

“The Pain of Exile”: What Social Workers Need to Know about Burmese Refugees

D. Christopher Fike, and David K. Androff

Refugees from Burma have comprised the largest group of refugees resettling in the United States over the past decade, with nearly 90,000 people, and 19 percent of the total refugee population. However, very little literature exists that describes the cultural context and displacement experiences of this population. This article addresses that gap in the literature by examining historical, social, political, and cultural dimensions relevant to social work practice with Burmese refugees. Practice with Burmese refugees should be informed by knowledge of refugee policy, refugee resettlement, and social services delivery systems; the Burmese historical and political context; the community’s specific strengths, needs, and cultural diversity; and human rights and social justice issues. Strong community partnerships between social workers and indigenous community leaders, between resettlement agencies and ethnic community-based organizations, and between different Burmese refugee groups are important to meeting short- and long-term social services needs and fostering successful adaptation and community integration.

KEY WORDS: *Burma; Burmese; displaced people; refugees; resettlement*

“But who that has not suffered it understands the pain of exile?”

—Orwell, 1934, p. 163

Forced migration within and from Burma is an international social justice crisis resulting from ongoing human rights violations (Agbényiga, Barrie, Djelaj, & Nawyn, 2012; Brough, Schweitzer, Shakespeare-Finch, Vronmans, & King, 2013; Harkins, 2012). Over 1 million people have been displaced within and from Burma, with nearly 400,000 internally displaced people within the country and more than 800,000 stateless people, or those not considered as a national by any state (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2015b); nearly half a million displaced people have fled the country and been granted refugee status by the United Nations (UNHCR, n.d.). Arrivals into the United States began in 2000 and consisted of former students and political activists. The scope of resettlement broadened in 2005. In the last decade, refugees from Burma, primarily ethnic and religious minorities, comprised the largest group of refugees resettling in the United States, nearly 90,000 people and 19 percent of the total refugee population (UNHCR, n.d.; Vang & Trieu, 2014).

Although there is robust social work literature on refugee resettlement and practice with refugees, at-

attention to the Burmese cultural context and Burmese refugees’ experience of displacement is sparse. International attention has focused on the democracy movement in Burma led by Nobel Peace Laureate and National League for Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi (Pedersen, 2008). Although media coverage highlights political repression and suffering, there is little attention to historical and cultural dimensions of the conflict, and the experiences and challenges of those displaced are missing in the literature (Malseed, 2009). The current crisis is rooted in the struggle for autonomy among the ethnically diverse Burmese population, an ethnic and political conflict dating from British colonization, when Burma was conquered and ruled as part of the British Empire in Asia (Charney, 2009; Holliday, 2010; Pedersen, 2008; Vang & Trieu, 2014). Burmese refugees have been in conflict with the military junta; forced from their homes, displaced to temporary camps, or housed in foreign lands, they face a complex process of adjustment to the United States that brings new difficulties (Harkins, 2012; Nash, Wong, & Trlin, 2006).

This article addresses the gap in the literature on Burmese refugees by examining historical, social, political, and cultural dimensions relevant to social work practice with Burmese refugees. This article raises awareness of the factors affecting refugees from Burma and the challenges endured in the resettlement

process; it also identifies implications for social work practice with Burmese refugees. Increased understanding of this population in the United States is necessary for culturally competent practice with Burmese refugees.

Consistent with U.S. and other Western governments (Vang & Trieu, 2014), this article uses the name Burma rather than Myanmar. Though the country's official name changed to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar in 1989, Aung San Suu Kyi and pro-democracy supporters reject the name change imposed by the military junta (Nelson, 2012). The United States does not recognize the name change as it was not the result of a democratic process. Referring to their country as Burma is an act of resistance for many refugees.

THE BURMESE CONTEXT

Social workers must be aware of Burmese historical, political, and cultural context to provide culturally grounded support and services to this population of refugees. Media reports about Burma highlight repression by the ruling military junta, neglecting the intricacies of ethnic conflict and nuances of the refugee journeys of those displaced by the conflict (Malseed, 2009). The over half-century fight for autonomy and ethnic rights is the foundation of the broader social justice crisis (Pedersen, 2008).

History of the Refugee Crisis

Burmese refugees are the product of ethnic and political conflict; social workers should appreciate how the consequences of this history can manifest in difficulty during resettlement (Charney, 2009; Holliday, 2010; Pedersen, 2008; Vang & Trieu, 2014). Prior to colonization, Burma was a multiethnic society with a precedent of interethnic exchange (Brough et al., 2013). After three wars, the British colonized Burma in 1885 as a province of India (Charney, 2009). The British colonial project of imperial control created and exacerbated ethnic divisions (Holliday, 2010). Overlooking distinct indigenous identities, the British assimilated the ethnically and religiously diverse peoples from remote mountainous regions into a single geographic unit, intensifying ethnic tensions with the majority Burman population (Charney, 2009; Holliday, 2010). After a brutal Japanese occupation during World War II, the Burmese achieved independence from the British in 1948 (Charney, 2009). Nationalist leader Aung San promoted cooperation among Burma's many ethnic groups through

the 1930s and 1940s, culminating in pro-independence student protests and political insurgency (Charney, 2009; Palmer-Mehta, 2009). After securing a unification agreement among all ethnic groups, Aung San's political organization won popular support around the country. While developing a federalist system of power sharing between political units comprised of ethnic groups, Aung San and his cabinet were assassinated in 1947 in a conflict between competing political factions of communists and conservatives (Charney, 2009). The leadership void following the assassination, and the power vacuum created by independence, plunged Burma into an enduring civil war; violent conflict between ethnic groups and the military have plagued the country since (Charney, 2009).

Political conflict between ethnic groups intensified after a coup in 1962 installed a military junta that has ruled as a dictatorship (Charney, 2009; Holliday, 2010; Malseed, 2009). In 1988, after decades of economic failures and political repression, the military junta violently suppressed a popular protest against the dictatorship for democratic reform, killing an estimated 10,000 people. Subsequent democratic elections were permitted, but the winning National League for Democracy was not allowed to take power and the military junta continued to rule as a dictatorship. Although the government is intent on centralizing political control and forging a homogeneous uniform Burman-Buddhist culture of the ethnic majority, ethnic nationalists continue to fight for self-determination, equality, and the right to cultural and linguistic preservation (Charney, 2009; Holliday, 2010; Pedersen, 2008). Burma's ethnic minorities have suffered disproportionately from human rights violations, discrimination, and neglect (Pedersen, 2008). This ongoing unresolved conflict has resulted in the current refugee crisis, and the cumulative effect of its traumas affects refugee resettlement (Holliday, 2010; Pedersen, 2008; Vang & Trieu, 2014).

Profile of Contemporary Burma

The population of Burma is young, with 44.7 percent under the age of 25 years, and predominantly rural agrarian, with less than 35 percent in urban areas (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2012). The 2011 gross national product per capita was \$1,144, life expectancy is 66 years, and the infant mortality rate is 45 per 1,000 live births (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2013). Burma is multiethnic, multilingual, and multicultural,

with more than 130 distinctive ethnic group identities (Malseed, 2009; Vang & Trieu, 2014). The majority ethnic group is Burman or Bamar, which represents 68 percent of the country's 55 million people; Shan (9 percent), Karen (7 percent), Arakanese (Rakhine) (4 percent), and Mon (2 percent) are the largest ethnic minority groups (CIA, 2013). Estimates of ethnic populations are contested; critics contend that the government underestimates non-Burmans, thus minimizing their political participation (Burma Link, 2013). Burman, Mon, Arakanese (Rakhine), and Shan are primarily Theravada Buddhist (89 percent), whereas Chin, Kachin, Karen, and Karenni are primarily Christian (Baptist 3 percent, Roman Catholic 1 percent); the Rohingya ethnic minority are Muslim (4 percent), and ancestor worship is commonly practiced across religious groups. This diversity is reflected among the U.S. Burmese refugees; however, government reports do not specify estimates by ethnicity or religion. Only refugees' country of origin is reported, obscuring divisions within the Burmese refugee community and limiting the cultural competency of social work practice.

Though each ethnic group has its own distinct culture, some general patterns have been identified. Burmese women have been historically afforded rights such as inheritance, divorce without stigma, and property, although sexism prevails (Palmer-Mehta, 2009). Traditional Burmese culture is family and religion oriented; paramount values include respect for parents and elders (Barron et al., 2007). There is strong social stratification along class lines. Interpersonal behaviors are important, and many cultural cues are subtle (Barron et al., 2007). It is considered impolite to touch someone on the head; to point with a finger, hand, or foot; to sit at a higher seat than an elder; or to wear shoes inside a home. Herbal remedies are common traditional health practices; help seeking for mental health issues is not widespread. Often people with mental health symptoms endure in silence, turning to community or religious leaders for support (Barron et al., 2007).

Human Rights and Democracy inside Burma

Military rule has led to chronic human rights violations inside Burma. Widespread well-documented violations include extrajudicial executions, disappearances, torture, sexual slavery, child soldiers, forced labor, and destruction of crops and places of worship (Brough et al., 2013). The Burmese military,

known as the Tatmadaw, routinely use physical and sexual violence to control rural ethnic villages (Malseed, 2009). The Tatmadaw also maintain control of the population through economic and spiritual abuses, forced food insecurity through the burning of fields, loss of freedom, and chronic fear (Malseed, 2009). Women and children are particularly vulnerable to the Tatmadaw, who use rape and sexual assault to force women into sexual slavery, and who conscript and arm children to fight against ethnic minorities. These gross human rights violations constitute "crimes against humanity" (Amnesty International, 2008).

Despite frequent and brutal violent crackdowns, the democracy movement in Burma has grown stronger in political resistance to the military junta. Mass protests led by Buddhist monks in the 2007 Saffron Revolution refocused international attention to Burma's long struggle for democracy (Pedersen, 2008). Democratic reform is promoted by Nobel Peace Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and her political party, the National League for Democracy, as well as by ethnic minority leaders (Holliday, 2010). Responding to increased pressure, the military regime recently began a process of reform; however, expectations are muted (Malseed, 2009). A genuine democratic transition must attend to Burma's multiethnic context. The government excludes the Muslim Rohingya people from the list of approved ethnic groups within the country based on the Burma Citizenship Law of 1982, rendering them stateless and vulnerable (House of Representatives Resolution 418, 2014; UNHCR, 2015c). Burma's ethnic nationalists continue to form their own organizations and pursue their own strategies for change amid the struggle between the military and the democracy movement that receives most media attention (Pedersen, 2008). Many Burmese refugees in the United States are exiled students, democracy activists, participants in the Saffron Revolution, and ethnic minorities who survived and fled persecution.

REFUGEES FROM BURMA

Displaced people and refugees are driven from their homelands due to factors beyond their control, such as war; political conflict; and social, religious, and ethnic oppression (Cox & Pawar, 2006). Refugees are unlike immigrants, who typically choose to relocate; they leave their homes with uncertain futures and little choice over where they will go. Unable to return home due to the risk of continued persecu-

tion, refugees live in perilous situations, often with needs that cannot be addressed in their country of asylum (Agbényiga et al., 2012).

Refugees flee Burma to escape human rights violations perpetrated by the ruling military junta, interethnic conflict, and religious persecution. Nearly 480,000 refugees have been displaced from Burma and granted refugee status (UNHCR, n.d.) due to systematic and ongoing human rights abuses (Agbényiga et al., 2012; Brough et al., 2013; Harkins, 2012); more than 245,000 Rohingya have been displaced from Burma due to severe legal, economic, and social discrimination (UNHCR, 2015c; H. Res. 418, 2014). Many have left in waves over the last several decades after a succession of violent crackdowns, often fleeing to refugee camps in Thailand and Malaysia. Burmese refugees often carry the consequences of traumas such as killings of family members; torture; forced labor, including sexual slavery and child soldiers; and destruction of homes, crops, places of worship, and their entire villages (Agbényiga et al., 2012; Brough et al., 2013; Harkins, 2012).

International Refugee Policy

International refugee policy is guided by the UNHCR. The 1951 United Nations Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees defined a *refugee* as any person with “a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (UNHCR, 2014a). The goal of international refugee policy is to identify one of three durable solutions that allow refugees to rebuild their lives in dignity and peace: (1) voluntary repatriation to their home country, (2) local integration in their country of asylum, and (3) resettlement to a third country (UNHCR, 2014b). Returning to their country of origin is the first choice for most refugees and remains their strongest hope of finding an end to exile (UNHCR, 2014b). Voluntary repatriation requires the cooperation of the home government; without significant political transformation in Burma, repatriation of Burmese refugees risks ongoing persecution and human rights violations and is not yet a viable option.

When voluntary repatriation is not possible, finding a home in the country of asylum and integrating into that local community is a possible durable solution (UNHCR, 2014b). Through local integration, refugees are granted increasingly broader ranges of rights, including the possibility of attaining permanent residence rights and citizenship rights. Refugees are con-

sidered locally integrated when they can live in local communities without fear of discrimination, no longer require international protection, and become naturalized citizens of the asylum country (Crisp, 2004). Local integration tends to be unpopular with asylum countries due to perceived negative security and economic consequences (Kenny & Lockwood-Kenny, 2011). Thailand, Bangladesh, and Malaysia, the primary countries of asylum for Burma refugees, have rejected local integration as a durable solution (Harkins, 2012; Vang & Trieu, 2014).

Life in the Refugee Camps

When Burmese refugees fled to Thailand or Malaysia, they became unauthorized immigrants living on the fringes of local communities or incorporated into temporary transitional camps operated by the UNHCR. Confined to refugee camps in Thailand, Malaysia, India, and Bangladesh, Burmese face poor living conditions and a lack of basic human rights (Agbényiga et al., 2012). Camp conditions are negatively affected by local contexts of poverty and lack of local capacity (Brough et al., 2013). Protracted stays in refugee camps, sometimes over 20 years, have become common among the Burmese; an entire generation was born and raised in limbo (Harkins, 2012). Overcrowding is endemic; one Thai camp has over 40,000 Burmese refugees. Employment is limited; those who find work report low wages and labor violations, and some are victims of forced labor. Malnutrition is a chronic problem in the camps; although food baskets that meet minimal nutritional standards are provided, fresh vegetables and fruit are absent (Kenny & Lockwood-Kenny, 2011). Health care is limited by insufficient capacity and resources (Kenny & Lockwood-Kenny, 2011). Domestic violence; rape, including of minors; crime; and drug and alcohol abuse occur at high rates. Despite overall reports of safety, women, especially single women, are vulnerable to sexual assault and exploitative relationships (Brough et al., 2013). Prolonged family separation is common when refugees are forced to move from one camp to another (Brough et al., 2013). Subsequent reports of depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder are high among Burmese refugees (Cardozo, Talley, Burton, & Crawford, 2004). Ongoing discrimination and low quality of life contribute to a stifling sense of frustration and powerlessness and significant lack of opportunities and freedoms for Burmese refugees (Kenny & Lockwood-Kenny, 2011).

Refugee Resettlement

When voluntary repatriation or local integration is not feasible, resettlement to a third country becomes a priority (Kenny & Lockwood-Kenny, 2011). Burmese refugees became eligible for third-country resettlement in 2005, when the UNHCR initiated a third-country resettlement program for them (UNHCR, n.d.). The Burmese third-country resettlement from the border camps is one of the world's largest and most successful refugee resettlement programs, resettling 88,348 refugees in the United States (75 percent) and 19,000 more in other resettlement countries such as Australia (11 percent), Canada (7 percent), Finland (2 percent), Norway (2 percent), and Japan (Harkins, 2012; Kenny & Lockwood-Kenny, 2011). Since 2010, a total of 18 families have arrived in Japan as resettled refugees (UNHCR, 2015a). The United States is concluding its resettlement of Burmese refugees, the last from the Thai camps are currently being processed; however, Burmese will continue to be resettled from the Malaysian camps (personal communication with B. Day, U.S. State Department, Domestic Resettlement Section chief, Phoenix, March 6, 2014).

U.S. Refugee Resettlement Policy

The United States has long provided a safe haven for refugees and is the world's top resettlement country (Agbényiga et al., 2012; UNHCR, 2014b; Vang & Trieu, 2014), resettling more than 3 million refugees in the last 35 years (U.S. Department of State [DOS], 2013). Nearly 90,000 refugees from Burma have resettled to the United States since 2004 (UNHCR, n.d.; Vang & Trieu, 2014). U.S. refugee resettlement policy is shaped by a variety of foreign policy, humanitarian, economic, and legislative factors, including the 1948 Displaced Persons Act (P.L. 80-774), the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act (P.L. 89-236), and the 1980 Refugee Act (P.L. 96-212). The Refugee Act of 1980 adjusted the status of refugees who have been present in the country for at least one year to legal permanent resident (Balgopal, 2000). It also separated refugee admissions from immigration, with refugees offered limited medical and social services.

Burmese refugees receive permission to immigrate to the United States while abroad; they are initially interviewed by the UNHCR and then referred to DOS and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for follow-up interviews. DHS makes the final decision about whether a refugee will be resettled to the United States in an interview

that assesses the refugee's credible fear of persecution if she or he returns to Burma; refugees with criminal records are not accepted for resettlement (Integrated Regional Informational Network, 2008). After approval, refugees receive medical screening, cultural orientation, travel plan assistance, and a loan for travel to the United States from the International Office of Migration. This process takes eight months to a year on average, and can last years (Kenny & Lockwood-Kenny, 2011).

U.S. refugee policy emphasizes quick integration into U.S. society (Kenny & Lockwood-Kenny, 2011). Resettlement agencies work principally to promote refugees' economic self-sufficiency through employment. The policy imperative of economic self-sufficiency does not permit time for recovery from traumas endured, adjustment and orientation to their new community, acquisition of language or job skills, or searching for a job that uses their existing experiences and qualifications. After surviving their journey, refugees tend to have idealized expectations of resettlement, which contributes to distress and depression when they experience the challenges of adaptation (Kenny & Lockwood-Kenny, 2011). Many refugees find the resettlement process extraordinarily stressful, reporting significant negative mental and physical health outcomes (Agbényiga et al., 2012; Nash et al., 2006).

Burmese Refugees Resettled in the United States

Burmese refugees in the United States are young, with 64 percent under the age of 40 years (Vang & Trieu, 2014). Burmese refugees are educationally bimodal, 39 percent have less than high school education, and 31 percent possess a college degree or higher. Limited English proficiency is a key socioeconomic barrier, and 30 percent live below the poverty line (Vang & Trieu, 2014). Intergenerational conflict has also emerged as a concern among the refugee population from Burma (Vang & Trieu, 2014). Refugees from Burma are more likely than other new arrivals to need additional assistance with finding English classes or employment services (Agbényiga et al., 2012). Common service gaps include language acquisition, employment, accessing community resources, and housing (Agbényiga et al., 2012). Informal support is a key strategy among Burmese refugee communities; they provide support to family and friends and receive support through religious institutions. Although provided with free medical care through Medicaid,

refugees are frequently prevented from receiving care because of communication and transportation barriers (Kenny & Lockwood-Kenny, 2011).

Each Burmese refugee ethnic group may experience different processes of adaptation given their distinct cultures, so specific obstacles and challenges are likely to vary by group. However, general issues with resettlement have been reported in the literature. Burmese refugees frequently experience sadness and loneliness associated with their newfound safety and freedom, and separation from family and community is a significant stressor (Brough et al., 2013). This sense of isolation stems in part from a sense of alienation from mainstream cultures; their sharp cultural differences result in feelings of isolation. Culturally, Burmese refugees may seem shy to Americans; they may not be accustomed to speaking out, asking questions, or being able to advocate on their own behalf in a safe environment (Barron et al., 2007). They often are not comfortable disclosing private information and may display their discomfort or tension through laughter. However, they enjoy strong in-group community bonds, with strong respect for their community leaders. They enjoy cultural and religious festivals, and they love sports and games. Their community strengths are limited by deep divisions among the broad Burmese refugee population, mirroring the ethnic identities and conflicts in Burma. Burmese refugees in the United States identify and associate with members of their specific ethnic group; mistrust and misunderstandings keep groups splintered and in opposition.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE WITH BURMESE REFUGEES

Social work practice with Burmese refugees should be informed by knowledge of refugee policy, refugee resettlement, and social services delivery systems; the Burmese historical and political context; the community's specific strengths, needs, and cultural diversity; and human rights and social justice issues (Potocky-Tripodi, 2002). Social work practice with Burmese refugees should be comprehensive and span social services, community development, and social change interventions (Nash et al., 2006). Social work practice should focus on factors associated with positive adaptation, such as resilience and strengths, informal social supports, indigenous leadership, and empowering community-based organizations (Borwick, Schweitzer, Brough, Vromans, & Shakespeare-Finch, 2013). Social workers should

refrain from essentializing Burmese culture and conduct their own exploration and investigations into specific Burmese refugee ethnic group cultures, including identifying and contacting local resettlement agencies and ethnic community-based organizations (ECBOs), which may inform their practice. At the micro level, social workers should problem solve with individual refugees and their families and provide case management, language acquisition, job training and placement, and health and mental health services. At the macro level, social workers should engage in capacity building, community education, and community organizing. All levels of social work practice with refugees require cultural competence.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

The Burmese are a vulnerable population among refugees in the United States. The legacy of the Burmese conflict includes ongoing intergroup ethnic conflict among refugees in the United States, mistrust of each other, distrust of government in general, and low levels of participation in civic affairs. Adaptive responses to the conflict and refugee experiences, combined with traditional regional Southeast Asian cultural values, can make culturally competent practice with Burmese refugees challenging for social workers with little experience or knowledge of this population (Barron et al., 2007). Exhibiting patience and understanding cannot be overstated as important keystones for culturally sensitive practice; practitioners should focus on relationship building to gain trust and elicit motivation for individual, family, community, and social change interventions. Patience can be demonstrated by social workers by allowing for extra time and making additional reminders and follow-ups. Relationship building should center on face-to-face communication as the primary form of contact. Working closely with community leaders to build relationships and develop trust is vital to gaining access to community members.

In preparing for practice with Burmese refugees, social workers should learn about Burmese history and culture (Charney, 2009). Practitioners should take caution not to stereotype Burmese refugee cultural behaviors that may be interpreted as shyness or unwillingness to speak up (Burma Link, 2013). Rather, such cultural attitudes and behaviors should be met with patience, understanding, and an increased focus on building trust. Frequent reaffirmations of practitioners' commitment to working with the community help to demonstrate interest and

loyalty (Agbényiga et al., 2012). Care should be given to make genuine expressions of care and respect, avoiding inauthenticity. Social workers should avoid the perception of empty talk by being prepared to focus on practical actions and to offer available resources. Social workers should demonstrate sensitivity to Burmese refugees' protective sense of privacy, which may prevent them from talking to "outsiders," and be prepared to waive disclosure requirements to build trust and gain access (Barron et al., 2007). Extreme language barriers necessitate prioritization of English classes.

Indigenous Support

Social workers should incorporate informal social support into practice interventions with Burmese refugees. Interactions with family members, peers, friends, and professionals are critical during transitional periods; such informal community relationships are important to Burmese refugee well-being (Agbényiga et al., 2012). Refugees with social support are better able to share their experiences and problems and are more effective at building community supports to assist newly arrived refugees (Agbényiga et al., 2012). Practitioners should empower refugees to work with new arrivals whose experiences they share (Nash et al., 2006). Refugees are often more comfortable seeking aid from a member of their community than from resettlement agencies and formal support structures (Agbényiga et al., 2012). Resettlement agencies often incorporate faith-based organizations and volunteers to supplement services (Kenny & Lockwood-Kenny, 2011). Sporting events can be effective strategies to promote Burmese community engagement, in addition to group bonding, health, and stress reduction. Refugees who do use formal support structures are typically better able to cope with the stress of resettlement if they can identify individuals and agency staff who empathize and share their experiences (Agbényiga et al., 2012).

Social workers should apply the strengths perspective to assess, recognize, and promote refugees' skills acquired prior to resettlement. Many Burmese refugees were responsible for day-to-day management of refugee camps, some of which had well-established community-based organizations such as the Karen Women's Organization, which worked in camps along the Thailand-Burma border. Social workers should also look for opportunities to engage in solidarity with Burmese refugees from the democracy

movement, who should be considered as social work allies in advocating for human rights and social justice. Social workers can engage in what Burmese democracy activists call constructive noncooperation, a strategy of escalating freedom and democratic space against state control (Sharp, 2002). They can achieve this through the creation of cultures of resistance in partnership with artists and other progressives, within communities, within resettlement and social work agencies including in solidarity with clients, within the profession, and at national and international levels (Atkinson & Mattaini, 2013).

Community Development

Drawing on experiences of successful adaptation to refugee camps, practitioners can mobilize confidence and human capital. Social workers have the capacity to identify individuals from Burmese refugee communities who can be collaborated with in indigenous leadership development (Agbényiga et al., 2012). Working with these leaders, social workers could help bridge gaps in service provision (Agbényiga et al., 2012). Indigenous refugee leaders can lend community credibility to resettlement agencies and social work organizations by offsetting the tendency of social services to be top-down or ethnocentric (Valtonen, 2001, 2002). Empowering indigenous leaders from the Burmese refugee community to increase access to services and strengthen advocacy efforts is consistent with social work's ethical value of self-determination and a *promotora* approach.

ECBOs (formerly known as mutual aid associations or MAAs) are grassroots self-help refugee organizations comprised of former refugees and members of refugee ethnic communities who support adaptation to the United States and maintenance of ethnic cultures (Vang & Trieu, 2014). Burmese ECBOs conduct outreach and education for refugees' in their own languages. Social workers can partner with Burmese ECBOs to mediate resettlement challenges at the grassroots level. Social workers can assist ECBOs to access resources that they can use to deliver programs and services such as educating the larger community about Burmese history and culture. Schools of social work can engage Burmese ECBOs through collaborative community-university partnerships with faculty, students, and volunteers to increase their organizational capacity and impact in the Burmese refugee community. Strong community partnerships between social workers and indigenous community

leaders, between resettlement agencies and ECBOs, and between different Burmese refugee groups are important to meeting short- and long-term social services needs, and fostering successful adaptation and community integration (Harkins, 2012). **SW**

REFERENCES

- Agbényiga, D. L., Barrie, S., Djelaj, V., & Nawyn, S. J. (2012). Expanding our community: Independent and interdependent factors impacting refugee successful community resettlement. *Advances in Social Work, 13*, 306–324.
- Amnesty International. (2008). *Crimes against humanity in eastern Myanmar*. London: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA16/011/2008/en/d80827f1-3248-11dd-adb0-a55f274f1a5a/asa160112008eng.pdf>
- Atkinson, K. N., & Mattaini, M. A. (2013). Constructive noncooperation as political resistance. *Journal of Progressive Human Services, 24*(2), 99–116.
- Balgopal, P. (Ed.). (2000). *Social work practice with immigrants and refugees*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Barron, S., Okell, J., Yin, S. M., VanBik, K., Swain, A., Larkin, E., et al. (2007). *Refugees from Burma: Their backgrounds and refugee experiences*. Washington, DC: Cultural Orientation Resource Center, Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Borwick, S., Schweitzer, R. D., Brough, M., Vromans, L., & Shakespeare-Finch, J. (2013). Well-being of refugees from Burma: A salutogenic perspective. *International Migration, 51*(5), 91–105.
- Brough, M., Schweitzer, R., Shakespeare-Finch, J., Vronmans, L., & King, J. (2013). Unpacking the micro–macro nexus: Narratives of suffering and hope among refugees from Burma recently settled in Australia. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 26*(2), 207–225.
- Burma Link. (2013). *Overview of ethnic groups*. Retrieved from <http://www.burmalink.org/background/burma/ethnic-groups/overview/>
- Cardozo, B. L., Talley, L., Burton, A., & Crawford, C. (2004). Karenni refugees living in Thai–Burmese border camps: Traumatic experiences, mental health outcomes, and social functioning. *Social Science & Medicine, 58*, 2637–2644.
- Central Intelligence Agency. (2013). *The world factbook*. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2010.html>
- Charney, M. W. (2009). *A history of modern Burma*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Cox, D., & Pawar, M. (2006). *International social work: Issues, strategies, and programs*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Crisp, J. (2004). *The local integration and local settlement of refugees: A conceptual and historical analysis*. Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit.
- Displaced Persons Act of 1948, P.L. 80-774, 62 Stat. 1009 (June 25, 1948).
- Harkins, B. (2012). Beyond “temporary shelter”: A case study of Karen refugee resettlement in St. Paul, Minnesota. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies, 10*(2), 184–203.
- Holliday, I. (2010). Ethnicity and democratization in Myanmar. *Asian Journal of Political Science, 18*(2), 111–128.
- H.R. Res. 418, 113th Cong., 160 Cong. Rec. H3929 (2014) (enacted).
- Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, P.L. 89-236, 79 Stat. 911 (October 3, 1965).
- Integrated Regional Informational Network. (2008). *Thailand: The mechanics of resettling Burmese refugees*. Retrieved from <http://www.irinnews.org/indepthmain.aspx?indepthid=82&reportid=76761>
- Kenny, P., & Lockwood-Kenny, K. (2011). A mixed blessing: Karen resettlement to the United States. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 24*(2), 217–238.
- Malseed, K. (2009). Networks of noncompliance: Grassroots resistance and sovereignty in militarised Burma. *Journal of Peasant Studies, 36*, 365–391.
- Nash, M., Wong, J., & Trlin, A. (2006). Civic and social integration: A new field of social work practice with immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. *International Social Work, 49*, 345–363.
- Nelson, D. (2012). *All in a word: Burma's rulers tell Suu Kyi not to call it Burma*. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/burmanyanmar/9364926/All-in-a-word-Burmas-rulers-tell-Suu-Kyi-not-to-call-it-Burma.html>
- Orwell, G. (1934). *Burmese days*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Palmer-Mehta, V. (2009). Aung San Suu Kyi and the rhetoric of social protest in Burma. *Women's Studies in Communication, 32*, 151–179.
- Pedersen, M. B. (2008). Burma's ethnic minorities: Charting their own path to peace. *Critical Asian Studies, 40*(1), 45–66.
- Potocky-Tripodi, M. (2002). *Best practices for social work with refugees and immigrants*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Refugee Act of 1980, P.L. 96-212, 94 Stat. 102 (March 17, 1980).
- Sharp, G. (2002). *From dictatorship to democracy: A conceptual framework for liberation*. London: Serpent's Tail.
- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). (2012). *Statistical yearbook for Asia and the Pacific: Myanmar*. Retrieved from <http://www.unescap.org/stat/data/syb2012/country-profiles/Myanmar.pdf>
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2014a). *Convention and protocol relating to the status of refugees*. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2014b). *Finding durable solutions*. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/528a0a13b.html>
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2015a). *A socio-economic review of Japan's resettlement pilot project*. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendocPDFViewer.html?docid=558a5a4a9&query=burmese20in20japan>
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2015b). *What is statelessness?* Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c158.html>
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2015c). *Who is stateless and where?* Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c15e.html>
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (n.d.). *2015 UNHCR country operations profile: Myanmar*. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49c4877d6&submit=GO>
- U.S. Department of State. (2013). *Refugee resettlement in the United States*. Retrieved from <http://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/factsheets/2013/203578.htm>
- Valtonen, K. (2001). Social work with immigrants and refugees: Developing a participation-based framework for anti-oppressive practice. *British Journal of Social Work, 31*, 955–960.
- Valtonen, K. (2002). Social work with immigrants and refugees: Developing a participation-based framework for anti-oppressive practice. Part 2. *British Journal of Social Work, 32*, 113–120.

Vang, C. Y., & Trieu, M. M. (2014). *Invisible newcomers: Refugees from Burma/Myanmar and Bhutan in the United States*. Washington, DC: Asian & Pacific Islander American Scholarship Fund & Association for Asian American Studies.

D. Christopher Fike, MSW, is a doctoral student, and **David K. Androff, PhD, MSW**, is associate professor, School of Social Work, Arizona State University, Phoenix. Address correspondence to D. Christopher Fike, School of Social Work, Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ 85004; e-mail: dcfike@asu.edu.

Original manuscript received October 6, 2014

Final revision received May 8, 2015

Accepted May 21, 2015