Resettlement and Beyond:
Civil Engagement in the Integration of Burmese Refugees into U.S. Society

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Dedication and Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandfather who, with his frequent reminders, thesis guides, articles, and carefully attentive reading of the first draft, was the most important person guaranteeing the completion of this thesis outside of myself. In thanking him, it is necessary also to thank my grandmother, his partner of over 50 years, as she was doubtless the one pushing him to do all of the aforementioned tasks by threatening him with ice cream withdrawal, book bans, and, of course, burning all the newspapers;

Academically, I would like to thank Margarete Grandner for her guidance. Her attention to detail and her initial understanding of my concept — and being able to put it into words even before I could — convinced me that my idea was a worthwhile project;

To my family, I owe everything — to my parents, the fact that I was able to eat the last two years and to fill my free time and vacant brain with matters of great global importance; moreover, they tolerated my ever-increasing precociousness and newly developed “intellectualism.” Over the course of the program, many changes have occurred affecting all of my family: in this, my brother Zachary taught me to do everything it takes to be the agent in my own happiness and to pursue the people and activities that lead toward that goal; my brother Calvin taught me bravery in all endeavors, having bet on a career in Hollywood, and that constancy, dependability, and damn good sense really do matter in this world; and my sister Tessa taught me that there are multiple opportunities in this life to grow and adapt — as long as you work hard and remember what you stand for, you can do anything;

To Erik Schau, my best friend, roommate, and partner, for two years of intellectual stimulation, without whom my heart and mind would be in hapless disarray and our apartment dirty;

To my friends in the Global Studies program, my eternal thanks for two great years. In moments of distress, we were sensitive; in moments of great joy, we were mutually elated; and, at the end of our theses, we had hugs and champagne. Without their crazy travel ideas, thought-provoking thesis topics, patience and laughter in all languages, and openness to ideas, I would have had a very boring year indeed;

And finally, I must thank the various interviewees who contributed to this thesis for their time, effort, and information given to me at all stages of work. They were patient, available, informative, and engaging, and they are all working to make our little community a better place. I must express special thanks to Deborah Fulkis who read parts of the thesis and gave me her focus, attention, and assistance in the final stages of editing this work.
Abstract

This thesis will trace the historical development and circumstances that have led to the resettlement of thousands of refugees in the United States, accelerating from the end of the Second World War. It will explore what happens after resettlement has taken place, namely the key role that civil society’s engagement plays in the integration of refugees into United States society. Using Burmese refugees in DuPage County, Illinois as a case study, it will elucidate the extraordinary efforts, organizations, and motivations behind the various individuals who have banded together to welcome and acclimate refugees to the country. The role of the United States immigration history as the foundation for a successfully integrated society; religious affiliations and their associated concentration of wealth and compassion; national security and international relations; and the increased education and understanding of interlinking global problems and solutions among U.S. American communities will be discussed as having played distinctive roles in making the United States resettlement program the largest in the world.

Key Words: refugees, resettlement, civil society, Burma/Myanmar, integration, VOLAG

Die Masterarbeit setzt sich mit den historischen Umständen und Entwicklungen auseinander, die zur Aufnahme tausender Flüchtlinge in den USA geführt haben. Dieser Prozess hat speziell in der Zeit nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg zunehmend an Bedeutung gewonnen. Diesbezüglich liegt der Fokus der Arbeit auf den Prozessen nach der Aufnahme der Flüchtlinge. Hierbei spielt das zivilgesellschaftliche Engagement eine Schlüsselrolle für die Integration der Flüchtlinge in die Gesellschaft der USA. Am Fallbeispiel burmesischer Flüchtlinge in DuPage County, Illinois, werden die außergewöhnlichen Anstrengungen, die Organisationen und Motivationen der verschiedenen Akteure erläutert, die sich zusammengeschlossen haben, um die Flüchtlinge zu empfangen und sie bei der Eingewöhnung zu unterstützen. Die Rolle der Einwanderungsgeschichte der USA als Grundlage für eine erfolgreiche Integrationsgesellschaft; religiöse Zugehörigkeiten und die damit verbundene Konzentration auf Wohlstand und Mitgefühl; nationale Sicherheit und internationale Beziehungen; und das zunehmende Wissen und Bewusstsein über global vernetzte Probleme und Lösungen innerhalb amerikanischer Gemeinden werden diskutiert hinsichtlich ihrer zentralen Bedeutung für die Entstehung des größten Eingliederungsprogramms der Welt durch die Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika.

Stichwörter: Flüchtlinge, Aufnahme, Zivilgesellschaft, Burma/Myanmar, Integration, VOLAG
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>The Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>DKBA</td>
<td>Democratic Karen Buddhist Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>English as a Learning Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAV</td>
<td>Family Advocate Volunteer</td>
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<td>FY</td>
<td>Fiscal Year</td>
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<td>GECRC</td>
<td>Glen Ellyn Children's Resource Center</td>
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<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organization for Migration</td>
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<td>KIO</td>
<td>Kachin Independence Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>KNA</td>
<td>Karenni Armed Wing</td>
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<tr>
<td>KNLA</td>
<td>Karen National Liberation Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>NLD</td>
<td>National League for Democracy</td>
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<td>NMSP</td>
<td>New Mon State Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>OPE</td>
<td>Overseas Processing Entity</td>
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<tr>
<td>OWL</td>
<td>Opening the World through Literacy</td>
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<td>ORR</td>
<td>Office of Refugee Resettlement</td>
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<td>PETA</td>
<td>People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRC</td>
<td>People's Resource Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRM</td>
<td>Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration</td>
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<tr>
<td>PTSD</td>
<td>Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELA</td>
<td>Ikatan Relawan Rakyat (Malaysian paramilitary civil volunteer corps)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLORC</td>
<td>State Law and Order Restoration Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPDC</td>
<td>State Peace and Development Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>SVD</td>
<td>Saint Vincent DePaul</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNOCAL</td>
<td>Union Oil Company of California</td>
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<tr>
<td>USCIS/DHS</td>
<td>United States Citizenship and Immigrant Services in the Department for Homeland Security</td>
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<tr>
<td>USD</td>
<td>United States Dollar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USDoS</td>
<td>United States Department of State</td>
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<tr>
<td>UWSA</td>
<td>United Wa State Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>VOLAG</td>
<td>Voluntary Agency</td>
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<td>WR</td>
<td>World Relief</td>
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Prologue

I first became aware of Burma in fourth grade when I was summoned to do a presentation on the country, geography, and people. I remember that I was terribly confused that this stretch of glorious geographical and cultural riches went by two names, “Burma” and “Myanmar.” In the project, I remember choosing to emphasize the name Burma because I liked the way it sounded. I also liked the secrecy behind the name, knowing that some people called it Myanmar but I knew it for its true name – Burma.

On a visit home to Glen Ellyn in 2010, I arranged a lunch date with an old friend, Katie Galli, who had become an employee at the Glen Ellyn Children’s Resource Center. She gushed about her job and her own personal growth through the rewarding work at the center. In revealing this new world to me, she emphasized the Burmese refugees, the group from whom she had learned the most. She was thrilled to share this with me; I, on the other side of an elegant lunch, was shocked. I had no idea that refugees were being settled in the United States, let alone in my own hometown. One year later, I was sitting in the grass in advance of delivering my thesis proposal. I had planned an entire thesis presentation for the Master’s thesis summer school, but a former student who gave a presentation explaining the format, thought process, and planning required to write his own Master’s thesis gave us two pieces of advice: get started as soon as possible, and do something close to home. Suddenly, it struck me: Burmese refugees were close to home (and I could start it quickly), would be an interesting topic, and would cover a migration topic about which I knew nothing. Assembling a few hasty sentences, I delivered a brand-new proposal and set to work.

In some ways, I feel like this process has brought me back to my fourth grade self, learning about a process that, much like my visual aids and perfunctory research back then, opened up the potential of my modest childhood setting into a globalized, diverse landscape with possibility and vitality – a far cry from the memories I have of the place as a homogenous, stodgy, and altogether un-cool suburb of Chicago. My thesis has brought me to a new understanding of that mysterious orange map of Burma that I printed out all those years ago, but more importantly has opened my eyes to the power of groups of active and concerned citizens to effectuate change in their immediate surroundings. In some ways, it encourages me about the better side of humanity. Despite language barriers, cultural distance, and misunderstanding, curiosity is the launching pad upon which community members create a collaborative and harmonious existence. More surprising and fascinating were those activists, young and old, who created organizations from scratch simply because they perceived a need in the refugee communities and responded to it on the strength of their own initiative. In short, it was a very positive experience for me and I hope that it will contribute to a more streamlined and collaborative refugee – and immigrant – support system throughout the entire United States resettlement program and immigration system.
Introduction

Fleeing across international boundaries into often unfriendly and unwelcoming neighboring countries, refugees are subjected to a precarious life that, despite being aided to various degrees by international organizations, governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), is often compounded with danger, disease, and discrimination. Leaving their country of origin with or without family members and keeping ahead of armies while scavenging for food, refugees undergo fierce physical and psychological pressures that, in the camps that they, if relatively lucky, can reach, are extended into years of waiting for relief, the hope of eventual return, or renaissance and the chance to start somewhere new. For some, a complex bureaucratic process is launched to determine whether they can begin life anew in another country. If this option is chosen and granted, the long process of screening and acceptance into the third country for permanent residence happens for the ‘lucky ones’ that have been torn from their lives and livelihoods to be planted awkwardly in geographically and culturally distant countries. For the estimated ten million refugees worldwide,¹ not to mention those who are of ambiguous status (the vast number of those labeled as internally displaced persons (IDPs), or people who have fled their homes but have not crossed internationally-recognized borders), this is an option for a startling few. When they leave, they set off for places like the United States, Australia, Canada, Sweden, Germany, France, England, and Iceland that have taken on the shared international responsibility to resettle refugees.

This thesis concerns the general process of refugee resettlement but focuses specifically on the process that begins after the labyrinth of international bureaucracy is surpassed and refugees are securely planted in third-country communities. More precisely, it will look at the organizations that facilitate the process of integration into communities in the United States, picking up the slack when government-mandated services end. The motivations, processes, and perspectives of some critical players have been gathered to show what a typical resettlement area might look like, as well as the shortcomings and challenges for refugees and those who help them.

To accomplish these goals, this paper will look at the reception of Burmese refugees in DuPage County, Illinois as a reflection of a wider phenomenon both in the state of Illinois and in the United States as a whole. Resettled as

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¹ Estimates vary widely for FY 2011, ranging from 7-16 million.
per the mandate of World Relief, a Christian resettlement agency contracted by the U.S. government, the Burmese have been coming to Glen Ellyn, Wheaton, and other areas of the county especially over the last five years due to conflicts back in Burma (that have persisted for over half a century), slowly extending their family networks within cities in the United States, DuPage County, and even the apartment complexes within which they reside (for a map of DuPage County and its situation within the state, please refer to Appendices D and E). To be accepted by U.S. Americans, refugees have it relatively easy: there are few who would express fears that refugees threaten the economy, take jobs, or otherwise negatively affect U.S. society (though the sentiment does exist) because of their harrowing background stories. This is in contrast to the negative stigma surrounding irregular migrants and migrants of certain origins (namely those from Central and South America), even if they do have regular status. Still, there are immense hurdles for refugees hindering full integration that are left to the local community and refugees to manage for themselves.

This paper will therefore trace the origin and development of various organizations that have sprung up to fill supporting roles for refugees in the communities of Glen Ellyn and Wheaton specifically (two adjoining villages in the county, though larger organizations that do not operate exclusively here but within the whole of DuPage County are included in this analysis, including the resettlement organization World Relief. With this in mind, some of the larger organizations and their projects that overlap will also be explained). The groups and individuals under analysis have banded together or acted alone (as a part of United States civil society in general) to provide a wide range of services to refugees based on the perception of need. Ultimately, then, this paper is talking about human relations at a local level, as governmental contractual assistance is eventually terminated, leaving refugees and the community to sort out their spaces of interaction together. Elaborating on various motifs, including integration, migration, justice, generational divides, law, religion, globalization, and nationality, this thesis looks at the human level of refugee integration from an infrastructural perspective. It is therefore important to remember that in assessing the division of responsibility, which involves a plethora of organizations, governments, agents, and regions, this process is ultimately a question of humanity and social inclusion at its start and endpoints.
Research Question and Structure

The central research question guiding this thesis is: what is the nature of the interaction between civil society and refugees in the United States, using Burmese refugees in DuPage County Illinois as a case study? To feed into this question, the following lead-in and complementary questions will be considered: how have the residents of Glen Ellyn/Wheaton (as the primary location of interviews) coped with refugee resettlement, a process that they can neither affect nor control, and what are the underlying motivations for doing so? What resources are available to them and what goals have encouraged them to participate in a variety of ways, including setting up organizations, church ministries, and after-school programs? With relatively short-term, low-level support from the government, local or federal, and World Relief (in the long-term), how have these projects attempted to ensure sustainability (or, conversely, have failed to take it into account)? And finally, are its members necessary for the U.S. refugee resettlement program to function and/or succeed, and what are the critical gaps that remain that either cannot or have not been addressed?

To answer these questions, chapter one will first address why refugees are coming from Burma. How are they being persecuted? What is the nature of the conflict, and how long has it been running? This will be useful later to understand how people in the United States react and contribute to refugee integration. This chapter will briefly trace the contours of the conflict's history to comprehend why refugees are coming at all and what types of problems exist even before they are confronted with the complications of life in the United States. Further, there will be an analysis of the various sanctions that have been leveled against the government in Rangoon, discussing their efficacy and exploring the discussion that says that sanctions have led to the creation of new refugees. Finally, this chapter will look at the conditions of refugee camps and how these affect future resettlement, as well as the national responses of those states to which Burmese refugees initially flee.

Chapter two looks at the history of refugee resettlement in the United States. What was the context for its origins and what are the international protections that have arisen? What are the foreign policy, security, and humanitarian implications of refugee resettlement for the United States? Finally, how does the system actually work? This will help lay a framework to contextualize the need for civil society to get involved, a topic that will be transitioned to in chapter three. Early predecessors to the system, particularly religious groups working prior to international and national laws and acts that
institutionalized resettlement, will also be considered, as well as the increasing role of the United States in resettling the world’s refugees. This explanation will include the program’s historical framework, a breakdown of the system itself, and the various branches (particularly voluntary agencies, or VOLAGS) that carry out refugee resettlement, bringing it from the national to the local level.

Chapter three discusses the organizations that facilitate integration in the local context of DuPage County, Illinois (specifically Glen Ellyn and Wheaton) as a model for the United States-wide resettlement process. There will be brief comparison to resettlement in Chicago, Illinois (the two case studies being a mere 44 km from one another) to portray the main differences that manifest in a small-town versus a large city context and to see how programs originate and, in many cases, overlap. The main organization under observation will be World Relief, the government-contracted organization (the area’s VOLAG) that is responsible for the main integration activities in the first ninety days of refugee resettlement. The chapter then proceeds to discuss other civil society organizations that have been responsible for creating and/or maintaining other kinds of services for refugees and a description of the variety of services offered, ranging from soccer teams to computer skills courses to English language learning. This chapter serves as the focal point of the thesis, showing where civil society fits into the United States resettlement plan and making the argument that civil society is an indispensable actor that makes resettlement in the United States the durable program it is today. It also looks at the role of churches in supporting the VOLAGs by mobilizing communities to volunteer. Finally, having been based in large part on interviews, this section will dissect professed reasons for getting involved at an individual level to explore the complex motivations that incite U.S. Americans to help certain foreigners to integrate into their society.

Chapter four then acts as an analysis of the previous two chapters’ observations. Because local-level integration is largely conducted (or needs to be conducted) by society at large after the initial ninety-day period of government services, and because the transition from services offered by the VOLAG to those of local organizations is widely divergent and ad hoc, there are naturally many gaps in responses. It is still a relatively young program for the United States and certainly shows a learning curve. Where are the gaps, then, in the resettlement program, in terms of the services refugees receive (with a focus still on the Burmese) and what they actually need? How are the organizations and individuals that have become involved necessary to
facilitate this process and what are some of the missing resources or barriers to fuller integration? How are the Burmese themselves adapting to their surroundings and correcting for some of the oversights within the program? This will cover a variety of themes specific to the Glen Ellyn and Wheaton contexts that can, to a certain degree, be extrapolated for the United States in general, certainly regarding some government-issued services such as healthcare, school lunches, and VOLAG services. Others variables such as transportation difficulties and the strong faith and resource wealth in the area will be assessed in terms of what they offer and neglect in the complexity of refugee resettlement and, more importantly, integration.

The concluding chapter will synthesize the information gathered through the interviews and review, summarizing how the experience of refugees prior to their arrival in the U.S. affects their integration into the host society. It will reemphasize various important points from the text and end with recommendations for the local setting, in particular within the context of the United States resettlement infrastructure. It will also assess ways in which other models may be of use in considering how to move forward to strengthen refugee resettlement problems and what the long-term implications of resettlement are for this community. This thesis will expressly not deal with the Rohingya refugees. This is a sizeable group of Muslim refugees that fled to India and Bangladesh and are severely persecuted in these places (especially in Bangladesh) and Myanmar. However, as they are not being settled in the United States, this thesis will primarily take Burman, Karen, Karenni, and Chin refugees into account.

Methodology

A significant portion of the research is based on original interviews conducted by the author. The interviews were semi-structured, due to the variety of backgrounds of persons interviewed. A basic outline of questions was followed that was amended during interviews based on the levels of professionalism and prepared answers of interviewees. Because they were not all directors or running official programs (many people having created their own way to assist refugees) the organizations and projects varied greatly in scope and capacity. Thus, the semi-structured approach allowed for the collection of crucial information while inviting the interviewee to define his or her own role, mission, and successes within the greater resettlement infrastructure. The interviews were, wherever possible, conducted in person at the office, church, or place of work of each of the activists.
The method of choosing interviewees was somewhat random. The researcher initially had one contact, the Director of the Glen Ellyn Children’s Resource Center. The network quickly expanded as various individuals within the information chain suggested further potential interviewees and crucial links within the network. This web is very interlinked at some levels and, at others, riddled with gaps. No activist had a complete picture of the activities and abilities of other points in the web. However, there were nevertheless frequent references to other projects, individuals, and groups. Thus, the interviewer received contact details of other individuals or organizations to approach in almost every interview. In sum, 15 interviews were conducted (with two interviews including two people), of which two were not recorded. The interviews ranged from 20 minutes to three hours, and were conducted with case workers, intentional community members, churchgoers, volunteers, a Burmese student and pastor, and organization heads or employees. A majority had some sort of faith background, though there were also secular participants involved. There were two phone interviews, the rest conducted in person.

One particular drawback of the interview process was that there were interviewees who would have been very informative but, because of unavailability, had to be foregone. This was the main reason for not including a greater number of Burmese participants. Many were asked but had to refuse due to time constraints and family concerns (language barriers also played a role). Nevertheless, the picture for Glen Ellyn and Wheaton garnered from the interviews reveals the nature of the network, which is wide, grassroots-oriented, and quite un-integrated. It is hoped that this project will be able to reveal various untapped capacities and opportunities for the participants in hopes for more effective collaboration in the future. For further information on the interviewees, their jobs and involvement, and the county, please refer to Appendices A, B, and F at the end of the text.

The literature amassed for this thesis comes from a variety of sources. The interviews were invaluable not only for the variety of perspectives on the local setting, but for the questions they provoked concerning the greater system. Students at Northwestern University and Wheaton College in particular (including Matthew Soerens, a published author on the immigration debate who lives in one of the apartment buildings with immigrants and refugees and wrote his Master’s thesis on the immigration system) have written on this topic within Illinois particularly. Still, much of the information came from the United States government and its various
branches’ internet pages, newspaper articles, websites from activists, blogs, and program or organizational websites. There is not an extensive literary contribution as of yet on the Burmese in particular, nor for this area of the United States. There were but a few articles or studies that covered some of the Burmese groups and their refugee experiences. This study, then, combines the eyes and ears of the local activists with the wider movements occurring on the national stage to contribute to the construction of a body of literature on these groups’ refugee experiences.

**Working Definitions for Key Terms and Explanation of Case Study**

To understand the phenomena currently playing out in DuPage County, the definition of, and historical protective mechanisms for, a refugee must first be outlined. Refugees have been protected by international law since the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was codified. It is described as the central legal document that stipulates who qualifies as a refugee, what his/her rights are, and what the legal obligations of states are with regard to his/her status. In it, a refugee is defined as a person who,

> owing to well-founded fear of being persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country… or, owing to such fear… is unwilling to return to it.2

An important distinction to draw is that between a refugee and an irregular migrant (also known as undocumented or, colloquially, illegal immigrant), especially in the Glen Ellyn context. Irregular migrants are “people who enter a country, usually in search of employment, without the necessary documents and permits.”3 The reason this disparity is relevant is that despite the fact that refugees and irregular workers oftentimes live in the same residential building in Glen Ellyn/Wheaton and require the same services to assimilate into American society, many irregular migrants have expressed that their reception has been less than congenial from U.S. nationals, whereas refugees tend to describe locals as hospitable and welcoming.4 This is due to the various forms of stigmatization and prejudice accorded to irregular (or even

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2 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. UNHCR. Article 1, p. 16.
regular) migrants, who many local residents see as skimming off of the welfare or health systems without paying into them. Refugees, meanwhile, are seen as the tragic heroes of messy geopolitical circumstances. Refugees also differ from regular migrants in crucial ways, particularly as they often have less control over their destination and the bureaucratic processes behind their movements can take many more years. Regular and irregular migrants’ movements typically depend on self-perceived economic, social, familial, and other needs.

Emphasizing that refugees do not always have as much of a choice in their destination is not to suggest that they are passive, irrational actors. Fleeing certainly imposes certain stresses and psychological disturbances that can deeply imprint themselves on the human psyche for many years. Moreover, the long years in the refugee camps can be boring, stifling, and disheartening, especially as refugees’ attempts to find work are often hindered by the host governments in the countries to which they flee. Nevertheless, they are actors and, especially in the resettlement process, their willingness and integrative efforts are as vital to long-term happiness and success as are the efforts of the third-country citizens who help them. There are certain restrictions placed on refugees, plus the barriers imposed on them in terms of quotas and countries which choose to resettle. They cannot go anywhere freely and do not receive help everywhere they go. It must be remembered, however, that these are not helpless peoples.

This paper further concentrates on civil society in the United States. There is no widely accepted definition but, for the purposes of this paper, the working definition used by the London School of Economics was chosen for its applicability in a small-town context. It reads as follows:

Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organizations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organizations, community groups, women’s organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups.5

5 This is a definition that was developed by the London School of Economics’ Civil Centre, which closed in September 2010. It is widely referenced and can be found, in full, in a text by
Of great importance is the understanding that civil society is made up of individuals, acting in concert, to effectuate some end. Another point is that civil society operates in a third realm, apart from the government and the market, as a major actor in modern societies. It is a pluralistic set of micro entities that, though not entirely divorced from the state or market in many cases (as will be shown with regard to World Relief), is nevertheless bureaucratically or functionally separate from both of these forces. It is also important to underline the usefulness of this definition in particular, as faith-based organizations, women’s organizations, advocacy groups, and coalitions are major actors in this region.

“People group” is a term that came up frequently in interviews with local activists. Interestingly, “people group” is a term that originally referenced “the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance” for evangelizing purposes. This term, however, has entered the common parlance of both organizations and individuals involved in DuPage County and seemed to denote, in these cases, an ethnic grouping linked by language, culture, and geography. This term has gained importance in the Glen Ellyn context with reference to the Burmese, as the grouping “Burmese” is actually misleading. There are various groups of national citizens of Burma (known officially as Myanmar, but known to the people as Burma) who have been resettled in the county, including Karen, Karenni (a sub-group of the Karen, though with distinct linguistic and cultural features), Burman, and Chin (for a map of Burma with the locations of these various groups, please refer to Appendix C). Upon closer questioning, none of the interviewees seemed to know the highly religious connotations of the term, though it was frequently used nonetheless. It was useful in the context, as people used it to distinguish

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Lausanne Committee Chicago Meeting, 1982. <http://www.joshuaproject.net/what-is-a-people-group.php>. The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization was created in 1976 after considerable work by Billy Graham, a famous Evangelist, to publicize the movement. It works to bring Christianity to peoples around the world, focusing on missionary activities in Africa and Asia in particular. They have, thus far, held three world congresses on evangelization in Lausanne Switzerland (1974, in advance of the creation of the committee), in Manila, Philippines (1989), and in Capetown, the Republic of South Africa (2010). Further information can be found at <www.lausanne.org>.

It was also mentioned in: Galli, Katie. Interview with author. Glen Ellyn, IL. 20 December 2011.
between the different ethnicities of the Burmese instead of saying “group,” “ethnicity,” or “culture.” Perhaps it also signifies more distinctly the religious interests in the area that influence the resettlement dialogue.

One of the ways that young religious people have gotten involved is by joining what they call “intentional community,” the purpose of which is to forge direct connections and ultimately friendships with residents of the county. They move into apartment complexes in which refugees, immigrants, and other low-income residents reside (refugees having been placed together either through familial or ethnic ties, but also due to the inexpensive apartments that are chosen by the VOLAG for resettlement) and form communities by being “good neighbors”, greatly influenced by the collective religious beliefs of the activists. Therefore, sharing the gospel forms an integral, though not sole, motivation for getting involved at this level.

Regarding the case study itself, Glen Ellyn/Wheaton has been chosen for various reasons. First, they are suburbs of Chicago, Illinois, which raises questions about the security and livelihoods of refugees in these towns when compared to their Chicagoan counterparts, making for an interesting comparison at a still relatively localized level. This is further enhanced by the fact that DuPage County (within which Glen Ellyn/Wheaton are located) is one of the wealthiest counties in the country, with a median household income in 2009 of $73,554. Second, while the issue of the religious character of World Relief will not be emphasized to an unnecessary degree, it is nevertheless a significant feature of this case study because World Relief has had great success in mobilizing the resources of churches in the area to support refugee integration in tandem with government funding. World Relief currently partners with over 70 churches in the DuPage area alone. Because most of the resettlement agencies have religious ties (made obvious in their names: see chapter two), this is a typical example of a VOLAG within the United States resettlement program.

Finally, Glen Ellyn and Wheaton were interesting case studies because of the increasing focus put on the immigrant debate in this area. In 2009, Matthew Soerens, who created and has lived in an intentional community since 2006, published a book called *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion and Truth in the Immigration Debate*. It looks at the immigration debate in the U.S. through a

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religious lens, based on Soerens’s (and his co-author, Jenny Hwang’s) personal experiences living in immigrant/refugee/low income communities and extensive research of the United States’ immigration system. This study, by comparison, will be investigating the reception of refugees in the area primarily through a secular lens (though, as mentioned, any efforts are usually heavily intertwined with religious forces) to help detangle the complicated network within DuPage County as a whole. It will look at the reception and integration of Burmese refugees there as an uneven but ultimately advancing process.

The Burmese migrants have been chosen as a subject group within the larger refugee population in this area to illustrate some of the problems when talking about refugees as a group or nationalities as one unit. This is particularly relevant for the Burmese refugee groups that have come to Glen Ellyn as a result of geographically distinct conflicts and separate grievances with the military government in Rangoon. Moreover, they are different social groups living in disparate parts of Burma and speaking dissimilar languages. They are also arguably different ethnicities, though the nebulousness of applying such a definition in this case is discussed in the first section of chapter one. Nevertheless, they are all categorized as “Burmese” by the U.S. government and the quotas are set accordingly, even though the government in Myanmar persecutes them in different ways. Unsurprisingly, then, the different groups have unique social and support structures when they arrive to the United States with little (if any) overlap, forming their own churches and collaborative groups.

The Burmese were also an inviting topic within the greater dialogue of refugee resettlement in the United States and in DuPage County as they are not covered in any significant way by Soerens’s text (which deals primarily with irregular migrants, not refugees, and implores religious communities to accept immigrants as fellow Christians despite their backgrounds) or many others, for that matter, inviting a new angle to analyze the U.S. immigration system. Finally, it was the author’s own longstanding interest in Burma, as well as the fact that it was the first group in DuPage County to come to the author’s attention, that determined the choice of the Burmese as a case study instead of the Somalis, Iraqis, Rwandans, and other refugees that are settled in this area.

A final important note for the purpose of this thesis is when “Myanmar” and “Burma” are used to name the country. Myanmar will be used when referencing the military government that has subjected Burmese peoples to
violence and hardship, causing many to flee. Burma, in contrast, will be used when referencing similar troubles or persecution for all of the peoples of Burma though, as will be explained in chapter one, they are not identical. It does not refer specifically to the Burmans. Moreover, because of the quota delineations in the U.S. resettlement program that treat the Burmese as a whole, “Burmese” will be used when talking about the U.S. resettlement system, as well as the abuses suffered, refugee camp conditions, and the services upon arrival in the United States (since these are likely to be similar based on this quota flaw). They will be referred to in their individual groupings when the circumstances or examples require it.

Immigration remains a central public debate within the United States political realm. With another presidential election approaching and economic crises both past and looming, immigration is always a fierce topic subject to partisan views and propaganda. Meanwhile, refugees keep sprouting up as the unfortunate by-products of wars around the world, and play a significant role in diversifying the USA from a public perspective. Their integration is important not only for the government’s self perception and policies, but is essential on the local level for creating cooperative and harmonious communities. To proceed, the conflict in Myanmar and its effects on the populations therein will follow.
Chapter One: Myanmar and her Refugees

To understand the story of Burmese refugees resettled in the United States, one must first have an understanding of the complex history that has led to the divided Burma of today, as well as of the conflicts that have driven people from their homes for fear of their lives long after their livelihoods and security have been disrupted. This chapter will give a very brief outline of the history of Burma and government’s military control over it before covering the psychological and physical harm that have caused many to flee the country. It will continue with an assessment of international responses to this protracted crisis, including the various sanctions that have been imposed by a variety of concerned nations, including the United States. The chapter concludes with a description of the refugee camp conditions and what problems they imply for future resettlement and integration efforts.

Understanding Burma

Burma is an ethnically complex nation in south-east Asia, bordered by China, Bangladesh, Thailand, India, Laos, and the Bay of Bengal. It has an estimated 135 different groups, but is divided into eight major ones: Burman, Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan,10 with the Burmans as the largest group at 68%.11 It was suggested in an 1872 government census that it was possibly the country most varied in race, custom, and language.12 Burma has a complex history of power struggles between these various groups dating back through the centuries. The various groups were split into warring kingdoms, united at times against other ethnic groups but only temporarily as a stable whole.

Though it is undeniable that the groupings listed above are distinct, it is difficult to classify the different peoples of Burma into ethnicities, a Western construct that relies on territorial origin bounded by distinct borders. Burmese peoples are divided based on ephemerally bordered, hierarchically arranged territories related to Hindu-Buddhist concepts of karma and

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12 Maung, Mya. “The Burma Road from the Union of Burma to Myanmar.” Asian Survey, Vol. 30, No. 6 (Jun., 1990), pp. 605. However, this census was conducted by the government of the country, raising question as to its biases
stations of birth. Though the groups are mutually distinctive by language, custom, geographical location, and other markers, it may be wiser to label them as “groups” rather than “ethnicities”, the former of which will be adopted by this thesis. It is, however, misleading to adopt the term “people group,” as this implies an agenda to proselytize to these groups. It is important to keep these differences, however classified, in mind when proceeding with the history.

Great Britain was the long-time colonial ruler of Burma. It “conquered Burma in stages” beginning in 1824, eventually leading to the ousting of the ruler, Burman King Thibaw, in 1886. Colonial Burma was a relatively insignificant portion of the British Empire’s vast rule, with the colonial rulers not even deigning to give it its own administration. Rather, they ruled indirectly through administrators from neighboring India. They exploited differences among the various Burmese peoples, favoring certain groups over others in order to maintain control by fostering distrust. This had the effect of ordering Burmese society in a way that was alien to them by undermining traditional elites through the promotion of arbitrary national ones and promoting minority rights in opposition to majorities. Further, they set groups that normally were not in agreement together or, far more treacherous, set groups that previously had no malice between them against one another.

Though its auspicious independence date from Great Britain in 1948 has been somewhat obfuscated in history by coming one year after the tumultuous India-Pakistan divide, which greatly colored relations in the region, the newly sovereign country had its own shares of chaos in the early years. In 1947, Aung Sun, deemed the Burmese father of democracy and possibly the only player who could command respect of all ethnic groups and therefore lead Burma into a stable independence (also father to the infamous Aung San Suu Kyi), was assassinated on July 19th. He had just brokered the Panglong Agreement, a peace deal aiming to create a federated Burma. Had the agreement proceeded under his rule, the country may have had a better chance at tolerant integration. However, the legacies bequeathed by British

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14 Galli was the first to use this term as a mode of distinction.
15 Walton, Matthew J. p. 892.
17 Walton, Matthew J. p. 897.
rule and centuries of non-unity overpowered this moment of accord and, with its principle actor gone, the Panglong Agreement almost instantly dissolved.

The War after Independence

This section will give an undistinguished explanation of the major events following independence that have created refugees and characterized the rule of the nation – undistinguished because a detailed explanation of the crisis and contemporary developments are out of the scope of this thesis. The section will focus instead on laying a framework in order to understand how refugees have been created under the military government.18 Fourteen disorderly years ensued after independence on the 4th of January 1948 as various ethnic groups rebelled under the mostly democratic interim government, demanding either independence or a federal system.19 Over time, the military gathered strength and power, gaining a prominent role in local politics by 1958.20 Before long, the dominating political force that, in some form, persists today successfully initiated a coup in 1962, sweeping General Ne Win, head of the government’s army, to power.21 Following the coup, the regime had no easy task ahead. Attempting to implement “the Burmese Way to Socialism,” or a classless society modeled on Socialist beliefs, the ruling power began to force a unified Burma onto a divided populace.22

Following this move, the myriad ethnic groups plunged into warfare that spanned the entire country, with their various armed and all-too-ready guerilla armies battling the central government from the fringes. They controlled no small part of the country, but were separated in a variety of alliances and small groups. There has been almost ceaseless warfare with the Karen, Karenni, and Chin henceforward, with some skirmishes with the Shan and Wa as well. A constitution created in 1974 further fuelled unrest as the ruling powers used the document to institute official demarcations of the various states within the country – without respecting natural divisions – all ruled by the central military government. This power move and the resulting

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19 “Mostly democratic” is a reference to the 18-month military rule from 1958-9.
20 http://www.fromburmatonewyork.com
22 Thomson 1995, 274. See also: Maung 1990, 604.
borders have been challenged by the outlying groups ever since and stokes anger to the present day.²³

1988 was the year of the most well-known uprisings in Burma. Tensions had been building, particularly since the demonetization of 80% of the country’s currency in September 1987 that induced financial chaos and the death of a student by a bodyguard of the ministry in an off-campus conflict.²⁴ It was university students who led protests on campuses around the country in March (Burma, prior to this year, had a strong university system) to which the regime reacted with a violent crackdown. Two deaths were officially recorded, though unofficial estimates are much higher, citing death by stabbing, suffocation, and beatings.²⁵ The next year, in June, students marching peacefully down the road leading away from Rangoon University were again met with violence, getting run over, stabbed, beaten to death, and murdered. Further accusations of rape and other crimes were leveled against authority figures that tormented protestors in jail. Many students fled into the mountains, forming resistance groups or joining preexisting ones; thousands left the country.²⁶

Many descriptions of what happened next describe a coup, while others describe a handover of power that was demanded by an extraordinary ballot of the government.²⁷ Whatever the reason, the new leader, a detested figure named Sein Lwin, sparked further protests among the populations of Burma, causing the government to declare martial law on August 3rd; riots, however, persisted and many more people were involved (beyond the students of the previous marches).²⁸ Burma Watcher describes an entire month of riots and violence; the halt of the economy, airplane services and schooling; and general looting in government warehouses that ended on September 18th.

²³ Thomson 1995, 274.
²⁵ Ibid, 175.
²⁷ Burma Watcher describes how “in the ensuing power vacuum the BSPP appointed Sein Lwin, the most hated man in the country, as both the BSPP chairman and president of Burma. Incredibly, the man held responsible in the people’s eyes for the brutality” (page 175). According to the same source, he then resigned briefly to allow another, more credible candidate (Dr. Maung Maung) to take power to quell protests (178). This source asserts that this was not a change of leadership, but merely putting a different figurehead under the same ruling party. Others, including Silverstein (1992, 952), Maung (1999, 269) and McCarthy (2006, 420) describe what happened as a coup.
²⁸ Burma Watcher 1989, 177.
when the armed forces, under General Saw Maung, declared that they had taken over the government.29

Because of the violence and intensity of protesting, the new ruling power – called until 1989 the SLORC (later named the State Peace and Development Council, SPDC) – felt compelled to hold democratic elections, finally giving a chance for the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), to run. What happened next was unexpected for the regime: the opposition party won what has been called by many a “landslide victory” in the elections held on 27 May 1990.30 The actual winnings were 80.8% of parliamentary seats and 59.9% of the popular vote.31 In denial of the obvious result, the regime locked up Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the NLD, under house arrest (which continued haphazardly in three separate stints and was again recently lifted at the end of 201032) and violently oppressed outlying groups.

This, however, led to a series of agreements with many of the fringe armies. Wishing to prevent another widespread bid at democracy, the government appeased a variety of the groups with ceasefires while refusing them with others to try to split opposition.33 However, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), Karenni Armed Wing (KNA) and Shan groups are all still fighting, with robust armies (many of their recruits are gained from those who have escaped from forced conscription under the Tatmadaw, the SPDC’s army) and an unwavering desire for independence from military rule.34 From 1990 onward, the government meanwhile continued to relocate people, creating significant flows of refugees, and still has not managed to

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29 These events are corroborated by the article: Maung, Mya. “The Burma Road from the Union of Burma to Myanmar.” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 30 no. 6 (June 1990), pages 615-618. Few articles, in talking about historical developments in Burma, dwell on this time more than to note the protests as a direct lead-in to the democratic elections of 1990.


31 McCarthy, Steven. 418.


unify the entire country. There are longstanding armies still at war, with no sign of abatement.\footnote{Maung 1999, 275.}

2003 and 2007 were two other significant moments of unrest and overt attacks on peaceful civilians by the ruling government. The event in 2003 concerned a traveling convoy with the recently released Aung Sun Suu Kyi, who was then allowed a slight expansion of her right to travel. At one point on the journey, she went beyond the borders within which the government had restricted her, speaking in the Bago region north of Rangoon. On May 30\textsuperscript{th}, Suu Kyi and her supporters were attacked by alleged government agents.\footnote{Seekins 2004, 179.} She was unharmed, but was returned to house arrest thereafter for seven years.\footnote{"Aung San Suu Kyi makes first trip since her release." 4 July 2011. \textit{BBC News}, 10 October 2011. \texttt{<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-14011850>}.} The second event, the Saffron Rebellion of 2007, took place over the months of August and September of that year, with monks leading protests against the regime to highlight the weakened and increasingly deteriorating economic situation in Burma. 10-30 monks were estimated to have been killed (the former being the official estimate and the latter coming from the Special Rapporteur of the UN to Myanmar) and thousands detained.\footnote{U.S. Department of State Website, 2011.} Whether change will occur over the next few years is currently being discussed, as the government in Rangoon has given indications of a changing mindset. For further details on these developments, refer to Appendix A.

A presidential election was once again held on November 7, 2010. There was little belief in its validity and expression of true Burmese political opinion, especially because Aung Sun Suu Kyi’s party, the NLD, boycotted the elections. The NLD refused to participate because this would have implicitly condoned the new constitution that the regime drew up in 2008 and the new electoral laws that prevented Aung Sun Suu Kyi, under house arrest, from leading the party due to her criminal record.\footnote{"Suu Kyi’s NLD Party to Boycott Burma Election." 29 March 2010. \textit{BBC News}. Accessed 20 September 2011. \texttt{<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8592365.stm>}.} The NLD has also condemned the reigning government for preventing it from taking its democratically sanctioned power in 1990, as well as ongoing human rights abuses and violence against civilians. Indeed, on the day of the election, there was mass infighting at border areas between armed resistance groups and the SPDC,
resulting in the creation of some 17,000 new refugees. Moreover, there is widespread agreement that the elections in 2010 were flawed: fraud, stuffed ballot boxes, lack of access to voting, intimidation and coercion, and a low turn-out rate (generously estimated at 35%) are just some of the factors that resulted in a rigged election that has consolidated the military’s hold on power under the guise of establishing its legitimacy in the eyes of the world.

Burma’s Cries

Since the beginning of the conflict, the suffering of the Burmese – from all different groups – has been brutal. Not only have they endured six decades of civil war. With groups at odds with each other, many have fallen victim to the cruel tactics of the army. Broadly, these include: quotas demanding regular labor from villagers, including the transport of food and weapons; the placement of said forced laborers as human shields in front of advancing forces or to sweep mine fields; forced disappearances; forced conscription of children and other soldiers; and the somewhat more “typical” tactics of warfare, including rape, arbitrary violence, and rationing.

The first event leading to the creation of a large number of refugees was a major offensive in 1984 when the government attacked the Karen state in eastern Burma. As a result, some 10,000 refugees fled into neighboring Thailand. Refugees had been fleeing into Thailand prior to this date, but never in such significant numbers.

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41 For articles decrying the rigged elections and descriptions of methods used to do so, see: <www.burmaelectiontracker.org>, as well as Davies and Siddique, 2010. They write that governments around the world, including the US, the UK, Japan, and the EU, called the vote “neither free nor fair.”


thus not only individual in scope, as implied in the 1951 Convention refugee definition, but affect vast swaths of the population at once. Whole villages, found near areas of fighting and suspected of assisting the enemy, are burned to the ground by the Tatmadaw (the ruling group’s army).44 Other villages must provide food and labor, meeting arbitrary quotas by the Tatmadaw that set limits ranging from bi-monthly to daily labor commitments. Interviewed victims also describe the disappearance of villagers suspected of sympathies or active assistance to opposition armies, tearing apart communities and crippling livelihoods through the removal of leaders and family members, not to mention extra hands for farming.45 This exacerbates the rationing that is imposed on villages, which not only produce food for themselves but must also provide for the army troops on demand, leading to malnourishment and other indicators of poor health.

Individuals are also punished for the collective “guilt” of the whole population. Suspected soldiers, activists, and supporters of groups opposing the government are taken away and interrogated, disappeared, or worse, oftentimes with their families implicated or harmed as well. During interrogations, people are beaten or stabbed46 and many have to rely on family members to bribe officials for their release. One man describes being refused water and held in an icy chamber, given contaminated food, made to write his biography and confession over and over again (signing it each time), and kept in solitary, pitch-black confinement.47 Further, he said guards try to prevent prisoners from dying in jail by bringing them to a hospital to lessen international pressure. If prisoners die in the hospital, the government can say that it attempted to assist them, whereas dying in prison implies ill-treatment.

Child soldiers in Burma have been recruited largely for the Tatmadaw but also for the fringe armies of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), UWSA, Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and the New Mon State Party (NMSP), among the 30+ armed groups.48 The Tatmadaw, though, has

45 Amnesty International 2008.
the full force of the government behind it. Due to dwindling voluntary conscription, the abduction of young men at military checkpoints and in markets, cinemas, train and bus stations, and villages has been exceptionally high for over a decade. One of the primary means of enlisting children is to demand to see their identification cards; children under the age of 18 are not granted one, so they are arrested on the spot for not verifying their age. Once in jail, they are given the choice of a long internment or joining the Tatmadaw. In return for forcibly detaining these children, their captors receive money and rice, which perpetuates the practice. 49 The army purportedly has set the age limit at 18 for new recruits to reduce international pressure over child soldier conscription. This only leads recruiters to force conscripts to sign their names to a falsified age (mostly above 18, though the “youth camp” – the Ye Nyunt – for training recruits is a convenient way to keep children for future fighting), thereby fulfilling the quotas of the bedraggled army while concealing true child soldier numbers.

Once in the army, the conscripts are trained to fight in clear violation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, a 120-state ratified document to which Myanmar is party.50 They are forced to participate in acts of violence including massacres, forced displacement, burning villages, and abusing villagers under the forced labor quotas.51 They are susceptible to the harsh conditions of life in the Tatmadaw army, including disease and injury, and have no opportunity for schooling (indeed, Burma’s high schools and universities have been closed on and off since 1985 – in a country that used to boast a robust education system – because they are seen as rallying points for opposition views. Many children only attend kindergarten as a result, confining them to a life of poverty52). They are beaten for mistakes, running away, and often simply for talking, worried as the Tatmadaw is that they will organize and rebel. With Burma boasting the most child soldiers in the world at an estimated 300,000, they are some of the military regime’s most vulnerable and abused victims.

49 Ibid.
52 “My Gun was as tall as me,” 2007, p. 24-5.
Finally, the groups that have fled have done so because of persecution on various levels. The Chins have fled because they are persecuted for their belief in Christianity. The Karens are not allowed to manage their own schools, teach in their own language, nor are they allowed to challenge official versions of history. All groups within the country are forbidden from achieving the semi-sovereignty that a federated state would accommodate and have had their desire for democratic rule repeatedly quashed despite protests, the free and fair elections of 1990, and popular sentiment. Further, the government has restricted schooling and travel — indeed, many of the refugees who flee are stateless because Myanmar does not issue them passports — and reduced the opportunities for entrepreneurship, innovation, education, and religious practice. In short, they have subjected all of the peoples of Burma to ill-treatment, both physical and psychological.

These multiple abuses have created the floods of refugees that spill over into Thailand, India and Bangladesh, migrate to Malaysia, and seek assistance from countries abroad. Victims of all ages are subjected to violence, forced labor, conscription in armies, and fear. The ruling party is not the only actor to blame in this, as outlying fringe groups have also conscripted child soldiers and, through fighting, helped to sustain the status quo that has forced so many from their homes. Still, they are part of the opposition voices that are trying to tell the world that this is an unsustainable situation and that citizens of the country cannot tolerate the circumstances. Once refugees cross the international boundaries that divide Myanmar from neighboring states, refugees are subjected to the politics and relations of various foreign governments, humanitarian organizations, and faith-based coalitions that greatly affect their ability to survive. Going back, at least in the short term, is not a viable option.

International Responses, Restrictions, and Reactions

This section will explore international responses to the protracted crisis in Burma, first by looking at how the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the regional economic and geo-political coalition, has interacted with Myanmar since ASEAN’s birth. It will further look at the actions of the governments in Thailand and Malaysia (the neighboring countries to which the refugees of concern to this thesis primarily flee) and the business partners of the junta. It will then assess how the United States government has

53 Oh 2008, 593.
oriented policies toward Myanmar, looking at the effect of U.S. sanctions on the government in particular.

ASEAN has had an interesting relationship with Myanmar, most likely because of the differing opinions of the countries that comprise it (for instance, China is a business partner of the regime, as well as India). For a long time, ASEAN barred Myanmar from joining the coalition. Though Myanmar was pursued for membership soon after the inception of ASEAN in 1967, it declined and ASEAN’s interest in pursuing it evaporated. Myanmar was approached again and finally allowed to become a member in 1997. It has maintained this status continuously, despite questionable governmental practices, attacks on Aung Sun Suu Kyi in 2003, and the harsh crackdown on the Saffron Revolution in 2007. ASEAN has not been completely complacent, however, and has frequently threatened to revoke membership.

More recently, debate has arisen regarding the leadership rotation that would put Myanmar at the helm of ASEAN in 2014. Many, including governments and NGOs, request that ASEAN block this move. Others, including Laos (which swapped places with Myanmar for chairmanship) and Indonesia, do not see a problem with it holding the position, as long as the government continues on the path to democracy and protects human rights. ASEAN is expected to release its decision at its annual meeting in November, 2011.

Recent events in Myanmar, such as the release of 6,300 prisoners and the decision to halt the construction of a hydro-electric dam on the Irrawaddy

57 Associated Press. “Myanmar Prisoner amnesty prompts call for all political detainees to be freed, not just 10 pct.” 12 October 2011. The Washington Post. Accessed 13 October 2011. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmar-to-grant-amnesty-to-6300-prisoners-but-unclear-how-many-are-political-detainees/2011/10/11/gIQAfypdI_stor y.html>. Despite the fact that Zarganar, a critic and comedian, has been freed, there are many who question the sincerity of the regime and await the release not only of token prisoners on amnesty but of more influential political prisoners as well.
river, a project that would have infringed on Kachin land,\(^58\) were likely pursued by the government to influence this decision and may indeed have an effect.

Still, not all of the countries are friendly to the government in Rangoon and a few small-scale actions may not be enough to convince ASEAN members, let alone the world, that the junta truly intends widespread change. Japan, which had given preferential treatment to Myanmar in the decades after the WWII due to having occupied it, has been the most obvious and substantial critic. It was the single most important funder of the government from 1976 to 1990, assuring 60% of all bilateral aid to Burma.\(^59\) However, the Japanese government issued a freeze on aid delivery briefly in 1988 due to the violence inflicted on protestors at the student demonstrations, supported in this move by the United States and the United Kingdom.\(^60\) It resumed aid for a time, increasing funds after 1995, the year of Aung San Suu Kyi’s first release from house arrest.\(^61\) However, it completely ceased development assistance in 2003 (except for humanitarian aid in the wake of natural disasters).\(^62\) Only in 2011 has it reconsidered recommencing money transfers due to the release of Aung San Suu Kyi last November.

Other members are not so keen to condemn. China has long filled the role of Japan in filling Myanmar’s coffers, reportedly giving a three-year, interest-free loan of 4.2 billion USD in 2010, not to mention a 780 million USD credit grant to the government early this year.\(^63\) Chinese corporations are also frequent business partners especially in mining and act as the primary interests behind the recently canceled hydro-electric dam. Additionally, China has provided Myanmar billions of dollars in armaments and training and


\(^{60}\) Zaw 2001, 5.

\(^{61}\) Holliday 2005, 614.


increasingly linked the two countries with rail and roads. Other supporters include Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore, which were key backers in Myanmar’s bid for membership in ASEAN. They are also investors and partners of the government, with Singapore in particular providing arms.

Friends of Myanmar do not extend much further abroad. The United States has taken a strong position against the country and condemns the government’s actions against its citizens. A longstanding (and highly contentious) policy of the United States government and some of its allies to effectuate this disapproval has been the instigation of sanctions against the country. There has also been periodic freezing of officials’ accounts from Myanmar, as well as restrictions on their ability to travel to the United States. The idea is that these restrictions will cripple the economy and force the military junta to cooperate on issues such as democracy, human rights, and rule of law for the citizens of Burma. But are these sanctions targeting the junta effectively? Many would say they are not. What are their motivations in the United States, and what are the effects on industries, the economy, the government, and the general population in Burma? What is the position of Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi?

U.S. Sanctions against Myanmar were first suggested in 1993 but imposed on May 20th, 1997 by President Clinton. These sanctions prohibited “new investment in Burma by U.S. persons and companies on or after May 21, 1997.” The idea was to strangle the government in Myanmar economically, since “U.S. dollars [served as] its lifeblood… in urban areas” for many years, especially in the oil sector. Interestingly, an exemption has permitted a politically well-connected corporation, UNOCAL, to continue natural gas exploration off Burma’s shores, which “provides $400 million to $647 million to the Burmese government annually.” This has created conflict both in Myanmar and the U.S. A major lawsuit broke out in 2004 between the company and various Burmese groups, which claimed that UNOCAL had assisted in the “relocation, forced labour, torture, murder, and rape” of citizens living in the way of the Yadana pipeline. Travesties, then, are not

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64 Zaw 2001, 5.
65 Ibid 7.
67 Seekins 2005, 441.
68 Niksch and Weiss, 2009.
restricted only to Myanmar’s government. Allowing this morally dubious company to continue to prosper from profits made through the Yandana Pipeline, as well as to collude with and pay off the government in Rangoon, is just one indication of the unevenness of imposed sanctions.

More sanctions followed in 2003 after the unrest that occurred (i.e., Aung Sun Suu Kyi’s convoy attack), this time increasing previous sanctions to include a ban on “the importation into the United States of certain products of Burma.” It further requires the United States government “to vote against the extension of any financial assistance to Burma by international financial institutions,” and “authorizes the President to deny visas and entry into the United States to former and present leaders of the Burmese government.”

The major player in Burma that has been affected by these sanctions is not, however, the SLDC, but the textile industry and its workers. The United States was a significant customer of Burmese textiles (valued at $356 million in 2002) and, when they ceased to import them, directly caused the closure of 64 textile factories. Estimates range from 40,000-100,000 jobs lost as a result, significantly affecting young women who used these wages to support their families. Many have turned to prostitution to make money, removing a respectable livelihood for one that exploits and denigrates women. This is just another reason why people are fleeing Myanmar’s dire political and economic situation.

Another piece of United States governmental legislation came out in 2003. Called an anti-terrorist law, pushed by the fear of terrorist attacks following September 11th, 2001, it forbade the resettlement of refugees that had, at any point, fought for armed groups. This includes Burmese who were forced to fight either for the Tatmadaw or for forces of any of the outlying groups. This unduly restricts some of the most vulnerable in the country that may have had to collude with the government to survive. Collaborators, whether willing or unwilling participants in the war, suffering Post-Traumatic Stress

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70 Niksch and Weiss, 2009.
71 Seekins 2005.
72 The United States government estimated in 2003 that the job losses in the textile industry amounted to 40,000 and would increase to 100,000, “most of which are filled by young women” in the “Testimony by Deputy Assistant Secretary Matthew P. Daley of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State,” U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on International Relations, October 2, 2003 <www.house.gov/international_relations>. Estimates of 80,000 and an additional 100,000 over the long-term was estimated by David I. Steinberg in “Burma/Myanmar: The Triumph of the Hard-Liners,” South China Morning Post, August 15, 2003. He further asserts that more jobs would be lost if the EU followed suit: It did not, at least regarding textiles.
Disorder (PTSD) and other psychological problems after fighting, are left to the insufficient means of refugee camps.

This law was slightly modified in October 2007 to remove those groups in opposition to Myanmar’s ruling power, which has allowed many more refugees to seek this avenue of support – though the government also decided to go after “individuals responsible for human rights abuses.”73 Whether this stipulation discriminates against child soldiers in Burma and restricts their access to this avenue has not been researched.74 Moreover, whether what they did counts as a human rights violation under the circumstances is currently being debated. A problematic feature is that this law also includes the provision that only those refugees with arbitrarily determined “coping” or “special” skills will be resettled in the United States, which can include the “educated, skilled, teachers, leaders, and staff in NGOs.”75 NGOs must train new employees at great cost, but the more pertinent consequence is that the remaining population, having lost leaders and teachers, are robbed of significant support within refugee camp communities.

The persistence of economic sanctions is still a vehement debate both within Burma and abroad. Sanctions have persisted every year from some assortment of countries but, as was shown in 1997, the unevenness of their mandates (excluding some industries while permitting others) and the fact that they have not been taken up or maintained by a significant number of countries has weakened their power significantly.76 Moreover, as sanctions do not apply to all countries, business can simply change hands. In July 2003,

73 Niksch and Weiss, 2009.
76 China and India are known as particularly strong partners of the government in Rangoon, often framed in the media as bickering governments vying for power there. Other countries that trade with Myanmar include Singapore, Russia, the Ukraine, and Israel. The EU has adopted uniform sanctions, though it took a long time to do so. Despite sanctions being prolonged by the EU in April of this year, opposition was lodged by Germany, Italy, and Spain. See: Shwe, Thomas Maung. “Germany wants to end EU Sanctions, activists say.” 11 February 2011. Mizzima. Accessed 8 October 2011. <http://www.mizzima.com/edop/analysis/4875-germany-wants-to-end-eu-burma-sanctions-activists-say.html>. The U.S. Campaign for Burma has been a voice encouraging the extension and global strengthening of arms sanctions against the country through a global petition. Information about Burma and the petition can be found on its website: <http://uscampaignforburma.wordpress.com/>.
the U.K. government implored the British American Tobacco company to pull out of Myanmar. It did, but it simply sold its 60% stake in the company to investors in Singapore, thereby causing no tangible effect on the market in Myanmar. Without concerted effort, there is little hope that sanctions will have a major impact, as long as there are still countries that agree to do business there.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been a key agent in terms of sanction expansion and contraction and has changed her position on the subject over the years. She is also the justification the United States and other allies have used to increase the potency of sanctions. In 2011, however, she went from tepidly expressing her wish for the modification of sanctions to full-blown support for them, saying that “sanctions are not really an economic weapon… Sanctions were instituted for political reasons and then of course a lot of people shout and scream about the fact that sanctions are making life tougher for the people of Burma and this is not the case at all.” Therefore, she dismissed their controversy and upheld them as a strong political message. Criticized by some as out of touch with the ordinary people of Burma, a co-founder of the NLD agrees with Suu Kyi, saying sanctions are “[needed] because sanctions are the only action from the international community on the Junta. It is very important and very, very tangible.”

Despite the increasingly divergent voices, one thing is clear: economic sanctions most certainly have had an effect on the general Burmese population, particularly women, many of whom must turn to prostitution for financial gain. Sanctions do, to a smaller extent, restrict the movements and business options for officials in Myanmar. Nevertheless, the fact that there have been sanctions in place since 1997 and little change in the policies of the regime to reflect this pressure shows that they may not be doing very much at all to affect the politics, position, and actions of the government in Myanmar.

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77 Holliday 2005, 616.
79 This idea of the little impact despite a decade has been reflected in a variety of articles, including McCarthy. See also: Kudo, Toshihiro. “The Impact of U.S. Sanctions on the Myanmar Garment Industry.” Asian Survey, Vol. 48, No. 6 (November/December 2008), pp. 997-1017. Kudo says that “obviously it was workers who suffered most from the sanctions” (1012). While the symbolic value of sanctions is not in question, unevenness is always a concern, particularly in Burma’s case. This greatly weakens their effect in real terms, though it does at least express condemnation of Myanmar’s governmental practices by the US.
Conditions in the Refugee Camps and Governmental Antipathy

Burmese refugees have been fleeing mainly into Thailand – not party to the 1951 Convention on the Status Relating to Refugees – with others heading to China, Indonesia, Malaysia and India (and the Rohingya to Bangladesh and India). The numbers have increased particularly from the 1980’s onwards. Wherever they go, they struggle to keep their families healthy, occupied, and positive living in squalid, trying conditions. This section will take a look at the circumstances within the refugee camps and the governmental policies of the countries that host them.

Especially for those who fled to one of Thailand’s nine camps along the country’s border, problems abound. Refugees are not officially incorporated into the labor system, leaving them unproductive and even losing skills for as long as they are in the camp and subjecting them to penalties for working on the black market. Further, education for children is limited, especially as community leaders and teachers are the first that are considered for resettlement abroad, hampering integration after resettlement. One of the most well-known camps in Thailand is Mae La. There, as in the other camps in Thailand, people cannot leave without express permission and may even be arrested on their way back if they do leave; few take the risk. Refugees live in huts made from trees, the roofs a patchwork of leaves. There is no running water or sewage facilities threading through the tightly clustered huts, so garbage accumulates outside of them, providing fertile grounds for disease proliferation. These are not temporary shelters, but can serve as family homes for decades. The menu within the camp does not vary, with each

family receiving rations of rice, oil, and fish paste. Education, employment, and opportunity are sparse for the residents of Mae La.

Generally speaking, then, a huge problem for refugees is the lack of self-sufficiency within the camps. Adults are often bored and unemployed for long periods of time. They are entirely dependent on international organizations for food, clothing, and entertainment, which creates problems both in Thailand and in the U.S. In Thailand in 2010, for instance, the exchange rate for the primary food source in the camps, yellow bean, soared, causing food aid from international funders to be cut. Local experts said that this would hit those who did not have jobs particularly hard who suddenly and swiftly lost their food source, which is many if not most of the refugees in the camps. This kind of crisis situation creates a troubling paradox as refugees cannot help themselves even with basic survival because of Thailand’s labor laws but then become malnourished because international donations peter out. Moreover, once they arrive in the U.S., they are supposed to be independent. In interviews, there were some descriptions by volunteers that refugees expect everything to be handed to them in the United States, which is why self-sufficiency is heavily emphasized in the resettlement program. Overall, because most refugees spend many years in camps with little to do, few options for employment, and everything having been handed to them (when funds permitted), a legacy of dependency came to characterize their lives. Unwelcome in Thailand but unwilling or unable to return to Burma, refugees are at the mercy of international efforts and political maneuvers.

Refugees in Malaysia face far more serious threats to their existence. The government there has neither recognized the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees nor its Protocol, and refugees, undistinguished in local

87 Ms. K. Interview with author. She mentions this with regard to paper, pencils, and notebooks; she says that children often want to take them. She tries to explain that things cost money, and has a policy of charging very tiny fees for school supplies to help them understand the lesson.
immigration law from undocumented migrants, have been rounded up by authorities and held in detention centers. Individuals are ransomed back to their families; others are trafficked to Thailand, with many women reporting sexual abuse at the borders.  

They are exploited by employers and forced to hide in the jungle in makeshift huts. Many face the same abuses that they fled from in Burma including rape, portering, and targeting by the Malaysian volunteer corps called Ikatan Relawan Rakyat, or RELA.  

Malaysia allows UNHCR to register refugees (though it does not facilitate this process in any way) and issue identity cards, which can help refugees if they are captured and detained.  

Refugees that are registered then have access to lower medical fee rates and food. Further, refugees in Malaysia often get resettled to third countries in less than a year, which is far less than the average length in Thailand. Still, the dangers are rife, and many remain unregistered. They are thus, in the eyes of Malaysian law, illegal immigrants from Myanmar.  

Thailand has been threatening to close down the camps along its borders and force refugees back to Myanmar. This violates the “non-refoulement” policy of the Geneva Convention, which refers to the forced return of refugees back to a country where they face persecution or violence upon arrival. Still, the Thai government insists on this point and says it is in talks with the government in Rangoon to try to facilitate this process. This indicates Thailand’s lack of willingness to host Burmese refugees long-term as a “durable solution,” the other solutions being, in order of preference, repatriation to the country of origin, local integration in the country into which refugees fled, and third-country resettlement. If Thailand is unwilling to house refugees and Malaysia unwilling to recognize them, this adds significant urgency to the third-country resettlement agenda for vulnerable Burmese who face discrimination in these places.


89 AFP 2007.


Chapter Summary

The conflict in Burma is one of the longest ongoing civil wars in the world. The government in power has instituted policies of fear including burning whole villages, rationing and stealing, detaining and killing supporters of outlying groups, conscripting child soldiers, forcibly recruiting the population for porter services, and other activities that threaten the human rights of these people. There is little protection and few social services, a weak economy, and total disregard for the due process of law. The democratically elected party of 1990 has been suppressed and its leader, Aung Sun Suu Kyi, has suffered various stints of house arrest. The current situation is grim and feeds the associated psychological distress that refugees have when they come to the United States (and other countries of resettlement). Further, the conditions in the refugee camps compounded with the unfriendly reactions of, in particular, the Thai and Malaysian governments create a legacy of dependency that refugees carry with them to their host countries, hindering integration and causing long-term psychological harm when untreated (as it often is).

This chapter also explored the responses of the U.S. and its various attempts to impose sanctions on the military government in the hopes of reform. Little change has been noted, especially because of the lack of intensity and collaboration on sanctions, not to mention the continued tolerance of some United States businesses to operate within the country, which guarantees considerable funds to help the condemned government survive. However, for the purposes of this paper, the most important reaction the United States has had to this protracted crisis was the decision to resettle refugees. Though this action is not without debate and conflict, both within the United States and between international organizations assisting with the plight of refugees, it has recently gained momentum. Now, Burmese refugees make up a quarter of all resettled refugees in the U.S. The history of refugee resettlement in the United States generally and how the government currently metes out resources to new arrivals will be discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter Two: The Resettlement Story

The United States government has been settling refugees within its borders for over 60 years. It does so through voluntary organizations (known as VOLAGS) such as World Relief that it contracts and funds to provide the first three months of services to acclimate refugees to the United States with a variety of initial programs. The U.S. currently resettles over half of all refugees worldwide and has consistently settled the most since refugee resettlement began – the government itself states that its goal is to settle 50% of all refugees that UNHCR refers for resettlement worldwide each year.\footnote{United States Department of State. \textit{Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2011: Report to the Congress}, Washington D.C. 2011. This document can be accessed at: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/148671.pdf>.} With a mythologized migrant history of “the nation of immigrants” that incites U.S. American citizens to welcome bereft strangers, as well as active religious and civil communities that are intimately involved in the process, the country, though it has wavered over its support since late 2001, is still the largest third-country haven for refugees in the world.

This chapter will look at the historical context surrounding the initiation of refugee resettlement in the world and specifically in the United States before moving into an in-depth explanation of the U.S. program’s services, branches, and infrastructure. A description of grants and other forms of assistance will be explained to give a succinct picture of how the program functions. Where necessary, comparisons to other countries’ resettlement programs will be elucidated in order to differentiate the ways in which refugees are resettled and integrated into host communities. The chapter will close by contextualizing the program within international law and underlining the wider implications of the codified definition of refugees, displaying some of the gaps in global legislation. Further, it will make specific references to the quotas and policies set by the United States government for resettlement of Burma’s peoples.

Historical Development and Origins of the Government Program for Resettlement

The story of refugee resettlement in the United States does not start with the government program but with faith-based organizations, including Jewish temples and Christian churches, which facilitated asylum-seekers in the United States prior to the Second World War. Indeed, faith organizations have consistently been the most prominent actors in advocating for, assisting,
and sponsoring refugees. Formerly, they were the only resettlement agencies, working independent of, and prior to, the government funding and support structure. What were the motivations guiding their actions?

The oldest organization involved in refugee resettlement in the United States is the Hebrew Immigrant Aid and Sheltering Society (HIAS) of New York, which started assisting new arrivals at Ellis Island in 1870. This was followed by the International Refugee Committee created in 1932; a coalition of Protestant churches known as the American Committee for Christian German Refugees created in 1934; and the National Catholic Welfare Conference of 1936, which were all instrumental in helping to ensure asylum for victims of Nazism. 93 Church World Service (CWS), a coalition of Protestant churches that aggregated together in 1946, had resettled over 51,000 refugees in the United States by 1952. 94 Moreover, it had been a presence in shaping later legislation (especially the landmark 1980 refugee law) and in finding sponsors for refugees across the USA. It is important to remember these organizations not only for their work, but also to understand why the U.S. adopts a public-private partnership model (that is, the public government funds private [and often religious] voluntary agencies) in the resettlement program today.

World War II and its aftermath also led to the subsequent involvement of governments in resettling refugees. Many Jewish refugees sought safe harbor in the United States throughout the conflict and were refused; the famous story is of the St. Louis, a boat loaded with Jewish refugees, which was refused both at United States and Cuban ports. 95 Afterwards, moral guilt played a significant role in the development of a government-sponsored program for refugee resettlement, as the United States attempted to make some reparations for this disaster. This guilt was not shared by the United States alone, however, and the newly fashioned United Nations quickly joined forces to create the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1951, which not only defined who qualifies as a refugee, but sets out basic principles reflecting the shared international responsibility to assist and

protect them. This specific document was followed up by the Protocol of 1967 that, though independent, cannot be seen without reference to the original Convention. It extends the time and geographical limits of the Convention, which originally were restricted to Europeans in the wake of WWII prior to 1951. The expanded scope included Asians and Africans in particular and is one of the foundational documents that led to the standardized system of refugee resettlement today.

The first United States-specific resettlement legislation was enacted by the U.S. Congress in 1948, the same year that the government recognized the state of Israel. Called the Displaced Persons Act, it was created in response to the need to assist refugees in Europe and bring them to the United States. However, President Truman only reluctantly signed the bill. In a released statement he cited the defects of the bill, which he called “flagrantly discriminatory.” He said it unfairly restricted Jews and refugees of certain national origins, particularly because of the proposed date – December 22, 1945 – by which refugees would have had to enter Austria, Germany, or Italy. He further decried the quota restrictions. Still, he signed it into law, saying that otherwise there would be an unduly long waiting time until Congress could reform it, leaving thousands of refugees without resettlement possibilities in the interim period.

Then, in 1965, the U.S. government rescinded the national preference quotas that had been set in 1924. The original law, known as the National Origin Act of 1924, in tandem with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1954, limited all migration to the United States and set quotas strongly preferential to Western European migrants. The Act of 1954 particularly limited Asian immigration, though it did break down some barriers and allowed (some) Asians to become U.S. American citizens. The new law in 1965 was groundbreaking in that it set aside visas for peoples from all origins, with 6% of visas allotted for refugees. It also set up a seven-tier preference system

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favorable to family reunification.\textsuperscript{100} Still, because it introduced a new quota system for all countries, it also limited immigrants from the Western hemisphere, who could previously migrate to the United States without the worry of restriction.\textsuperscript{101} This law was nevertheless a boon especially for Asian countries, which had previously been severely restricted in access to the United States, refugee or otherwise.\textsuperscript{102} Still, refugee resettlement was not the annual, codified system that it is today. New laws or acts were enacted and special statuses given to refugees on an ad hoc basis, though from then on, all regions were on more equal footing in the eyes of the U.S. government.

Possibly one of the most significant events that triggered the development of a standardized resettlement program in the United States was the Vietnam War. In 1975 the U.S. resettled hundreds of thousands of Indochinese refugees through an ad hoc Refugee Task Force with temporary funding. As with the Japanese and Burma relationship after WWII because of prolonged occupation, the United States instituted a special relationship with Vietnam to try to assuage its guilt over the atrocities of the war, but also as a security and international relations move to make a stance against Communist regimes. As with other groups – 500,000 refugees from Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines from 1975-1980, 800,000 Cubans from 1961-1980, and 50,000 Soviet Jews from 1973-1982 – resettlement for the Vietnamese became part of a complex interplay of Cold War politics to support those who defied Communist regimes by voting “with their feet.”\textsuperscript{103}

Though the 1980 resettlement law would change this ideological preferential system somewhat, resettlement groups are still subject to political relationships on the international stage. Martin points out that the Palestinians, a considerable group of refugees, are denied any sort of assistance by the United States, given the considerable domestic Jewish lobbies and the close relationship the United States has with Israel.\textsuperscript{104} Others see further risks evidenced in the nexus of “morality, humanitarianism, defense of freedom, national responsibility, and internationalism” that characterizes the United States’ resettlement program. There are various


\textsuperscript{101} McCabe and Meissner, 2010.


\textsuperscript{104} Martin, 2005.
impulses, Haines says, including taking the “fair share” of refugees that have resulted from U.S. actions, the defense (formerly) against Communism, and more recently, the promotion of democracy. However, “[t]he very fragmentation [of these unlinked and isolated impulses]… leaves the world of policy more firmly in the hands of political and economic interests. Moral goals are replaced by practical ones.”105 That is to say, the United States may not always be acting in the best interests of refugees in deciding which groups are prioritized for resettlement.

Congress formulated the landmark Refugee Act in 1980, which finally incorporated the United Nations definition of “refugee” and standardized resettlement services for all refugees admitted to the U.S.106 It is still the main instrument guiding the U.S. government’s involvement with refugees. This act amended the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 and not only standardized the services that would be offered to refugees from then onwards, but also created the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration within the United States State Department and the Office of Refugee Resettlement within the Department of Health and Services (the primary government bodies for refugee assistance).107 The act has six objectives: it expanded the definition of refugee to all who meet the United Nations Convention of 1951 and Protocol of 1967 standards; raised the annual limitation on refugee ceilings; established an asylum provision in immigration law; granted control to Congress over all phases of resettlement decision-making; created a flexible procedure to resettle refugees of special humanitarian concern outside the refugee ceiling limit; and established the federal refugee programs and funding streams. Further, it standardized practices that would create optimal conditions for refugees to live in economic and social self-sufficiency and stipulated that the government would give grants to VOLAGs for the first three months and provide English language classes as a basic step on the path to integration.108

The government has since increased its role in refugee resettlement (with a brief dip following the September 11th terrorist attacks). It does so because

105 Haines 2006.
the United States resettles refugees not only as a humanitarian mission but also for security, international relations, and political purposes. No longer is the United States in a Cold War with the dissolved Soviet Union and associated ideologies, which greatly determined the reaction in the ‘80s to certain resettlement groups. Moreover, the days are long past when refugees from Europe have come in floods in the wake of dictators. Nowadays, most refugees come from West and East Asia and Africa. Still, refugee resettlement is a moral and political way to show condemnation for the regimes that inflict humiliation, violence, and persecution on their populations. Further, it is a way for the United States to reflect its values abroad, including respect for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. While its actions are somewhat contradictory in this regard (as was shown with the UNOCAL example), it must still be commended for helping to relieve a majority of the refugees in the world. But is the system enough? The next section will look at its funding, structure, and drawbacks.

How the System Works and the Significance of VOLAGs

To understand how refugees make it to small communities in the United States, the whole journey of a typical refugee and the various organizations abroad at international, national, and local levels must be explained. This section will start with a description of how the U.S. government distributes funding and then move through the steps necessary to get the Burmese into the country.

The U.S. government works in public-private partnerships with organizations known as VOLAGS or Mutual Assistance Associations that use governmental funds to deliver standardized services for every refugee, regardless of origin, background, and age. There are eleven of these VOLAGS nationwide that have over 250 branches and partners in local resettlement settings. They are: Chaldean Federation of America, Church World Service, Ethiopian Community Development Council, Episcopal Migration Ministries, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, International Rescue Committee, Kurdish Human Rights Watch, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services, and World Relief.109 These groups’ involvement has varied immensely over the years, as

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109 Information provided by Refugee Council USA Associate Director Leslie Miller per email on 14 April, 2011. Compare to the Office of Refugee Resettlement’s official webpage, which states that the eleven groups are Church World Service, Ethiopian Community Development
the organizations must apply every year for a contract. This induces a competitive dynamic much like in the business world, which encourages VOLAGS to streamline and strengthen their programs.

Mutual Assistance Associations (MAA) are the next tier of support that receive and distribute government funding. They are usually tied to specific ethnic groups – that is, groups of concerned Karen, Somalis, or Rwandan people will band together to mete out assistance on their own terms. Eby notes that they are particularly good organizations because they can provide support over the longer term, something that the VOLAGs cannot do because of the heavy case load and minimal government funding. These are undoubtedly significant agencies working to support their own countrymen to preserve their identities while making their homes in the United States. Moreover, they can probably coordinate better with their own people, seeing as they share a common language, culture, foods, and customs. However, the only example in Illinois of an MAA that is funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) is the Pan-African Association. As there were no MAAs in the area for the Burmese, MAAs will not be pursued at length in chapter three.

There are also three major branches of the United States Government that work with refugee issues: the Office for Refugee Resettlement (ORR), the Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), and the United States Customs and Immigration Services of the Department of Homeland Security (USCIS/DHS). The ORR administers funds to states and local programs and handles the primary funding for VOLAGs in annual packages to the organizations; PRM administers funding abroad, promotes migration and population policies of the U.S. government, and assists in the integration and resettlement phases; and USCIS/DHS deals with security issues, including refugee processing and interviews before the refugees arrive, and

Council, Episcopal Migration Ministries, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, International Rescue Committee, Kurdish Human Rights Watch, US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, World Relief Corporation, and the State of Iowa Bureau of Refugee Services. However, the website was last updated on March 23, 2010 and Ms. Miller says that, for instance, the State of Iowa Bureau of Refugee Services no longer resettles refugees. Other accounts of VOLAGS vary between 9-11 organizations, with Susan Sperry (head of World Relief in DuPage County) listing 10; this author has never seen an identical list.

Eby 2010, 10.

Information on Mutual Assistant Associations that receive funding can be found on the ORR website, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/partners/maas.htm#IL>.
the process leading to naturalization after refugees have resided extensively in the United States.\textsuperscript{112}

Each fiscal year, the president sets a refugee ceiling, or the highest number of refugees that will be permitted to enter the U.S. that year. This was a stipulation of the 1980 act, which said that Congress and the president should determine the special cases, new conflicts, and proportional needs for different refugee cases around the world annually. These quotas are further subdivided into regions of the world and different groups of refugees with certain limits, as well as priority statuses, imposed on different groups. Priority statuses are 1) Individual Referrals, 2) Group Referrals, and 3) Family Reunification. The latter two are further subdivided each year into priority designations and nationalities, respectively. Priority 2 is based on recommendations made by UNHCR of whole groups of refugees from certain countries that are of humanitarian concern. For Fiscal Year (FY) 2011, Burma is on the qualifying list. Priority 3 has been suspended since 2008 and will continue to be suspended until the United States can develop a DNA test that will prove familial linkages between aspiring candidates and family members in the United States (due to high levels of fraud). When it resumes, Burmese refugees will again be on the priority list.\textsuperscript{113}

In FY 2009, the United States settled 75,000 refugees, “more than in any year since 1999,” over half of which came either from Iraq or Burma (with the Burmese numbering at 18,202, or 25\% of total refugees).\textsuperscript{114} However, the fact that it was “more than any year” actually reflects the early part of the decade when the United States, in retaliation to the September 11\textsuperscript{th} attacks on the United States in 2001, drastically reduced the number of resettled refugees.\textsuperscript{115}

Moreover, there is a consistently considerable gap between the ceiling number and the actual number of resettled refugees, which Congress estimates will only be 55,000 of the proposed 80,000 in FY2011 due to new security code implementation. VOLAGs are citing concern particularly over their own decreased funding and ability to provide services beyond the first

\textsuperscript{112} This information can be found on www.refugeecouncilusa.org in summary and on the websites in full: ORR: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/, PRM: http://www.state.gov/g/prm/, and USCIS/DHS: http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis
\textsuperscript{113} United States Department of State. 2011.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid. Also, Europe, by contrast, resettled only 4,707 refugees in 2010, or 6.5\% of resettled refugees worldwide. See Williams and Phillmann, 2010.
\textsuperscript{115} Martin 2011, 1.
90 days (see chapter three below). Further, due to more intensive screenings of candidates that has been connected to the tightening restrictions that followed September 11th, including the U.S. Patriot Act and the REAL ID Act of 2005 that both expanded the scope of those who would be deemed terrorists (including those who have, at any point, provided material support to terrorist groups), fewer will be granted access to a new life in the U.S.\textsuperscript{116} This is problematic for many Burmese, who may have been forced to fight in any of the fringe armies that have been labeled terrorist organizations by the U.S. government. Lackluster funding mechanisms and questionable security methods may keep vulnerable populations in refugee camps at risk.

Refugees, like the Burmese in Thailand and Malaysia, are referred for third-country resettlement either by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), NGOs, or Overseas Processing Entities (OPEs). These OPEs are either run by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Church World Service, or other entities.\textsuperscript{117} The refugees are then screened and interviewed by the OPE first, followed by the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) and/or the US Citizenship and Immigration Services in the Department of Homeland Security (USCIS/DHS), with long processing times in between. The U.S. government says that “interviews are often conducted in remote locations and are geared toward populations in greatest need of third country resettlement opportunities.”\textsuperscript{118} However, there is criticism that they do not indeed take those in greatest need, but in fact take those who have arbitrarily determined “survival skills” or special skills, for integration into the U.S.\textsuperscript{119} Further, they may not be subjected to just one interview with each entity, but multiple. These interviews are held to determine whether the refugees are genuinely in need and comply with the non-terrorist sections of U.S. refugee law. If one family member qualifies for refugee status, spouses and unmarried children under the age of 21 are automatically included for resettlement. After they pass all remaining security checks and medical examinations within the host country, the case is passed along to VOLAGs in the United States to request sponsorship and to find an appropriate place to resettle them.


\textsuperscript{117} Eby 2010, 3.

\textsuperscript{118} United States Department of State 2011, 14.

\textsuperscript{119} Ms. K and Fulks mention this. See also: “The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (The McCarran-Walter Act).”
When it is determined that a refugee will be resettled to the United States, IOM administers an orientation prior to departure (thus, in Thailand, India, or Malaysia), including medical checks, and language and cultural trainings. For the majority of the Burmese, the new tasks they must learn are extensive, having spent most of their adult lives in camps that are far from the standard of living common in the U.S. Training orientation activities can include learning to change a diaper, nutrition tips, and how to use an airplane bathroom. All of the important documents for the airport are put together in a special IOM bag so that refugees can be recognized easily by airport staff and security. IOM also makes the travel arrangements (the refugee must reimburse them through the government later) and arranges transportation to the airport, any necessary transfers in connecting airports, and a pick-up once the refugees arrive in the United States (this is further coordinated with the VOLAG and its associated organizations, which have airport pick-up programs).

The refugees, newly arrived in the United States, are then the responsibility of the VOLAG in the host community. This is the point where direct U.S. government and international involvement ceases and the private side takes over. This is in contrast to countries like Portugal, the Czech Republic, France, Finland, and Ireland where the government stays active in the opening stages by running temporary, centralized centers where language classes and culture training orientation are administered prior to sending them to host communities. VOLAGs in the United States work with government funds and private donations (a major strength of VOLAGs is their link to churches that can pool resources for humanitarian causes like this one), taking the bulk of the responsibility to help refugees find jobs, housing and English lessons, and to train for the citizenship test, attend medical appointments, and register for government services. If there is a family that a refugee family is connected to in the United States that is

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122 Williams and Phillman, 2010, 86.

123 Countries in Europe rely particularly on governmental finances and approval or NGO involvement, which makes the system more controversial for taxpayers. Churches in the United States resettled prior to government involvement, implying that they would continue to do so with or without governmental support. See: Williams and Phillmann, 2010.
available to assist, the U.S. family is given much of the responsibility to help the new family adapt. If not, the VOLAG finds a church that can hold primary responsibility to sponsor and assist the refugee.\textsuperscript{124}

The VOLAGs receive money predicated on the presumed number of individual resettled refugees. According to a representative of World Relief's headquarters, per the agreed-upon contract with PRM, World Relief has agreed to resettle just over 8,000 refugees in 2011 and receives $1800/per refugee from the government as part of the Reception and Placement (R&P) program.\textsuperscript{125} It is broken down in such a way that $900 must be spent directly on the refugee client and $900 can be spent on administrative expenses or pooled for other clients.\textsuperscript{126} The other grant available is the Match Grant program funded by the ORR. This is one of the most important ways to promote economic self-sufficiency and independence among refugees. In this program, refugees raise money for businesses, cars, or other investments and the government matches their funds up to 2,200 USD.\textsuperscript{127} The program is an attempt to avoid other types of public funding assistance for refugees and to provide incentives for long-term investment.

VOLAGs are well placed to utilize the money at their disposal. Their energies are spread nationwide, so if refugees move within the United States (as they often do to join other members of the same ethnic group or find jobs), the VOLAG can, if they know that the family intends to go, assist at the other point of integration as well. They mobilize support from the community on the one hand in terms of resources and volunteers, but can also help provide guidance and supporting materials in nearby churches for people who want to create a new English language or computer literacy class. They are experienced at applying for government programs, so they can advise activists about potentially available funding streams. Finally, they are extremely flexible and fast-acting. Using their networks, they are able to place hundreds of refugees in different areas of the country, finding employment and apartments in which to place them,\textsuperscript{128} oftentimes, with only two weeks’ notice to prepare everything for a new family.\textsuperscript{129} Moreover, VOLAGs are great resources that link people within communities together. For the Burmese in particular, who speak sparsely learned languages, VOLAGs can

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{124} Wright 1981, 169.
\item \textsuperscript{125} This is a nationwide estimate, not simply for DuPage County.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Information provided through Susan Sperry from World Relief Headquarters.
\item \textsuperscript{127} Information provided by Sperry in an e-mail on 1 March 2011.
\item \textsuperscript{128} Wright, Robert G. 1981, 172.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Sperry, Susan, 4 Jan 2011.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
bring different players together. When one agent creates a resource tailored to the Karen, Chin, or Burman language, they can transmit it through their networks to improve the quality of assistance for all people of that group. Their linkages extend to secular organizations as well, meaning the Burmese who seek assistance from them can find help from a variety of sources. In sum, they are dynamic organizations that have a long history with the resettlement program and are the first contact with refugees in their host communities. As such, they are the face and voice of the government’s program.

**Who Qualifies?**

Refugees are not typical immigrants. Traditional immigration texts state that immigration is due to economic factors, family ties, national lore, and other push and pull factors (there is not one single definition). Refugees, on the other hand, are persecuted victims of governments protected by the Refugee Convention of 1951 and the Protocol of 1962. The important distinctions between the two are that refugees have an internationally agreed-upon definition and codified rights in the aforementioned documents and that they flee due to fear of direct persecution in their country of origin. This has an important implication in the Glen Ellyn context that has been asserted by Matthew Soerens, an immigration expert in the area, and various members of the intentional community that reside at Parkside Apartments in Glen Ellyn: while refugees are looked upon with pity and often helped without reservation, immigrants are often suspected of being illegally residing and a drain on the economy and government services.\(^{130}\) This will be covered further in chapter three, when Soerens’ personal efforts (and those of civil society generally) will be expounded upon, and in chapter four when enduring challenges to refugee resettlement are explained.

The three qualifying points to be a refugee (and not merely an immigrant or an internally displaced person, IDP) and therefore to be granted protection are 1) that the person crossed an international border, 2) that he/she has a well-founded fear of persecution based on his or her race, religion, nationality, or social and political affiliations, and 3) that he/she is unable or unwilling to avail him or herself of the protection of his or her country.\(^{131}\) Though the Convention has a relatively wide mandate to assist refugees, it has a basic shortcoming that has been widely criticized:

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\(^{130}\) Both Diana and Soerens mention this, Diana in an interview with the author and Soerens in his book.

\(^{131}\) 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.
Civil war and domestic disturbances… do not provide a basis for meeting the Convention refugee definition. Those who flee even intense fighting are not covered, unless the combatants had one of the stated reasons for targeting the individual or group that has fled. Even though the definition is usually applied with a somewhat more generous approach in the overseas refugee program than for purposes of asylum, overseas officers still must find a sound basis in the information provided during the interview, or in other circumstances affecting the applicant, for making the legally required findings.132

This statement reflects that in conflicts around the world, it is not one or two persons fleeing persecution, but thousands that have been driven from their homes by violent armies and fled across international borders. For the Burmese, it has been in multiple, broad movements in different parts of the country that they have, en masse, fled post-1988 revolution violence, pre-election violence, burned villages, rape, torture, and societal, religious, and other types of persecution.

It is further interesting to note that “popular usage tends to refer to all kinds of forced migrants as ‘refugees’, but most forced migrants flee for reasons not recognized by international refugee law, often remaining within their country of origin.”133 These are IDPs and are not counted in the estimates of refugees (ranging from 9-16 million), so the estimates of all persons of concern including refugees and IDPs together are much higher. IDPs are functionally refugees that simply have not crossed an international border. There is also no allotment in the Convention definition for those who flee environmental disasters. For instance, there is no official protection for the thousands that fled Burma’s detrimental Cyclone Nargis, which ravaged the country, even if they crossed international boundaries, as they did not do so for reasons of persecution.

All of these nuances mean that refugees are not facing the same choices that immigrants face. They are restricted from deciding their own destinies and choosing to migrate freely, as third countries limit the number of refugees that come every year. It is not in the interest of these third countries to

expand the definition. For the Burmese particularly, migration to a third country is certainly an improvement from the refugee camps in Thailand in which the average person spends 18 years and, if they had fewer restrictions, they would probably make the choice to leave more often.\textsuperscript{134} Whereas immigrants who move also do so because of external factors, they can do so more freely. Refugees are at the mercy of the countries which choose to accept them. To make matters more difficult, in the case of the US, the quotas change annually based on a nexus of international relations and favored groups for that year. This can affect total potential numbers and make escape for those in prolonged refugee situations difficult. It is never a static situation for refugees and can be a complicated and trying process in the pursuit of a settled and secure life.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to explain the history, system, and functioning of the United States resettlement program. As the country currently settling the most refugees worldwide, and due to the relatively recent nature of purposeful resettlement abroad, its actions are mostly commendable. While the program needs more funding and while it has been criticized for not having ample secular routes to grant assistance, this can be achieved at the lower level. After-school programs, ridesharing, setting up children’s sport teams, and acting neighborly are just a few ways that the local level has gotten involved in DuPage County that do not necessarily require religious affiliation.

With the foundation set for understanding the nationwide program and an understanding of the process that brings Burmese refugees from far away camps to tight-knit U.S. American communities, the next chapter will explore the various organizations that have sprouted in the fertile refugee resettlement region of DuPage County, Illinois. The actions taken on behalf of a variety of organizations and individuals show opportunities for growth as well as some shortcomings of the United States resettlement plan. Ultimately, though, the chapter will discuss human interaction and active engagement with outsiders, showing how individuals band together to welcome the new and embrace global trends and changes in their communities.

\textsuperscript{134} Sperry, 4 January 2011
Chapter Three: Welcome to America

Refugees in camps throughout the world apply for placement in other countries so that they can resume a life with rights and dignity, though this may take many years to be realized. But who are the people facilitating integration programs when the government sanctioned services run out? This chapter takes a look at actors within DuPage County – a district in Illinois west of Chicago in which refugees from all over the world have been resettled for over 30 years – who are helping to ease the transition. Two adjoining towns within the county, Glen Ellyn and Wheaton (the primary locations of the conducted research), are the focus of the analysis and have distinctly educated, well-off, and actively religious populations. In them, various organizations have sprung up in response to refugee resettlement, with the aforementioned variables (education, wealth, and religious affiliation) having played significant roles in the elicited reaction. How do people get involved, and what are the limits to their involvement in the greater scheme of refugee resettlement? Where the governmental role drops off, civilians must pick up the slack; indeed, at least in the United States context, this is what leads to resettlement success stories that dominate the narrative. But what are the gaps between the two approaches and how do they arise? Could they be improved through better communication and collaboration? The chapter will end with a comparison of this area’s response to that of nearby Chicago’s, and compare also how different resources (space, money, time) play into integration success. Finally reaching the crux of the thesis – why do people help, and how? – this chapter documents the emergence of grassroots movements that have blended the global and the local in a unique and constructive way against the backdrop of the limits of governmental assistance.

The Organizations: Discovering and Meeting Refugee Needs

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the United States government works in cooperation with a network of agencies (and their subsidiaries) that administer government funds for initial resettlement support. However, there are many other organizations, religious communities, and individuals that have assessed needs on their own and seek to fill them with unique methods and resources independent of government support, guidance, or interference. These are members of an active civil society with the education, resources, and, most importantly, the willingness to help strangers integrate. What motivates these active citizens to help and in what ways have they contributed to refugee integration? How did they get started? And finally,
what do they do for the Burmese in particular, for refugees at large, for individuals, and for the community as a whole? This part of the chapter looks first at the VOLAG and then at its branches, as well as its individual efforts towards integration to answer the initial research question: what role does civil society play in the resettlement and integration of (various) Burmese refugees in the United States?

**DuPage County Support System**

The focal point of resettlement activity in Glen Ellyn, Wheaton, and the wider DuPage County is World Relief, the only VOLAG in the area. World Relief is a national organization that “was started in the 1940s by evangelical leaders to clothe and feed victims of World War II. In later years it expanded to serve needy people around the globe.”

The DuPage office of World Relief began in 1979. The main strength of the organization is that it is able to draw on a wide network of religious community support from DuPage County, especially from Christian churchgoers. Indeed, that is the reason why “World Relief is out here in Wheaton, and it draws on volunteers from churches in the areas,” said Naazish YarKahn of Palatine-based Refugee Assistance Programs. “It’s going to place people where there are volunteers.”

Sperry corroborates this claim, saying that “one influential factor for World Relief [to set up operations here] was the presence of local churches [which] were willing to assist new refugee families, and host ESL [English as a Second Language] classes.”

Each year each VOLAG submits an application to the Department of State including a description of potential resettlement locations for the following year, along with current and proposed locations. The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) reviews these and other data and decides which locations will resettle refugees. Regarding DuPage County specifically, World Relief’s resettlement area has always been broader than Glen Ellyn, and includes Wheaton, Carol Stream, West Chicago, Glendale Heights, and other neighboring suburbs (for a map, see Appendix E). There are many factors that influence the resettlement location choice, including housing

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136 A city outside Chicago.

availability, employment opportunities, schools, accessibility of public transportation, accessibility of other support services, ethnic community and volunteer support, etc. Many of these were a part of the decision to resettle in Glen Ellyn/Wheaton and to increase or decrease resettlement volume there. Another factor has been refugee feedback and community feedback, focused primarily upon school districts.

World Relief’s (and thus the U.S. government’s) policy regarding the integration of refugees emphasizes the need for self-sufficiency (see Heartland Alliance description below as well). This is partly to discourage a legacy of dependency on the government but also because the system is simply underfunded. When discussing the $1,800 allotment per refugee, Susan Sperry describes how difficult it is to stretch these funds. People in the communities, she speculates,

are under the impression that [resettlement] is all a [VOLAG] does because this is the primary contract and it tends to be what gets the most publicity and it’s the primary grant… After this, there’s nothing visible to show that… there’s someone involved with families, even though all of these programs by and large are able to work with families up to three years after they arrive.

Still, she has to admit that “[it is] not as well-resourced as [one] would like, and it’s not three years of support at the same level… So usually, we find that the first three-six months are the most intensive levels of support, and then [it drops] to either community-based support, or as needed.” This concern was corroborated in interviews. Many people said that they either perceived or heard from refugee families that the link to support services was severed overnight after three months. It is a significant problem both for the VOLAGs and for those who must carry on with new programs afterwards to provide targeted support to families without the latter knowing the details of

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138 Because of the length of stay in refugee camps, it is often said that refugees become too dependent. Within refugee camps, as they are oftentimes not permitted to leave, they require everything (food, drink, entertainment, education, healthcare, clothing, pots and pans) from the organizations running the refugee camps. There is a culture of dependency that is exasperating for refugees, who describe a feeling of idleness and uselessness, but that cannot be helped. Oftentimes, when refugees arrive in the United States, they are expecting the same sort of direct and sustained protection that VOLAGs are unable to accommodate.

139 Underlining the idea that this network is connected among some groups better than others, Katie Galli of the Glen Ellyn Children’s Resource Center (whose mother works at World Relief) corroborated and expanded on the fact that people are critical, but World Relief is doing what it can. Sperry, Susan and Katie Galli, interviews with the author.
cases or official protocol. More communication between VOLAGs and new organizations could help to breach these gaps.

Unfortunately, the cookie-cutter type resettlement process can be detrimental to those who have special needs, especially young and vulnerable groups like Burma’s child soldiers. Danielle Grigsby listed the hurdles they have to jump when their initial case management session expires:

1) Most refugee parents / guardians do not speak adequate English to seek these services; 2) ‘therapy’ is a largely western concept, not something many refugee groups would seek out, anyway; 3) most geographic areas into which refugees are resettled in the U.S. do not have anything resembling child soldier integration programs, at all.140

This is one major gap that feeds into other problems, including the lack of multi-lingual psychologists (let alone teachers), inadequate funding channels, and cultural challenges that initially block vulnerable people from opening up to volunteers and activists.

VOLAGs do not operate alone, however, and have community support not only in the churches but in other groups (secular and not) that administer services and help to coordinate programs like the airport pick-up, stocking apartments with necessary items, and administering English language classes. The following list will describe some of the main organizations in the DuPage County area that are working in the same vein as World Relief. While there is some collaboration and communication among these larger organizations, they act independent of each other and often have very different goals and missions with regard to refugee and low-income populations.

EXODUS World Service was started in 1988 by three former members of World Relief. Exodus was formed to help people get involved at a local level with refugees as the only other way preceding its creation was to be directly involved in a sponsorship program. The mission was based on helping people within communities, becoming a part of their lives, and forging friendships with them. There are three main established programs for refugees at Exodus and one that is under development: The New Neighbor

program connects refugee and local families together for the first three months post-arrival to help new families practice English and show them around places like the zoo, the library, and other everyday places that characterize life in the United States. Though people must sign up for a minimum of three months, most people continue to work with their partner family. The second program is the Welcome Pack program. People donate household items, such as kitchen and bathroom supplies, bedroom furniture, etc. to newly arriving families, with the possibility that the volunteers will also go and meet the family and act as a partner family. Finally, EXODUS also has a Speaker’s Bureau for organizations that want training or a refugee simulation workshop. Speakers go to businesses or work places and administer these workshops while answering questions and concerns about refugee employees. The project under development is called First Steps and features a handbook that will be developed in all the languages of refugees that arrive in this area. It has common words and phrases, directions, commands, and basic vocabulary to provide people with a handy guide that they can use to develop basic English skills and emergency words and phrases. Other activities under the mandate of this organization that do not exclusively concern refugees include activism and citizenship test training for all immigrants.¹⁴¹

Heartland Alliance is one of the agencies that is contracted out by a VOLAG but does not resettle refugees itself. They help out at the level of integration providing similar services as VOLAGs; they work primarily in the city of Chicago. If the family arriving already has connections to the United States (family members that came before them, primarily), housing is typically provided by the family that already lives in the city. Heartland Alliance then works with the “host” family to make sure they have prepared the new arrival’s apartment. This includes: making sure there are provisions in the apartment, assisting the new family in attending all their appointments (medical, registering kids for school, etc., which should be completed in the first 90 days), and commencing the process to receive benefits (including social security, Medicaid, and getting a green card).

For families that do not have previous ties to the United States, the level of interaction is more intense; Heartland Alliance takes over in assisting with all of the aforementioned activities and the administration and logistics side of

¹⁴¹ This information was obtained through a phone interview and e-mail correspondence with Exodus employee Jessica Davis, as well as on the website, which can be found here: <www.e-w-s.org>.
moving as well. They track data on the arrival of refugees, arrange a pick-up from the airport, take them home, and make sure that a hot meal is waiting. Further, they provide food stamps for the first two months until social security benefits begin. To continue to receive subsidies, refugees need to take a state-issued English class, which Heartland Alliance arranges. They also have employment teams that work with refugees to try to help them become self-sufficient economically. Finally, it has a kindergarten-12th grade program for children to get them registered for school and to advocate for them within the education system.\textsuperscript{142}

This leads into the next service (one that is not specifically for refugees, but for all low-income residents of DuPage) known as the \textit{St. Vincent-DePaul Car List}. St. Vincent-DePaul is a Catholic organization run at the national level that, among other services to help people in poverty to achieve various means of self-sufficiency, matches people with cars.\textsuperscript{143} People who do not need an old car donate it to the program and people in need sign up on a waiting list to receive one. If the car is too old or not in good condition, it can also be scrapped for parts and the resulting money will be donated. There are certain standards that must be met – the future owner must have car insurance, for instance – but mostly the program simply facilitates the interaction between those who want to donate in a positive but non-intensive way and those who need cars to commute in Chicago’s sprawling suburbs.

\textbf{Glen Ellyn/Wheaton Services for Refugees}

The following sub-chapter will look at the smaller-scale, localized services that have primarily evolved on the strength of advocacy within the towns of Glen Ellyn and Wheaton. The two have been chosen because they border one another and many of the services are either run or attended by people who live in both. There were also advantages for the author, including long-standing connections with advocates and groups (for more information about the advantages and disadvantages of this approach, refer to the Appendix A at the end of the paper). A variety of organizations or individuals have emerged in this area to provide relief, assistance, spiritual comfort, and other forms of services to help with the integration process. Indeed, this section begins to look at the fundamental issue in this thesis.

\textsuperscript{142} All information on Heartland Alliance’s specific services came from a phone interview with Anonymous of Heartland Alliance. Further information can be found at: \texttt{<http://www.heartlandalliance.org/>}.

\textsuperscript{143} Information provided by John in an interview, as well as obtained on the website: \texttt{<www.svdpusa.org>}. 
That is, why people help others and which needs have been met fully and which only adequately by individuals and community members, covering the ground where international and national responsibilities end.

*People's Resource Center* is located in downtown Wheaton. It was initially set up as a food pantry and, as seen in the name, serves all people in DuPage County, not merely refugees. This includes the homeless, unemployed, immigrant, and other vulnerable populations, assisting with job search services, ESL courses (English as a Second Language, now often referred to as ELL, or English Language Learning), and of course, food collection and distribution, their original mandate.\(^{144}\) People’s Resource Center started to incorporate refugee services as the need arose around 1975. Currently, they offer different empowerment programs to “break the cycle of poverty,” including literacy, computer training and refurbished computers for families’ homes, art enrichment, and job search assistance.\(^{145}\) In 2010, Knight estimates that the organization had 1,300 volunteers in all aspects of PRC’s services, including ESL, tutoring, computer courses, housing and job placement, and food delivery.

PRC also provides the educational resources for an ESL tutoring course that meets weekly at Faith Lutheran Church, just around the corner from one of Glen Ellyn’s low-income housing complexes, Parkside Apartments. This was negotiated through members of the church and PRC, but the two are not explicitly linked. Classes meet twice a week, with babysitters present to care for children too young to stay at home alone. Meanwhile, volunteers and students create an agenda together, whether studying for the citizenship test, practicing everyday phrases, or reading aloud. These classes are offered for all groups, especially those who may not be able to take courses at College of DuPage, PRC, or elsewhere. In some cases, this is because the level of language ability for some people at the beginning is so low that College of DuPage will not accept them even in beginner’s ESL class. The class aims to broaden and accelerate English language learning through one-on-one tutoring. The coordinators have noted that clients who supplement language classes with personal tutoring far outpace students beginning at the same level. The classes are limited only in the number of volunteers available; there

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\(^{144}\) Knight, Pam. Interview with author. Wheaton, IL. 5 January 2011.

is a lot of need and a lot of interest on the part of refugees to improve their language skills.\footnote{Fulks, Deborah. Interview with author, Glen Ellyn, IL. 3 Jan 2011. Further information and edits offered later in an e-mail sent on 3 November 2011.}

The Glen Ellyn Children's Resource Center (GECRC) was set up at a local elementary school and is one of two after-school programs being run in Glen Ellyn. The other is called Opening the World through Literacy (OWL), which meets at a local church. Both provide daily after-school homework help and summer programs, with OWL also running weekend field trips. In the spirit of “opening the world through literacy,” field trips are arranged around country themes, visiting restaurants or cultural centres for the various featured cultures (though there are also trips to the local pool and zoo). GECRC takes on a variety of volunteers with previous cross-cultural experience from the community. OWL meanwhile gives student volunteers from the nearby high school community service hours for their tutoring and leadership roles for refugee children. Head of GECRC Katie Galli also set up a soccer team for refugee children through the local park district, as soccer is the sport of many young inhabitants here. The park district donated t-shirts (required for each team) and waived the registration fee, and vans were loaned by the local YMCA to transport the kids to and from practices and weekend games. The next step in this process is to get refugee children integrated into local teams in the hopes of fostering understanding among young children, as well as making the program self-sustaining (and therefore not relying on Galli herself, especially with regard to ride-sharing).\footnote{Galli, 20 Dec 2010.}

The Refugee Ministry at a local church started out because parishioners at the church suddenly noticed the arrival of new, distinct members in their homogenous nave. Initially only offering rides back and forth to church on Sunday mornings, this church’s efforts have greatly expanded to include a Refugee Ministry with Friendship Advocate Volunteer (FAV), Celebration, and ESL components, all of which have developed since early 2009. The FAV program connects incoming individuals and families to parishioners in order to welcome, assist, and befriend them and introduce them to various aspects of local American life, including bowling, picnics, and parks. The Celebration Ministry is oriented around holidays, and introduces refugee families to American-style celebrations. It was initially held for a woman’s bridal shower and then a baby shower (pre-marriage and pre-birth celebrations). At the time this research was conducted, the goal was to orient
the ministry around community holiday celebrations, and the church had just held a Christmas party at which refugee families engaged with great enthusiasm (John notes the Burmese love of singing and their impromptu “thank you” carolling trip to his house). Finally, the ESL program was developed when parishioners heard from refugees that many of them could not attend any of the ESL courses offered at the College of DuPage, PRC, or other places. So, the Refugee Ministry added an ESL course after Sunday morning mass with babysitters to care for children.

John states that the ministry has approximately 30 “core” volunteers and is growing all the time. Members of the ministry have also contributed individually or somewhat collectively (in an ad hoc manner) to the needs of the church. John himself hosted a fund-raising event to help raise money for a car for a Burmese man who needed to get to work a few towns over and was commuting by bus and walking, which took him many hours. The man was able to secure a car through the St. Vincent-DePaul Car List, and the fundraising funds were then (at the time of the interview) intended to be used for the initial set-up costs, which John described as automobile registration, car insurance, and license fees. John was enthusiastic, but also realistic of future challenges for the Refugee Ministry, saying that they needed to add to the ESL curriculum and professionalism and “refine” the program generally, as well as make the program self-sustaining and not necessarily reliant on a few core (indeed integral) players. At the time of the interview, the next immediate goal was to develop an interactive website to spread information about their activities and to get people within and outside of the parish more excited and involved in the church’s Refugee Ministry.¹⁴⁸ This example can be used as a case study for ways that churches get involved and an example of the natural network that is created through communities of faith.

Other initiatives: Another church’s innovative way to assist refugees was to provide space behind the parish for vegetable patches for immigrant and refugee families. Many of the cultures represented are not accustomed to the processed foods often found in American cuisine and were thus given greater autonomy over food choices and acquisition, not to mention giving them a sustainable and independent means of gaining this autonomy. Speaking Classes at the Glen Ellyn Public Library were developed by Mr. S who saw the need for more robust programs to practice conversational English. The type of small class he designed can help encourage people to speak in a way that other

¹⁴⁸ All of the information for this section was obtained at the interview with John, conducted by the author, held on 21 December, 2011.
large-scale English classes might not. When asked whether he had contact with World Relief or other groups in the area, he described finding it difficult to contact other parts of the network and that there did not seem to be a uniform way to approach World Relief or other established organizations.

Another initiative is the intentional community at Parkside Apartments near a busy street in Glen Ellyn. It started in 2006 when Matt Soerens, author of *Welcoming the Stranger*, moved in at the prodding of a Rwandan family that he was assisting at the time at World Relief. He then started inviting friends to live with him, giving the opportunity to fellow Christians to serve as an “intentional Christian presence that lives there and works there with [the] neighbors… [to] be kind of a prophetic voice back to the church especially to say, look, this is something that we need to… get the church more involved with, the poor that live right among us.”

It is common for churches in this area to fund huge overseas mission projects in places like Mexico, Costa Rica, or Ghana. Though these projects are “great” too, the community members have been trying to highlight the poverty and needs in the local community, showing how time and intelligent resources can go a long way for the families that live in DuPage County. Some have seen success in this area, with one church funding the Glen Ellyn Children’s Resource Center instead of an expensive mission abroad, which “benefits all the kids in the neighborhood”; despite this success, activists say there is still a long way to go.

There is a conflict in this area because parents want to send their kids abroad for unique international experiences. However, committing extravagant funds to short-term stays in other countries without reciprocal action in the local community brings into question the values underpinning the motivations and concepts of giving and donating resources.

The intentional community members, who double as advocates, teachers, and case workers, describe the importance of making friends with neighbors and offering community support at a very localized level – including reading mail, helping children with homework, being around to answer questions, giving rides to appointments or the emergency room – that can be infinitely more helpful than poorly targeted projects or simple short-term solutions abroad. Still, when asked whether this is a long-term or sustainable solution, two of the three interviewees were skeptical. Rodriguez was leaving after a little more than a year, and Diana admitted that this was not a permanent plan for

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149 Diana, 31 Dec 2010.
150 Diana, Rodríguez, and Mr. JK (all members of the intentional community at one point in time) have all expressed this concern.
her. Still, there has been interest and networking at the local (religious) Wheaton College to keep the presence there. The third member, Mr. JK, was busy trying to set up an initiative to coordinate various activities that were playing out separately at Parkside Apartments, which would be known as the Parkside Coalition. His idea is that there are so many people trying to do the same thing in the same place that their coordinated efforts could yield higher gains across all programs while freeing up people to innovate and develop new funding streams and ideas. Using his knowledge from having lived within the community, Mr. JK is making a concerted effort to branch out and coordinate with other groups to create a more even and equitable distribution of energy and resources, something that had been relatively unseen elsewhere in the research process.

One of the most important agents for vocalizing the immigration debate in the area is Matthew Soerens, co-author of Welcome the Stranger, and employee at World Relief. He has been instrumental in opening the dialogue with people in the area through this book, which simplifies the immigration debate for people who know nothing about the government’s programs and describes the major avenues for legalization in the United States. His research is based on interviews with his neighbors, many of whom struggle to support themselves and their families while they wait for legal status. His book has been embraced by the local community, especially for the major emphasis it has on viewing the immigration debate through a Christian lens. A local church bought 10,000 copies of it and distributed it to members; others have used it and frequently referenced it in kind, as people mentioned that we must “welcome the stranger” in the midst. Though it pays little attention to refugees in particular, it is still a pinnacle work in the area for giving human faces to the immigration debate and changing the way people think about their communities, diversity, and the country’s history.

**Keeping the Programs Running: Sustainability**

An important facet of refugee programs is their durability and sustainability. Integration is not a problem that gets solved in a month, a year, or even five years, and each generation within any migratory population deals with and acclimates to host societies at a different pace. This is why the church connection that World Relief has is so important. Without the resources and

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151 Galli was the first to mention the book and concept, with Diana providing details on the dispersal of it. John was one interviewee who mentioned the phrase, which, though popularized by the bible itself, has also gained common currency because of this publication.
time given by volunteers in churches, refugees would be essentially on their own after three months, which many describe as too short. Churches and individuals have filled these gaps in a variety of ways with the examples shown above as well as other stories of carpools, classes, and donations that are coordinated on a large scale through committed religious communities and individuals, with or without a large organization backing them. Overwhelmingly, people describe recognizing a need and then responding to it (emphasizing the practical nature of volunteers, though the religious inspiration or obligatory angle is also a frequent motivator for involvement).

This shows not only great community involvement but a very significant recognition of the global nature of this area. Members of the community have described and emphasized not the considerable commitment or sacrifices they have made, but rather the incredible lessons and rewards that they reap because of the friendships and cross-cultural knowledge they gain. Some emphasized how good it is for the community to have an international environment, both for kids in schools and adults in faith communities or daily life. Others mention the friendships that develop and the reverse benefits that accrue, including learning a foreign language, community dinners, expansion of faith, and access to new perspectives and mindsets. The multicultural advantage was highlighted in many interviews. For instance, organizers who have coordinated and trained volunteers were asked what some of the traits they looked for in volunteers were. The single most important trait that came up again and again was the advantage of previous cross-cultural experience, including living abroad, language training, contact with foreign cultures, or travel.

Behind these motivations is also the sense of commitment fostered by the migrant history of the United States that contributes to the desire to aid others to fulfill a sort of “American Dream.” This collective sense of responsibility endowed by the U.S.’s migrant past is often attributed by many as the great success of the United States’ refugee resettlement program (the desire for civil society to assist those people in situations with which they can

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152 Diana and Fulks both expressed this in interviews with the author.
153 Ms. K.
154 Jacob Rodriguez emphasized very strongly his friendships that weather any misunderstandings. Diana describes keeping her Spanish and French sharp by the practice she gets with respective populations, as well as learning Arabic from one of her new neighbors. Again, the intentional communities share the philosophy that this is not a matter necessarily of give and take, but simply being a good neighbor (both in a religious and general sense). Rodriguez, Jacob and Diana, (separate) interviews with the author.
155 See interviews with Mr. JK (29 Dec 2010), Galli 20 Dec 2010), and Knight (5 Jan 2011).
empathize). It was cited in a few interviews and mentioned casually by many, including the Chief of Mission at IOM Vienna in early 2011.156

What is important about both these factors – cross-cultural experience and the United States’ own diverse history – is recognizing that migrants can positively influence communities and vice versa if agents on both sides collaborate and change together, no matter the reason that drove the new arrivals to migrate. No part of this is a one-way transfer, but either side of the equation can resist change and insulate. On the one hand, this can be an important facet of cultural preservation, especially for groups that move to new places (especially older members) and want their children to respect customs, learn the language, and generally remember and acknowledge their homelands. This process of knowing and accepting one’s cultural origins is not mutually exclusive to integration, nor is the adaptation and knowledge acquisition of host communities on the other side antithetical to remaining proud citizens of U.S. American culture. Ultimately, the transition comes when the migrant becomes the citizen and the host community becomes a community, more diverse and aware because of these global diversification processes.

The Role of Churches

The undeniable center of the resettlement process is civil society. Indeed, this is the main thrust of this thesis: that, without active and compassionate members of civil society, the process would not have the success that it has had. But more than civil society alone, this chapter has shown in particular how the myriad activities of a variety of churches (plus many more that were not named; Sperry says that the network in DuPage County alone has over 70 active churches) play a crucial role. Oftentimes, as in the case of the local church, it was simply that the religious community existed for refugees to join. Members then noticed that refugees required transportation to and from church or work (which blossomed into ever-expanding services). In other instances, the churches realized that the needs of the poor within the community were significant enough to make bigger commitments to the local refugee population than to send the children of parishioners abroad for expensive vacations (when the money could do a lot more locally). It is not an antiquated practice; churches were always the forerunners of resettlement.

156 John, 21 Dec 2010. Other people and articles also reference this casually as the key to binding Americans in the task to help “fellow migrants” adjust to North American society.
Churches and other faith organizations gather multitalented parishioners who are compassionate and attuned to the needs of the wider community. People from faith backgrounds and communities “may find themselves motivated to serve refugees and vulnerable people out of a desire to fulfill the mandate for service found in many traditional religious texts of the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish faiths” and to donate time, skills, or money to help the needy around them. Indeed, in the case of the refugee ministry, the parishioners combined IT whizzes and business minds with English teachers and homemakers. This underlines the importance that religion can have as a unifying factor across national, social, and socio-economic boundaries (as churches, mosques, and temples have collected members from all parts of the globe) as well as the significance of attitudes towards migration within the country. For those who view it positively, they see it as a part of history. Helping those who come is a moral obligation and an opportunity for diversification for them (as opposed to representing competition for jobs or resources), merging global movements with local realities.

As previously stated, it is also the vast funding that religious communities can draw on, especially VOLAGs, which makes the program so successful. Heartland Alliance is one organization, for instance, that struggles because of its secularity. An interviewee mentioned that the funding from Christian organizations is a huge advantage and that his organization struggles by comparison. This is significantly owed to the tradition of alms-giving in the United States. Churches pass around collection plates every week to collect donations. These are either used by the church for improvements or for use within the wider community. Alternatively, these donations can be (and often are) used for mission trips abroad for young adults in the church or for sponsoring refugees from abroad, among many other church-related improvements, programs, and holidays. It is also not uncommon to have small shops in churches, as well as fundraisers held within them. Alms-giving is a specific tradition of Christianity that aggregates funds and makes churches the powerful and useful partner that they are in the refugee resettlement process.

The downside of the primary role that Christian organizations have within the United States refugee resettlement system is that it discourages people of a more secular background (or alternate religious upbringing) to participate, facing uncomfortable (or even restrictive) standards to be able to help

157 Eby 2010, 8.
158 Anonymous, 4 January 2011.
others. In fact, World Relief was embroiled in a rather heated political discussion in 2010 for refusing to employ a Muslim man named Saad Mohammad Ali because the organization felt that he did not share certain values with the Christian church. The organization had no problem keeping him on as a volunteer (indeed, a very valuable one, seeing as he can speak Arabic and therefore could help the numerous refugees who come from Arabic-speaking lands), but would not hire him because of his beliefs.

The Civil Right Act of 1964 permits certain types of discrimination for membership in specific organizations based on religion, “recognizing the need of faith-based organizations to maintain an atmosphere of shared values and principles.” The opinions of this act and its consequences for Mr. Ali are split. Some see this as perfectly justified; a person would not join an oil company if they did not share the values of the company, nor would someone work for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) if they had a fur coat. Still, the fact that VOLAGs run on public money has caused many complaints and questions of legitimacy and fairness. Asked whether this national scandal had affected business as usual for World Relief DuPage, Susan Sperry said no. The scandal did, however, scrutinize World Relief Chicago, which also came under the microscope after a high-level employee quit because she disagreed with the discriminatory (though, as previously stated, completely legal) hiring policies which had been then put into force (this was always a passive feature of hiring policies). The day-to-day activities and cases in DuPage County were relatively unaffected; grants and leadership management, she predicts, would perhaps be slightly affected and under pressure in the future, however. It is nonetheless a strange practice to discriminate in hiring for VOLAGs as there are not other resettlement organizations in the area that one could work with which are secular. Despite the reasoning that one would not join these organizations unless they shared similar values, if it is the only option available and also has public money and a public mandate, it is unfortunate that they are permitted to discriminate in this way.

159 Anonymous and Spirito both mention this in the interview, as well as some concerned activists in the town; in one case, a woman actually overheard an interview and weighed in that she found it difficult to get involved because of the religious nature of so many organizations in the area.

160 Turnbull, 10 March 2010.


162 Sperry, 4 Jan 2011.
What is most troubling about the Christian-only attitude of organizations like World Relief is not only the diversity that it loses but also the issue of motive and process. At least four of the intentional community members purposefully creating a Christian presence within the apartment complexes have or do work for World Relief, suggesting that there could be an agenda behind World Relief’s government-mandated services. Though interviewees who were intentional community members and linked to World Relief did not express anything more than getting to know their neighbors, they also emphasized the Christian side of their cohabitation. Though, as previously stated, Christian organizations have been the drivers of resettlement and are important actors, they are organizations that do not have to apologize for proselytizing or spreading the faith because it is their prerogative as a private organization that only interested parties would join. Still, World Relief is linked to the government and should offer the same level of services to all of its clients. It is also very important not to alienate refugees, many of whom fled their homes because of religious persecution, and not to force ideas upon them. While the intentional community certainly has invaluable knowledge and gives support to refugees on a daily basis, the strong religious character of their mission is certainly a troubling aspect that has worried secular activists in the area.

Still, despite discriminatory practices, non-secular organizations are valuable actors and are useful as refugees flock to them based on previously held beliefs even without networks or prejudicial information. They are community centers that reach out to people in need. Moving forward, what is needed in this context is a more inter-faith approach. World Relief, for instance, asks refugee candidates who identify as Christian if they would like to be contacted by a Christian or Catholic church (the Refugee Ministry is one example of a church group that is linked to World Relief in this way). Incorporating other faith organizations to help refugees access support systems with people of their same faith background (and possibly other common characteristics) into World Relief’s referral program and getting faith community and organizational members involved in a wider dialogue on good practices could be for the benefit of all refugees who arrive in DuPage County.

163 John, 21 December 2010.
Comparing the Circumstances of Glen Ellyn and Chicago Refugees

Different parts of the state and country experience vastly different problems and opportunities when it comes to refugee resettlement, even those that are near one another. In the city of Chicago, in contrast to Wheaton and Glen Ellyn a mere 28 miles away, refugees can avail themselves of the various forms of public transport that snake across the city. Suburban refugees almost always need a car for their commute, which can prove to be difficult to obtain financially. Even in accessing the organizations that are there to help them, having a car is critical for a refugee to get to all the appointments and to find assistance. People’s Resource Center, for instance, is far from the Parkside Apartments in Glen Ellyn, as are doctor’s offices, English language courses (generally), and the elementary school. With a poor public transportation network, there is less independence in the suburbs.

Another issue is employment. There are historically more jobs in cities, which broadens occupational mobility. This can be important especially for refugees whose qualifications have been un- or under-utilized. If they have to start out at the meatpacking districts or other factories until they learn English, they can then have greater access to higher-level jobs in a tightly concentrated area, in stark contrast to the suburbs. Still, though Chicago has settled over 133,000 refugees since 1975, there has been attention paid recently to the ever-growing exodus of refugees from the inner-city to the suburbs. There are differences in opinion as to why this may be, but crime levels in the city, better education possibilities for children in the suburbs, unemployment in the cities, and housing problems have been implicated to various degrees for this out-migration.

Regarding the resettlement agencies themselves, Susan Sperry, head of World Relief DuPage, cites a few differences. She emphasizes the significance of the fact that there are multiple refugee resettlement agencies within a few miles of each other in Chicago. Not only does this fact require the organizations to collaborate and cooperate extensively, but also gives refugees the opportunity to “shop around” to try to find the best services in the area. This means that the activities and policies of one organization greatly affect the

164 Eichberger, 21 January 2010.
167 Sperry, 4 Jan 2011.
operations of the others. On the other hand, because World Relief is the only acting resettlement agency in DuPage County, there is a greater degree of speculation, scrutiny, and responsibility placed upon the organization to perform and provide well for refugee clients. This can put undue pressure on the resettlement organization. Still, with more communication with the community at large about its mandate and activities, resettlement organizations can be their own agents to minimize bad press.

Generally, smaller communities like Glen Ellyn and Wheaton also have more possibilities for people to get to know their neighbours. In cities like Chicago, low-income housing may be in unsafe or inaccessible regions of the city. This problem is compounded for men and women who need to take public transport every day and may be at risk for much of their daily commute. In Glen Ellyn, the problem is that refugees are isolated from the services and neighbours because they do not have cars. Generally, though, in Chicago, because of the isolation of housing, higher danger risk, and relative anonymity of a city, there is likely to be less integration of refugees into mainstream life. Then again, all low-income housing is somewhat segregated, even in DuPage County. Still, in smaller places, people can publicize their activities better and educate the population not only about the refugee situation, but about ways to help.

**Chapter Summary**

Are civil society organizations and individuals necessary to fulfill the U.S. government’s refugee resettlement program? The intent of this chapter was to show that they certainly are necessary to facilitate integration on a variety of levels not foreseen or accounted for by the government’s initial services. Further, they offer perspectives (to varying degrees) from direct contact with refugees that may not otherwise be obtained from government officials administering a huge program (to the tune of 80,000 refugees per year) throughout the United States. Voicing these views and contributing this locally obtained knowledge may help to ameliorate the enduring issues and challenges that will be discussed at length in the final chapter. These challenges arose in interviews and while some were unique, most came up in multiple interviews, suggesting some unity of narrative in this area. It is important to keep in mind everything elucidated in this chapter when analyzing the enduring challenges, especially the organic, grassroots nature of most of the assistance that has been offered by individuals and collectives based on perceived need and resources. It is also important to keep in mind the general funding of the program by the U.S. government, which restricts
the intensity and duration of services on offer by VOLAGs and their branches.

In response to the second part of the original question in the thesis – could this be done better through better communication and collaboration – this author’s opinion is that it could. This is corroborated by the fact that Sperry herself mentioned that throughout the process of resettling refugees in West Chicago, more efforts were made to communicate to the mayor, school districts, and other local leaders to help transmit the message to the public that resettlement is a positive development and not one that would infringe on the social and educational development, job opportunities, or funds for local citizens. Anecdotes within Glen Ellyn and Wheaton have shown that some are voicing concerns that refugees are unfairly advantaged and taking resources away from citizens. This type of attitude can be rooted out through education campaigns and informational forays and should be a bigger responsibility of the government or its VOLAGs, especially given the heatedness of political debate on immigration alone within the United States. Citizens should be educated to understand how refugees fit into the United States government’s foreign agenda and how refugees can benefit communities. Overall, there needs to be greater connection between the national and local levels of the resettlement process to ensure a consistently supportive atmosphere for vulnerable populations resettled on U.S. soil.

In the Czech Republic, the NGO responsible for resettling Burmese refugees made sure to inform the community before resettlement occurred to spur interest and support from the outset. This is arguably more important there, as the NGO did not have direct links to religious organizations that are so fruitful in the United States. Still, it is important to let communities know and anticipate their questions and fears in order to ensure a more seamless and intelligent integration process. See: Williams and Phillmann, 2011.
Chapter Four: Integration Challenges, Unmet and Ongoing

Crossing oceans and cultures to their new homes, refugees surmount a variety of challenges along the way. From their initial survival to the temporary stop in the second country and finally to their third-country destination, each part of the journey provides completely new difficulties compounded by the need to adapt to the surrounding culture. In the end, the final arrival is not so much a relief as a whole new beginning. The entire family must adapt at different paces to an entirely new language, food, societal structure, government system, job situation, and educational system, not to mention the variety of social mores that must be observed.

This chapter will look at a selection of issues that came up during various interviews with members of churches, organizations, and schools regarding the difficulty of integrating into DuPage County. This is in order to better understand the barriers that refugees face for which the organizations must try to correct, as well as to highlight some of the challenges with regard to the various Burmese populations in particular (as opposed to other refugee groups). These policies bring into question the greater strategy of the United States government in choosing locations to resettle refugees through the exploration of some of the endemic challenges of Glen Ellyn and Wheaton (and the surrounding county) while also revealing the limitations of VOLAGs. All of these remaining issues, in the context of the previous chapter’s explanation of what various organizations and individuals are doing to help, refer back to the original research question of how and why people get involved in the process of integration after refugee resettlement. Oftentimes, volunteers observed a need that was not being met and, through generous allotment of personal resources (including time, ideas, and money), are working to correct the problems that occur from an incomplete and chronically underfunded system. Still, there are many problems that remain.

Transportation

Glen Ellyn and Wheaton are suburbs located outside of Chicago. Because of the setup of these and many similar towns in the United States, there are very few effective and efficient public transportation options and thus, the most time-saving way of getting around town is to have a car. There are trains and bussing services in most places, but in and around Glen Ellyn and greater DuPage County, they do not reach towns where many of the refugees go. For instance, they do not lead directly to meatpacking factories. Many refugees and immigrants must therefore walk miles to and from their low-
paying jobs alongside highways and major avenues, in the heat of summer and freezing cold of winter, to get to and from their jobs.

Some organizations have ride-sharing programs. St. Michael’s Church in Wheaton had a program to help refugees – and other members of the community – to get to church.\textsuperscript{169} However, some others have attempted to organize ride-sharing or bussing systems but encountered difficulties that forced them to stop. People’s Resource Center of Wheaton, for instance, was one of those organizations that briefly coordinated a bussing system. However, due to (perhaps) language differences and difficulties, as well as competing cultural conceptions of time, it was hard to coordinate with people to get them at the right place at the right time. Moreover, there was a high variety of needs (appointments, jobs, getting kids to after-school programs, etc.) which made it impossible to serve everyone. The service was disbanded after only a few months.\textsuperscript{170}

There is some availability of cars, however. As was covered in chapter three, there is an organization called St. Vincent DePaul (SVD) that operates a car-trade program. When an old car is unused, SVD facilitates the transfer of this car to a low-income family, which includes many refugees.\textsuperscript{171} This is only one step. Not only do the immigrants have to take the test in a foreign language, they also, in many cases, also have to learn how to drive. This requires not only classes and money, but also hours practicing with a licensed driver. There are many volunteers who have taken up this task, such as Jacob Rodriguez and Karl and Marilyn.\textsuperscript{172} Moreover, no one is permitted to drive on American roads without an insurance plan, which is also another hefty monthly bill.

 Refugees are not helpless in this regard, and this is an instance where familial ties help to a large degree. Oftentimes, families with a car end up sharing with other families to help the parents get to work, get family members to the doctor’s office, get to church/mosques/temples, or take the children to school. Because of the various needs, however, and the layout of American cities, this can be tough. There is also the question of getting children to and from extracurricular activities. The GECRC has set up a soccer team that competes with other children on Saturday mornings. This was almost disbanded because of the question of transportation; each individual child

\textsuperscript{169} John, 21 December 2010.
\textsuperscript{170} Knight, 5 January 2011.
\textsuperscript{171} John, 21 December 2010.
\textsuperscript{172} Rodriguez also notes that refugees help new refugees with these tasks when they arrive.
had to be picked up and dropped off, and there are questions of liability and safety. They have been able to keep this program going, however, which is a great success for children’s integration.\textsuperscript{173} In general, though, the question of transportation for refugees still needs to be addressed. Advocacy to get people and politicians to understand this problem could result in more efficient routes or greater community collaboration to ride-share.

**Acculturation**

Learning a new language is always a difficult undertaking. For refugees, and particularly for the Burmese who pass through Thailand, problems are plentiful. First of all, the average refugee spends 18 years in a camp there; for some, the entire life prior to resettlement is within the walls of a refugee camp.\textsuperscript{174} This is a generation spent in a host society where, in this case, the mother tongue is not spoken. Of course, children can learn their mother tongue, surrounded as they are by their co-nationals. Nevertheless, there is the problem of adjusting for their future. Refugees often have only a brief notice before they are moved to a third country, and given that there are a variety of countries such as France, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Germany (on an ad hoc basis) that accept refugees, it is impossible to prepare linguistically in advance of the move.\textsuperscript{175} English is a challenge, then, particularly for those refugees that go to the U.K. and the U.S. The International Organization for Migration does provide language training courses and a brief orientation in advance of a move once the location has been decided (as well as medical screenings and booking the flights, which must be paid back by the refugee over time), but in terms of long-term learning and language development, this occurs mostly in the third country.

Once they get to their final destination, which in some cases is not the immediate step after the refugee camp, they must start all over again to learn the destination country’s language. Often, the older generation learns little to no English. It is difficult for them because Burma natives do not use the Latin alphabet, meaning even the language’s form is entirely new. Moreover, it typically takes nine years to be able to speak English at a level of fluency commensurate with a native, a task which many of refugees (and immigrants) cannot undertake as they must work long hours at meatpacking factories.\textsuperscript{176}

\textsuperscript{173} Galli, 20 December 2010.

\textsuperscript{174} Sperry, Susan on the 18-year statistic; Jessica Davis of EXODUS World Service mentions that many refugees have been in camps their whole lives.

\textsuperscript{175} “Paving the Way: A Handbook on the Reception and Integration of Resettled Refugees.”

\textsuperscript{176} Ms. K 2010.
There is a variety of English classes taught by churches, schools, and the local community college, but that also requires time, practice, and money on top of the task of raising children and adjusting to the other time constraints such as buying and preparing food, getting to and from work, and leisure time within the family. This means that the children (who often adjust more quickly to the language) are often saddled with the burden of acting as translators for such diverse and important issues as medical services and Medicaid card attainment and appointments; school registration, events, and homework; and daily tasks such as answering the door or picking up the phone. Though it is important to know that the Karen Burmese in particular have formed a wide family network and can therefore support one another when their relatives join them in the United States, this does not always correct for the daily challenges. One member of the intentional community says that one of the biggest roles that a volunteer can play, both in the lives of a refugee or an immigrant, is to help them with reading the mail, as they can miss important bills or unknowingly sign up to a credit card scheme (or multiple), ensuring later complications.177

One of the particular problems with the older generation’s inability in English manifests itself with regard to their children’s education. They cannot participate in their children’s education on multiple levels, which is (according to the educators interviewed for this thesis) often the key to the child’s academic success. This is primarily because the parents cannot, due to linguistic barriers, help with homework. However, they also cannot attend parent-teacher conferences – or can attend but with the help of a translator – and learn how their child is developing in the classroom. More to the point, they may not know this is an option. Many of children have experienced trauma and respond by acting out in the classroom or not participating at all, a problem that school counselors or teachers can assess and help to combat at school.178 This, however, requires student and parent acknowledgment, cooperation, and active participation. Most importantly, say two interviewees, there is no one to advocate for the rights of their children in the classroom if not the parents.179

177 Rodriguez, John, and Fulks all mention this.
178 Both Ms. K and Ms. D expressed this concern, Ms. K as an ESL teacher at a junior high school and Mrs. D as an after-school program leader.
179 Katie Galli, head of the after-school program Glen Ellyn Children Resource Center, expressed this in an interview, as well as Pam Knight, who works at the People’s Resource Center in neighboring Wheaton.
Finally, there is the high level of difficulty of English compounded with illiteracy in the mother tongue. Multiple interviewees cited the importance of previous formal education or at least the ability to read and write in the mother tongue. If these skills preexist, the speed at which one can learn to read in a second language is higher. At the Glen Ellyn Children’s Resource Center, they emphasize this point and hope to have children learning their own mother tongue with bilingual teachers. Indeed, in the Wheaton school district, once the number of ELL students from one language background reaches 20, the school is required by law to have a bilingual teacher who can teach them the fundamentals of their own language as well as English grammar and vocabulary.

One of the fundamental errors in the process of meeting refugees’ needs is not actually asking them what it is they need. In the schools, many children receive government-sponsored breakfasts and lunches because their families are included in low-income brackets. However, many of them do not eat the lunches anyway, as the sandwiches provided are made with peanut butter and jelly (something the children have never had before), consist of ham (unacceptable to Muslim children) or run-of-the-mill cow’s milk (anathema to children raised on camel’s milk, or any non-American pasteurizing system). Some of the kids go hungry during the day because the food is completely alien to them. Though the thought behind it is well-meaning, it unintentionally goes awry. Similarly, the Parkside Apartment complex gets regular deliveries of food from the food pantry. However, the food given oftentimes includes canned beets, pineapples, or string beans – things that even U.S. Americans seldom cook. So, instead of simply delivering food because there is a need, there must be more attention to collecting food with which the refugees and other immigrants and low-income families can actually cook. This requires cultural awareness and sensitivity, and also simply asking people what they need. For the Burmese populations, this would be rice, the single most important food in their cultures and synonymous with life itself. As a result of this, a rice steamer is the most

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180 Galli, 20 December 2010.
182 Ms. D, January 2011.
183 Diana, 31 December 2010. A further anecdote is related in: Eichberger, Susan, 12 January 2010. In the latter interview, she says she went to a refugee household and upon entering the kitchen, she “noticed cans of food lining the gap between her cupboards and the floor.” When she asked the woman the reason why she kept the food along the floor border, she replied, “for decoration.” Eichberger works for Heartland Alliance’s Refugee Nutrition Program.
184 Ranard and Baran 2007.
essential element of any Burmese refugee’s kitchen. Asian shops in the area hold high-quality rice cookers, thereby protecting one of the essential elements of Burmese life and culture in the United States. Rice is consumed in huge amounts in the United States, as compared to Europe, and is therefore plentifully available for refugees. Indeed, a survey found that low-income residents of the United States consume more rice than high-income citizens, implying that it is cheaply obtained; however, it also points to the ethnic origins of many of those who participated in the survey.\(^{185}\)

Finally, one of the biggest adjustment processes for refugees is getting acclimated to Chicago’s freezing climate. Myanmar is a tropical country in Southeast Asia, climactically distant from Chicago’s harsh winters. Many members of the community mentioned anecdotally how they often see refugee children (not only those hailing from Burma, but also Rwanda, Somalia, and other warmer climates) walking in the late autumn in only flip-flops and light jackets. Many organizations help to collect and distribute suitable clothing for refugee families to accommodate all weather conditions. This is an important health issue, not to mention difficult for physiological and psychological adaptation. It is but another factor that could, should civil society not get so involved with assisting refugees, drive a wedge between these new members and the community by keeping refugees at home and apart, preventing interaction.

**Long-term Employment**

One of the particularly crippling effects of moving to the United States for those who have skills is that they can go unacknowledged for years or even permanently in their new homes abroad. Interestingly, most of those who are permitted to relocate abroad are skilled workers, having acted as NGO liaisons, teachers, medics, community leaders, or occupations. They move abroad and greet the chance to work enthusiastically, but then are not acknowledged for their skills. It is dispiriting for them to go to the land of opportunity and to be barred from pursuing their desired careers. Meanwhile, for those who are unskilled, and for those who have been living in the refugee camps for decades with no chance for employment, they learned to rely entirely upon the UN and NGOs for food and services. With the U.S. resettlement program’s emphasis on self-sufficiency, they can be rudely

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confronted with bureaucratic processes and authority figures. The new life abroad comes with the reality of bills to pay, a travel bill to reimburse, and the necessity to work long hours for meager pay (often facing long transit times to and from work) just to get by. While many are thrilled just to be able to work again, the reality of the short-lived stipend is felt relatively quickly for most refugee families. Many in the DuPage County area work at meatpacking factories – jobs which are relatively easy to come by – with others toiling long hours packing boxes for clothes factories (or similarly low-skill, low-pay jobs). However, the former occupation may conflict with religious values (for Jewish or Muslim groups in particular, depending on the type of meat) and is frustrating for refugees with higher education degrees that go unrecognized.

Interestingly, another problem that arose while speaking to a Burmese who helps other Burmese assimilate was that of racism in the workplace. Though Burmese are generally viewed as solid and reliable employees, there is nevertheless a problem of inter-factory racism as African-Americans, Latinos, and other refugee/migrant populations are pitted against each other. At times, this creates tensions and even all-out conflict, sometimes even goaded by employers. This was not acknowledged (and likely not known) by any U.S. American interviewees. Indeed, this is one of the complaints that does not surface and make itself known to the assisting organizations, perhaps because of the short duration of services and the inability to forge strong, trusting connections, making refugees reluctant to express deeper problems. Many of the refugees in general feel abandoned after the first three months of initial services from World Relief run dry. Though the stance of the VOLAG is that if they had more budget to work with they would certainly have a more attentive assistance approach for a longer period, the reality is that the funds are not sufficient. Case loads of others take precedent as national quotas are met and new refugees arrive, which is often a great burden to the VOLAGs, which must mobilize instantly for new families.

This vastly underutilizes the skills base of refugees. Many have extensive credentials that could contribute to U.S. society. One man describes how he would like to perform social work, as he and his wife are both teachers. There is a desperate need for translators, especially in the educational sectors.

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186 Wright 2009.
188 Pastor. Interview with author. Glen Ellyn, IL.
189 Galli, Knight, Diana, and the Pastor all mentioned this in their interviews.
190 Wright, 2009.
and in formulating tools for new arrivals (such as Exodus’s First Steps). While there may not be new arrivals which have been specifically trained in this area, refugees (especially teachers) are especially well-placed to be invested in. They already speak the language and are more or less required to learn English. If they become trained as case workers for resettlement agencies, teaching aides or teachers (especially given the federal requirements for native speakers of refugee languages in ELL classes), activists for migrant rights, or other forms of social work to assist integration, it will both actively use their skill potentials and assist greatly in cultural and linguistic bridge-building.

**Education: the School System and No Child Left Behind**

As previously mentioned, fluency in English can take a non-native speaker up to nine years to achieve. A major hurdle for children to reach fluency, however, comes from President Bush’s educational legacy, the No Child Left Behind Law. Originally titled the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, first created in 1965, the No Child Left Behind Act was reformed in 2001 and signed into law by President George W. Bush on January 8th, 2002.\(^1\)

The main thrust of the law, among other sweeping goals, aims to have 100% of children reading at their grade level by 2014; thus, third graders must be able to read at a third-grade level, ninth graders at a ninth-grade level, and so on. However, this law includes refugees, thereby bunching together those who have never had previous schooling with those who have grown up under the American education system. For the Karen Burmese in particular, who cannot read in their own language let alone English, the expectation is that they will function at an equivalent grade level to their fellow classmates, with such study subjects as “George Washington” and “Pythagorean Theorem”. If the American children do not already have an advantage in reading at their grade level, for instance having understood the Washington legacy from parents or books, there is a profound advantage in being fluent in the language. The kinds of things that refugees are expected to learn are a kind of cultural and idiomatic language, the comprehension of which depends greatly on having parents who understand the language and know enough about cultural processes and historical events to understand and relay the significance of assignments.\(^2\)

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The long-term consequences of this law have been debated not only in terms of refugees. There has been widespread corruption throughout the U.S., with many school districts getting charged with cheating to enhance testing scores. Teachers have been accused in Pennsylvania, Florida, Georgia, and New York of changing test answers to improve the overall rating. High test scores mean more and better funding, and poor-performing schools could get penalized to the point of being shut down. One interviewee spoke of heaps of papers showing children passing classes, essays, and projects when in fact the work was sub-par or worse. Refugee children are oftentimes passed because it is the easy thing to do and not because they are prepared or functioning equivalently to their peers. Many of them do not receive a diploma upon graduation of high school but rather a paper stating that they attended the high school, thereby “setting them up for failure.” The law has once again been scheduled for reconsideration, with plans to develop a waiver program for states that will not reach the goal by 2014 but have ambitious education improvement plans nevertheless. The process is, at the time of writing, just beginning.

Lack of Counseling

Refugees face immense psychological trauma from their experiences in their home countries. For the Burmese groups, who were always “one step ahead of the army,” there are longstanding issues such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that affect their daily lives. According to a report by Amnesty International, Karen refugees in particular suffered a range of cruelties. Many lost family members through death or forced disappearances. This is compounded by life in the refugee camps where inhabitants live in cultural and physical isolation. Many have seen loved ones die and have struggled to survive in the tough conditions of the camps, waiting to be reunited with family members abroad. Some simply want the opportunity to start a new life far from the dangers that the refugee camps pose, oftentimes resting not far from the borders and armies of Myanmar.

The chance to start again is not given to every family, and they must wait years to find out if they will be chosen. Then, once they arrive to the United States and must face new cultural challenges and shocks, there are often few avenues for relief. Many join churches – especially the Chin Burmese - where

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195 Dillon, 8 Aug. 2011.
196 Sperry and Davis both described this lifestyle in interviews with the author.
they are assisted and find at least some connection to other parishioners in a common faith. Still, they struggle silently nonetheless with trauma and an inability to express themselves fully. Though they are by no means helpless, there are serious repercussions for adults of being rendered silent while the children acclimate and learn the language alongside the daily challenges of a U.S. American life.

**Day-to-Day Life**

One of the most important roles that the intentional community at Parkside Apartments plays (and that individuals do on an ad hoc basis) is reading mail, helping with credit card/electricity/rent/phone bills and contracts, and generally assisting refugees in navigating the numerous obligations of a bureaucratic society. This is a particular area where, after refugees’ cases are mostly closed by World Relief, refugees require a great deal of assistance and only get it in a perfunctory and uneven manner. The author, accompanying Galli to the Parkside Apartments to help parents register their children for the after-school program (a task that took her a few days, as she had to get signatures and explain the times for school registration and when the first day of school would convene, all through unenthusiastic child interpreters), watched as, at one apartment, the grandmother invited Galli in to assist her with a medical question. One member of the family required a certain medication and could not obtain it because his name (Burmese names being unusual to American eyes and ears) had been printed incorrectly on his Medicaid card and thus was different from his identity card. Galli patiently called the pharmacy and then Medicaid, explaining the problem and eventually securing a new card that would be delivered in a few days.

This is but one problem. Rodriguez says one small contribution he makes is to read refugees’ mail. Oftentimes, they inadvertently sign up for credit cards, mobile phones, or other deals and then get roped into contracts that are hard to break. Rodriguez, 4 January 2011. John says that the FAV ministry also helps to prevent this from happening. Individuals have also been known to assist refugees, with one woman spending hours on the phone with a telephone company to remove someone from a contract. John, 21 December 2010. She was successful, but this demonstrated that this was certainly a case where fluent English was necessary to negotiate exit from the contract (and would have likely prevented the problem from occurring in the first place). The problem with being unable to comprehend
the bureaucracy of the country’s authorities – especially for the Burmese who often did not have such things as credit cards, Medicaid, car insurance, mortgages, or schools to register for in Burma – is not adequately assessed by the VOLAGs and there may be many more people suffering and losing money unnecessarily that are going unassisted.

Other problems that the refugees and VOLAGs face together include finding suitable housing and the short duration of public medical services. For housing, Sperry describes the difficulty of securing adequate apartments while Fulks bemoans substandard facilities. The Parkside Apartments are not only a mix of refugees and low-income residents. Observers also noted drug dealers, which does not contribute to a healthy and safe atmosphere for the kids who run around the apartment blocks at will. Having access to protected, affordable housing (something some residents attest that Parkside Apartments does not provide) means a secure living situation, or an oasis amidst the difficulties that challenge them every day. The problem is not only access to housing, however, but includes long-term health issues within the apartments. At the time of interviewing in Glen Ellyn, one of the apartment complexes was suffering from bedbugs. Others have implicated the same housing complex as having exposed wires and other lackluster facilities. An article on Burmese refugees in Milwaukee reported refugees being settled in squalid apartments infested with roaches, lacking carbon monoxide detectors, and with many broken appliances. The problem in this instance was that the resettlement agency did not check the lessor’s background. Still, problems abound as resettlement agencies must resettle refugees quickly and cheaply.

The short duration of medical services and public funding has been a source of trouble for refugees, especially as they are often supporting family networks much wider than themselves. Emphasizing the need for self-sufficiency, the resettlement agencies and government push refugees to purported independence in order to relieve the purported burden of refugees on the state. Refugees are placed in low-paying jobs (instead of training them, accrediting their skills, or focusing on English for the first few months to better their prospects) and may have to work long hours or multiple jobs just to be able to buy groceries. Many, as a result, describe how they will go to

199 Rodriguez interview.
work even if they do not feel well. They may not have access to doctors easily in the first place (plus the associated fees) and cannot afford to take time off. Moreover, their public assistance from the government is not permanent. For instance, the Social Security Administration gives cash assistance to many refugees, but sets a seven-year limit on payments. In August 2010, 3,800 refugees, many of whom were too old or ill to work and not eligible to become U.S. citizens (which would guarantee some form of assistance), were told that cash assistance would end in October that same year. Medicaid is only available for the first eight months after arrival, as is Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA). Even knowing how to access these services in the first place requires targeted help, which is mostly taken care of by the resettlement agencies (signing up refugees for food stamps, getting them to their appointments in order to qualify for these services in the first place, etc.) over the first 90 days.

In March 2010, Congress signed into law the Affordable Care Act that is designed to remove some of these barriers. After 2014, Medicaid should be available for everyone, provided certain income requirements (133% of the federal poverty level) are met. If employers do not fill this gap, the refugees will have access to affordable healthcare services. Refugees (and all citizens) will also be protected from discrimination by insurers based on preexisting ailments or charging higher premiums based upon these ailments. This is a considerable advancement for refugees and society in general, promising healthcare access for all residents of the United States.

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203 This is a federal policy that applies in all states. See: <http://jfs.ohio.gov/refugee/>.
Not Helpless, but Hard

Despite all the challenges listed above, this chapter has not meant to suggest that any of the Burmese groups are helpless, not advancing themselves, or in any way not integrating. It is meant only as a summary of some of the major gaps and areas that require further work and were identified during interviews. Indeed, the Burmese groups are self-sufficient in many regards. Like all refugees, they are very close-knit. The Burmese in particular come in large family groups that get placed together at the same apartment complexes, helping to assist when new families arrive. They share rides, register each other for church and worship together, generally working in groups—whether it be shopping en masse, going to appointments, registering kids for school, or taking the kids to and from school—and cooking and living together. They are not helpless but rather struggle together as they struggled within their country and in the refugee camps. They are critical actors in getting each other in supportive communities once in the United States. They face incredible obstacles with unfathomable depths of courage and endurance; for, when they arrive, their journeys to integrate in the United States have only just begun.

Chapter Summary

There are many difficulties yet to be confronted in a systemized manner in the United States’ refugee resettlement program because of the vast differences that exist even in areas a short distance from one another (like Glen Ellyn and Chicago) with regards to resources available, volunteers, transportation needs, and communities. There is perhaps not very much that the government can do systematically to fill these gaps in all of the resettlement locations around the United States. Still, there seem to be simple solutions (such as the content of low-income meal plans, alterations to the No Child Left Behind law, job and psychiatric counseling, and the extension and better support from government services like Medicaid) that could help integration without reducing the impetus on refugees to become self-sufficient. Transportation has been somewhat effectively dealt with through programs and the refugees themselves, but does not consistently extend to all

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205 Sperry, Diana, and Rodriguez mention that they live together, particularly at Parkside. Anonymous mentions how Heartland Alliance uses them particularly to help new families come; if the family that is arriving has ties in the US, Heartland Alliance is relatively hands-off.

206 John, 21 Dec 2010.

207 Diana, Rodriguez, Sperry, Davis and John have all mentioned witnessing these types of activities.
refugees. This perhaps could be improved through better transportation systems for everyone in DuPage County, not just for the refugees.

There has been considerable assistance and innovation in these communities that help to integrate refugees, often due to considerable efforts and energy – or even just plain observation – of community members, religious or otherwise. Their actions are commendable and certainly impressive. Some of the problems may never improve – or will improve, but slowly – due to financial problems, especially for secular organizations that do not have pre-formed groups at their disposal through which they can mobilize volunteers and funds. If the problems persist, particularly with regard to counseling issues and nutrition, it may be an opportunity for the government to reconsider some of its funding avenues and consider bolstering up this program that forms such a significant part of its foreign relations and security agenda. Further, this may be a moment to consider different modes through which weaker programs can be expanded and these evident needs carefully assessed.

Civil society has gotten involved in a huge way that makes up for many of the gaps in the resettlement agenda. A significant part of this is due to the Christian organizations that have maintained the services they have been offering for over half a century, which have significant funds and members gripped by a moral sense that there is something bigger than themselves and willing to assist those that they see in need in the communities around them. However, the obvious emphasis and overtly Christian avenues to assist refugees have also dampened efforts to some degree, with some volunteers and organizations expressing their discomfort at the overt proselytizing and moral righteousness than can pervade these atmospheres. These attitudes and practices dissuade people from helping when they might otherwise do so, when their membership could make the programs stronger and more diverse. Still, there is no blueprint for how these developments work and the organizations are doing the best they can. Some organizations are even correcting for this need, even if the organizations themselves have a religious background or focus. There is yet room for improvement, but also a very laudable effort on the part of U.S. American citizens to help strangers in their midst and diversify their surroundings through volunteerism, neighborliness, and faith.
Concluding Remarks and Points for Further Research

The role that civil society, in the form of individuals and organizations, plays in the United States refugee resettlement program is pivotal to the success that is attributed to it by insiders, research institutions, and other observers. Its members are the force that, following the initial services provided by the U.S. government and its VOLAG branches and associates, contributes most significantly to the integration of refugees into U.S. society. There is no doubt that without significant engagement, interest, resources, and a sense of collective responsibility and motivation – which have led to the creation of a variety of services – refugees would be a more alienated group and would have a much more difficult time adapting to U.S. society.

It is clear from the analysis that many factors are necessary to facilitate integration. On a large scale, English language can definitely be seen as the key to ensuring a secure standing in day-to-day life and future success as an American (U.S.) citizen. Other factors that are significant at the local level, especially in the Chicago suburbia context, are: transportation in the form of cars, as many of the entrance level jobs for refugees are the meat-packing districts far from the active communities in which their apartment buildings are located; and existing networks, whether familial, ethnic, or religious, which are fostered both by the United States resettlement program (which resettles and groups families together) and by refugees themselves. Many refugees move after a period of time to other areas in the U.S. (a practice which is not prohibited) in which large pockets of their same ethnicity are located to achieve just this kind of cultural comfort.

This point leads into the importance of the self-sustainability within the refugee networks, independent of the activities and services offered by the host civil society, which is particularly notable within the various Burmese communities. They are known to share rides, babysit each other’s children, invite and assist their fellows in attending church and language/job/housing services, and generally pass along the knowledge they have accrued to newly arrived families. Without their own survival skills and desire to integrate, it would be much more difficult to achieve the levels of integrative success that they have thus far attained.

Of course, sustainability of the programs initiated by members of U.S. civil society is also critical. Some programs, such as the intentional community at

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208 Sperry, Williams, and the United States Congress report on FY2011 ceiling limits for refugees all emphasize this point in relation to other countries’ programs.
Parkside Apartments, are not necessarily sustainable, with many of the residents saying they would not live there permanently. However, they have also managed to keep new members coming, as well as keeping their activities and mission well-documented in a witty and informative blog. Most other volunteers operate through organizations – like the People’s Resource Center – and so the sustainability and commitment have thus varied, given funding, time, and energy. For successful integration and the durability of programs, finding ways to get the community involved is usually simply a matter of making them aware, which can be seen in the case of the Glen Ellyn children’s soccer teams. The program required much initial input from individuals, but has become sustainable over the years by integrating the individual players into other, local teams (eliminating the need for rides, as well as the need for one person to orchestrate the entire process). Whether through credit processes (such as the system instituted for the after-school assistants at the OWL program, who get community service hours for school), intensity of involvement (some donate money, clothing, food, or cars – which may be desirable due to a lack of time or long-term desire to assist – while others get involved at a higher intensity by teaching, tutoring, volunteering, or running church groups), or simply the desire to commit already-present skills (Karl teaching computer science classes, ESL teachers in the parish helping refugees at the refugee ministry), there are a variety of ways to make projects sustainable by either requiring little of people or playing into other motivations.

The motivations of activists in the area are diverse. Because of the wide variety of opportunities available, there is ample ability to commit to something that is enjoyable rather than arduous. Some see it as an opportunity to make the community more diverse and therefore contribute to the knowledge and worldliness of this small corner of the world, a kind of global transfer at a local level. They see getting involved as a way to act as good neighbors and make friends, and not as a one-way transfer of assistance. Other interviewees described uncovering a need and responding to it, and developing programs and services from this launching point. Generally, the highly educated, highly resourced, and religious nature of the population found in Wheaton and Glen Ellyn specifically (and DuPage County more generally) also appears to contribute to the desire and willingness to help others succeed. Finally, the immigration history of the United States has endowed some (whether conscious or not) with the desire to help others achieve their “American dream” and to contribute to ideas of what the nation is all about.
Going back to religion, the role of Christianity generally in this area cannot be undermined. At the outset, World Relief facilitates access to churches for refugees, though new arrivals also approach churches independently in order to establish connections to the community and worship. In the short and long-term, religious affiliation serves as a uniting factor that brings people that may not have had contact with each other in the first place together. While the services in themselves may not be inherently religious (The Refugee Ministry’s ESL classes or Celebrations Ministry), the majority of the interviewees were either religious, attended church regularly, or conducted the services in or through a church. Additionally, the very nature of the U.S. resettlement program hinges on the support of churches through the primarily religious resettlement agencies that place refugees around the country and have done so since the program’s beginning. The VOLAGS can appeal to churches and their members for money, venues, sponsorship, and enduring services, which has garnered much success in the integration of refugees. While there are certainly other religious forces at play – nearby mosques and temples also provide services, resettle refugees, and assist – they have been underemphasized in this thesis, as the DuPage County area is primarily Christian. Indeed, as the interviewees were all recommended by other (mainly religious) members of the network, it says a lot about the visibility and connectedness within this network, as well as its unevenness. Perhaps more coordination in the long-term, as well as multi-denominational (and secular) organizations will emerge as the need arises for solidarity, funds, and understanding.

Finally, an important motivation and factor that initially stirs interest, as well as being an important factor for recruiters of volunteers and employees, is previous cross-cultural experience. Intentional community members, churchgoers, teachers, and parents describe this as an excellent opportunity to expose their children and themselves to other cultures, languages, and perspectives, not to mention gaining new friends. Diana described how she is able to keep up her language skills by living in the apartment complex; Rodriguez describes how, after working in Costa Rica, he found the reverse culture shock strong and actively sought out new, international connections at the local level; Ms. K describes how it is good for her children, her students, and the community to have international perspectives and cultures around for mutual growth; John describes making friends and learning about cultures, “getting back” thanks and appreciation from the Burmese in the form of Christmas caroling; and so on. It is this kind of encouragement of glocality, or integrating global elements at the local level, that make the term “international community” more viable and introduce alien elements into
relatively homogenous cultures to prepare them for the intensified contact with outside cultures that will continue to expand throughout the 21st century.

The thesis has attempted to demonstrate the various holes that still exist in the program and to suggest long-term difficulties for incoming refugees. While there is much to be lauded, the last decade has shown increased constraints placed upon the program in terms of accepted numbers and security screenings, though the doubling of funds available for VOLAGS by the government in 2010 was certainly a step in the right direction. There are further issues to consider, including transportation difficulties in counties of resettlement, the longevity of government-issued services (including medical care and school lunches), and the comparative value of settling in different parts of the United States, especially to ensure that ethnic groups are together and opportunities for employment abound. This latter issue has led to considerable amounts of movement after resettlement, making it difficult for the VOLAGs and government to accurately determine case successes.

Generally, the local level itself needs to better incorporate, communicate, and cooperate across religious and ideological lines. There is no correct way to integrate refugees – as the variety of programs and modes of integration in other countries suggest – and the effort to stifle, ignore, and discredit different groups does not play into the greater goal of better and more streamlined initiatives for assisting refugees and for facilitating contact with the host community. Within these small communities, there was a rather significant amount of misinformation, gossip, and ill-will pervading the answers of interviewees, with many responding either defensively with regard to personal activities or quite caustically regarding other attempts to assist refugees. Ultimately, this is not the goal, and the program is much bigger than the individuals that make it up.

Due to the varied nature of responses and the overlap described, efforts that include collaboration and long-term, sustainable solutions – like the Parkside Coalition – are welcomed for the far-sightedness of their mission, which is to aggregate the efforts of different individuals all driven by similar aims. Hopefully, this will lead to increased interest, funds, and innovation within the community instead of overlap and competition that was described as somewhat widespread in this area. The intentional community, though dubiously sustainable, also has the right idea in initiating direct contact with refugees on a day-to-day basis, though the religious overtones are somewhat troubling generally. Finally, modes of interaction such as those facilitated by the children’s soccer teams will be one of the more effective ways of
integration, as it includes refugees in the normal day-to-day activities of the town. Ways to incorporate refugees in older age brackets to keep them involved and active, as well as developing their English skills in non-conventional ways, would be beneficial in this context.

This thesis is not meant to act as a blueprint, nor as a tell-all for the various responses and reactions to refugee resettlement in the United States. Indeed, the fact that the reactions are dissimilar is raised in the comparison of the DuPage County involvement versus engagement in the city of Chicago. The resources, interest, history, and socio-economic factors of different localities around the U.S. combined with the preexisting factors among refugee populations (English ability, for instance) must inevitably color the depth of interaction between refugees and communities. This topic therefore invites further research. Because the process is somewhat systemized, as VOLAGs have specific directions from the government, and because many of the needs are the same in terms of what service gaps may need to be filled, this case study serves as an interesting model to reveal shortcomings and opportunities in refugee resettlement across the nation.

To expand its relevance, however, research could be conducted within other communities regarding their support of Burmese refugees, or within the same community (and others) concerning other refugee groups. Though it was not dealt with in a methodological way, it is hoped that some of the key differences among refugee groups implied by the case study of the “Burmese” and the myriad differences that exist even among them helped to illuminate that there are specific challenges among each group of refugees in adapting them to U.S. society, despite the fact that the basic needs (food, shelter, transportation) are the same. This is definitely an area of research that could benefit from expansion, both in showing the universalism of the general approach and the fragmentation of community involvement.

There is no sign that the refugee-producing conflicts of the world are letting up. With many people at risk of violence and persecution by their own governments – especially those who do not have strong international protection in the form of refugee status, such as internally displaced persons – the international obligation and efforts to settle refugees (in addition to other durable solutions) must be strengthened and collaboratively approached so that the next decade can see more people given the chance to regain their livelihoods and independence – even if that means going far from home – and the world's most vulnerable populations integrated into societies that can offer them support and opportunity. This requires, in turn,
more education about refugees within communities, more avenues for people of all faiths and backgrounds to assist refugees, and more collaboration throughout communities to create harmonious, supportive, and diverse settings without alienating civil society in the United States.
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Appendix A: Case Study Caveats

The Appendix will first cover some general comments about the structure and methodology of the thesis that could be seen as weaknesses or, alternatively, as launching points for further research. It will proceed to outline some very recent developments that took place in October 2011 and that have interesting implications for the coming years in Myanmar. It will conclude with maps, tables, and other pertinent information to better understand Burma, DuPage County, the refugee movements between the two, the activists in the area, and the general populations in both locations.

The first drawback of the interview process is that only one interview was conducted with a Burmese community member. This was due not only to time and language constraints, but also to the fact that many of the Burmese contacts that were suggested were either too busy in the long-term (despite Skype and other proffered solutions), had time-consuming jobs (the Burmese community is linked and, having come with wide networks of families, are often supporting a considerable group of people, not to mention the fact that the jobs were often far away, thus having a long commute time that constrained time in which an interview could be conducted), or simply were not interested. This certainly colors the analysis in chapter four in significant ways but in others, it adds to the thesis as a whole. It is certainly very interesting to view how the host community observes (or perhaps overhears) the problems of the alien community, which may or may not be in contrast to what actually occurs. For instance, almost every person interviewed mention transport as a considerable difficulty for refugees, either meaning that this was a particularly obvious issue that people came to on their own or that it was much discussed within the community. However, not one of the host observers mentioned racism, which was one of the only issues that the Burmese pastor raised.

Interesting still is that the pastor (whose name has been protected due to his own request for anonymity) came not as a refugee, but as a student. To some extent, he also, then, experiences a degree of disconnect with refugees, having left by choice and not as a result of factors culminating in a flight for survival. However, serving as he does as a pastor (for a specific ethnic group, the Chins, which also affects the analysis in terms of other groups), and therefore acting both in leadership and confidant roles, he definitely exhibited particular insight into some of the problems that were not brought up by members of the host community at large.
Perceptions form a critical portion of this thesis. Given that much of the highlighted research was conducted through interviews with a variety of members of the community (ranging from professionals in this field to various activists who have links somehow to refugee integration), there is a variety of perspectives, stories, and truths (whether actual fact or fiction). This is intensified due to the nature of the network of refugee advocates as an incomplete, fluid, and constantly growing web. This adds flavor to the thesis, as well as demonstrating the true nature of the resettlement program itself as an uneven, though vibrant, sector.

Some of the most pertinent insights came from members of the intentional community at Parkside Apartments in Glen Ellyn. This should not be surprising: these residents, from middle or upper-middle class backgrounds, spend their days living in the same context, learning the languages, and generally being of assistance to refugees, immigrants, and low-income residents of their shared apartment complexes. It is only natural that they would have particular access to the people in need, which gives them insight into the particular difficulties refugees face day-to-day. This includes the various observations including the need for assistance in reading mail and receiving usable food (to them) from well-meaning food pantries. They also witnessed, however, the ways in which the networks refugees form themselves forge ties, leading to a considerable degree of self-sufficiency. This includes equitable distribution of food among families, carpooling, and caring for children while other parents work.

Finally, the interview process could have been somewhat contaminated by the author’s previous connections there. Having spent just over six years of childhood in Glen Ellyn, the author knew some of the interviewees prior to the interview process, which may have both given access to certain pieces of information that the interviewee might otherwise not have shared and obscured others. However, only two of the interviewees were intimately known to the author, while the others were all new. Much of the anecdotal evidence, however, came from people who the author knew and who took an interest in the topic, though oftentimes to a lesser degree than full-blown activism. The author would like to acknowledge that this may nevertheless have polluted the process, though she likes to think that it only added to the depth of confidence given her, and hopes the fact that research was done by “one of Glen Ellyn’s own” will motivate people to read about and take action regarding this issue.
Regarding Myanmar, it is interesting to note recent changes that have been taking place in the country over the course of September and October 2011. Talks have been taking place between Aung Sun Suu Kyi and the president Thein Sein after the government halted the construction of a huge dam on Karen land, purportedly to fulfill the will of the people. Further, the government released 6,359 prisoners (an unclear amount were political prisoners, and there have been recent calls for more amnesty). This has huge implications for much of the thesis, including the creation of refugees and sanctions against the country. If the regime is showing a shift and taking into account the will of the people, Myanmar’s politics may indeed change in the coming decades. However, the regime has indicated false starts before, and there will be various tests of proof needed to prove that the government intends widespread and durable peace for all groups in the country. In chapter one, the possibility of Myanmar taking the helm of ASEAN was discussed. It is perhaps interesting to conclude by noting that the government in Rangoon may possibly be taking this into account in acting in demonstrating changes in its longstanding and violent policies. Only time will tell whether the government in Rangoon will change its ways and give back the livelihoods, voices, and rights to its citizens that it has withheld so long.
## Appendix B: Interview Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Participant</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Katie Galli</td>
<td>GECRC Program Director</td>
<td>20 December 2010/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Investment Manager</td>
<td>21 December 2010/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. K</td>
<td>ELL Teacher, Edison High</td>
<td>28 December 2010/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah Fulks</td>
<td>Coordinator of Interfaith ESL Tutoring</td>
<td>3 January 2011/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karl and Marilyn</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>31 December 2010/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>French and Spanish Teacher</td>
<td>31 December 2010/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob Rodriguez</td>
<td>Graduate Student, Biblical Exegesis</td>
<td>4 January 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. JK</td>
<td>Church Network Facilitator for Mosaic</td>
<td>29 December 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. D.</td>
<td>OWL Coordinator</td>
<td>4 January 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastor (Burmese)</td>
<td>Pastor</td>
<td>5 January 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Sperry</td>
<td>Refugee Services Director at WR</td>
<td>4 January 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica Davis</td>
<td>Program Director, Exodus</td>
<td>28 December 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Associate Director of Refugee Family Services- Refugee and Immigrant Community Services</td>
<td>4 January 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam Knight</td>
<td>Coordinator of Adult and Family Literacy, PRC</td>
<td>5 January 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. S.</td>
<td>Circulation at Glen Ellyn Public Library</td>
<td>6 January 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Map of Myanmar/Burma

Source: http://www.burmavision.com/images/Burma-map600.jpg
Appendix D: DuPage County’s Location in Illinois
Appendix E: Map of DuPage County

DuPage County, Illinois

Source: http://www.DuPageco.org/findus/
Appendix F: General Information about DuPage County Residents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category (in 2010)</th>
<th>DuPage County</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>916,924*</td>
<td>308,745,538*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>$77,426</td>
<td>$52,954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>57.28%</td>
<td>48.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity (all denominations)</td>
<td>55.08%</td>
<td>45.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (High School)</td>
<td>92.03%</td>
<td>84.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (2-4 yr college graduates)</td>
<td>34.24%</td>
<td>24.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (Grad degrees)</td>
<td>17.37%</td>
<td>10.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (White)</td>
<td>77.9%*</td>
<td>72.4%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (Asian)</td>
<td>10.01%*</td>
<td>4.8%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation (Alone or Carpool)</td>
<td>85.68%</td>
<td>86.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation (Mass Transit)</td>
<td>6.54%</td>
<td>4.84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: [http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/17000.html](http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/17000.html)
Burmese Residents in DuPage County

In total, World Relief DuPage has resettled 737 Burmese refugees since 2006, 249 of which live in Glen Ellyn. The area experienced an increase in Burmese refugees after 2007-2008. 2011 experienced heightened security measures, which lead to a nationwide decline in total resettled refugees that primarily affected (some) African and Middle Eastern refugees. Most of the Burmese resettled are Priority 2, or group referrals. They are resettled in individually owned apartments, small- to medium-sized management companies, and larger complexes like Parkside and Wheaton Square Apartments.

World Relief expects to resettle 373 refugees in DuPage County in the coming year, one quarter or fewer of which will be resettled in Glen Ellyn. The forecast of 373 individuals is close to the projection of 375 that World Relief DuPage has maintained over the past few years as resettlement numbers creep toward pre-9/11 numbers. For the five years immediately after 9/11, the numbers dropped significantly, as they did nationwide.

(Information provided by Susan Sperry via e-mail on 2 November 2011)
HANNAH DUNHAM

WORK EXPERIENCE

Freelance Editor 2008-Present
- One PhD thesis on rights for third-country nationals in Austria
- Documents ranging from 1-20 pages for over 15 different clients

Theory Talks Assistant Editor Apr. 2011-Present
- Interviewing top International Relations Theorists (Saskia Sassen interview)
- Transcription editor

International Organization for Migration Project Assistant Feb-June 2011
- Composed two articles for publication; edited documents; worked primarily on refugee resettlement and youth projects; represented IOM at conferences; translated a document from English to French; edited website
- Attended a day-long International Migration Law Workshop, (30/5/2011)

Listros e.V. Intern Feb-June 2010
- Drafting/Composing E-mails, contracts, and advertisements; editing English texts

TASIS England Student Center Cashier Jan ’03-June ’06

EDUCATION

Erasmus Mundus Double Masters of Arts in Global Studies 2009-2011
- University of Leipzig ’09-’10, University of Vienna ’10-’11

Certification in Mandarin Chinese, Level 4 Nov. 2008

Bachelor of Arts in Global Studies 2006-2009
- University of California, Santa Barbara: Global Studies/African Studies

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Taipei City Libraries, Da-An Branch: Volunteer July-Nov 2008
- Sorting books; creating children’s recommended reading list; editing

Habitat for Humanity Trip: Romania Feb. ’05, ’06

Habitat for Humanity Trip: Czech Republic Feb ’04

AWARDS

Awarded DAAD Scholarship Nov 2010

Inducted into Phi Beta Kappa June 2009

Awarded TECO Huayu Enrichment Scholarship July 2008


Inducted in Cum Laude Society June 2006

Awarded Headmaster’s Award: Academic Excellence, Community Contribution June 2006

Awarded for Excellence in the Humanities June 2006

Awarded for Leadership and Spirit as Girl’s Varsity Soccer Captain June 2006

LANGUAGES

Fluent in English, advanced French, intermediate German and Mandarin Chinese.

SIGNIFICANT CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION

Institute for Cultural Diplomacy by invitation Berlin 01/2010

EU-China Year of Youth Opening Ceremony by invitation Brussels 01/2011

World Diversity Leadership Summit assistant Vienna 04/2011

EU-China Year of Youth Multilingualism Conference by invitation Brussels 05/2011