss something when I come back [home]'. This account agrees with the happenings observed in other Hindu communities in Montreal: 'The temple allows people to establish a feeling of continuity between a migration context and their original culture' (Boisvert 2012: 169). It is a place for memories, or perhaps for nostalgia, but also for networking and for

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since autumn 2012. The federal Ministry will provide services for Quebec and the Maritimes only in Montreal.

perspectives. One temple goer claimed to have met people who talked to him of a job opportunity if he mastered the French language. Still, some respondents do not share the same vision of the temple:

‘There is some kind of difference in the way of practising the religion in between the people of India and the people of Nepal. We have seen that one, we experience that one. In Nepal we could carry our *pūja*, our *bhajan*, it’s not the same way as them. We do not follow so much the feasts they celebrate. For example, we were Hinduists in Bhutan and we didn’t know what is Holi. We never played Holi in Bhutan’.

The feelings of physical remoteness and the manifestations of differences expressed here cause even more people to wish for a temple in Saint-Jérôme. It is a long-term project, since the feasibility of a building must be evaluated, a *pūjāri* must be hired, the financial means of Saint-Jérôme’s small Hindu community must be considered, and it remains unknown how receptive the local population will be to this project.

### Conclusion

Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees appreciate the peace, justice, and safety they have found in their welcoming new land, Canada. To resettle in Quebec nonetheless implies learning French, a language that is very foreign to the migrants, and accepting new conditions of Hindu practice. Hindu elders are conscious of the importance of the transmission of their religion. Marriages are mostly endogamous for Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees but, to face the dispersal of relatives all over the world, spouses often use surrogate family to substitute for missing fathers or elders and remote relatives, in-laws or even friends take the role of the missing relatives. All these collective rituals take place in houses or rented venues, because the absence of a temple in each of the Quebecois cities remains a big issue.

My own PhD research aims to increase our understanding of the integration methods of these refugees, focusing on young girls between 15 and 21 years of age in two different Quebecois cities. Such a focus will help study identity strategies (Camilleri 1990) as these refugee teenagers face two different cultures: their culture of origin and the culture of the Quebecois High School. On the one hand, the teenagers acquired their

culture of origin in the refugee camps in Nepal where they were born, and they want to be called Nepalese because they have never known Bhutan. Nepali is their mother tongue and Hindu norms invite them, for instance, to practise the *vrata* regularly. On the other hand, these young girls are now immersed in Quebec schools where the educational system focuses on mastering French and English and advocates the values of gender equality and academic success. It remains to be seen how these young Nepali-speaking Bhutanese girls build their identity amongst all these influences.

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# Conceptualising employment services for resettled Bhutanese refugees: A case study in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Eleanor Ott

During a focus group discussion with adult Bhutanese refugees in Pittsburgh, an older woman stated: ‘Government should understand the nature of the refugees arriving and put us with the jobs that ... allow the life to sustain.’ For Bhutanese refugees,<sup>1</sup> the nature of the resettlement experience is the result of the design of the national resettlement system and the local services received upon arrival. In the US, economic self-sufficiency and employment form the fundamental objectives of the resettlement programme for new arrivals. Refugees’ sentiments about the difficulties experienced and the government’s lack of understanding of these experiences appear in parallel in reports prepared for the government. One report finds that ‘resettlement efforts in some US cities are underfunded, overstretched, and failing to meet the basic needs of the refugee populations they are currently asked to assist’ (US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations 2010: vii). Another report notes that although there exists short-term monitoring of employment outcomes, ‘there has been less focus on making evaluation, on a broader scale, a part of the refugee program’ (Nightingale 2008: 2). Nonetheless, Bhutanese refugees and others are assumed by the resettlement system to be receiving employment services leading to economic self-sufficiency and broader wellbeing. Amidst the negative rhetoric and scant research, conceptualising the employment services Bhutanese refugees receive serves as a basis for understanding the relationship between resettlement policy, service delivery, and refugees’ experiences.

In this paper, I first situate the importance of Bhutanese refugee resettlement and economic self-sufficiency within the broader refugee studies

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1 This population is often referred to as ‘Bhutanese Nepalis’ or ‘Lhotshampas’, although each term has political undertones (Hutt 2011). I have chosen to use the term ‘Bhutanese refugees’ in alignment with the preference of community leaders in Pittsburgh, although many now prefer not to be referred to as ‘refugees’ because they have permanent residency.

field and discuss the research methodology. Then, I present preliminary findings on the theoretical framework and programme delivery. Finally, I discuss the implications of the employment programming's 'theory of change' for the Bhutanese refugee community in Pittsburgh and for refugee resettlement.

### **Contextualising Bhutanese refugee resettlement in the US**

Globally, twenty-seven countries have resettlement programmes associated with UNHCR—representing domestic commitments to those individuals resettled and commitments to the international refugee framework (Lim-Kabaa 2012). These resettlement programmes vary in size and in the populations they resettle. Of the 10.5 million refugees of concern to UNHCR, less than 1% are ever formally resettled to a third country - 62,000 individuals in 2011 (UNHCR 2013). In the UNHCR resettlement handbook (2011), resettlement is said to:

...serve three equally important functions. First, it is a tool to provide international protection and meet the specific needs of individual refugees whose life, liberty, safety, health or other fundamental rights are at risk in the country where they have sought refuge. Second, it is a durable solution for larger numbers or groups of refugees, alongside the other durable solutions of voluntary repatriation and local integration. Third, it can be a tangible expression of international solidarity and a responsibility sharing mechanism, allowing States to help share responsibility for refugee protection, and reduce problems impacting the country of asylum.

The Bhutanese refugee resettlement initiative ostensibly serves all three functions: it provides particular protection to those in need first, it serves as a durable solution for the Bhutanese refugee population caught in a protracted situation in camps for 15-20 years, and it acknowledges international responsibility. As widely discussed in the literature on the resettlement programme out of Nepal, the Bhutanese resettlement programme is an expression of solidarity between countries, with over 100,000 Bhutanese refugees referred for resettlement and over 80,000 already resettled in eight countries since 2007 (Gurung 2013).

The US resettlement programme is held up as an archetype of this commitment to durable solutions and refugees globally. Since 1975, the US

has resettled over three million refugees, including over 60,000 Bhutanese refugees since 2008—more than all other countries combined on both accounts (US Department of State 2013). The government invests over \$1 billion per year in the resettlement programme (US Department of State *et al.* 2012). However, the role resettlement plays as a ‘durable solution’ hinges on the programming of the domestic system itself. The US 1980 Refugee Act states that the Director of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) shall ‘make available sufficient resources for employment training and placement in order to *achieve economic self-sufficiency among refugees as quickly as possible*’ (emphasis added).

This paper examines economic self-sufficiency interventions for Bhutanese refugees, their theories of change, and perceptions of effectiveness in an archetypal city: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania has received more Bhutanese refugees than any other state, and was the top receiving state in FY2011 and FY2012 (US Department of State 2013). Pittsburgh accounts for much of these arrivals, receives many Bhutanese secondary migrants, and is postulated by Bhutanese community leaders as the city with the highest Bhutanese refugee population in the US (Ott 2011, interviews 2013).

