Happy TTSTA Tuesday!

Given our recent cross site meeting and discussions at PACA, I am creating a series of TTSTA Tuesdays that will feature the most common refugee populations that PACA is settling. I will include the name of the population in all of the subject lines to facilitate quick retrieval in the future.

First are the Burmese, a refugee population from Myanmar, officially the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and also known as Burma. It is a sovereign state in Southeast Asia bordered by Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and Thailand. For those of you who are geographically challenged like myself, I linked a map of the location of Myanmar (Burma) [http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/countries/myanmar-map/](http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/countries/myanmar-map/)

When you click on the link below, you will have a number of resources to review. There are videos and culture specific information. Attached is a publication about the Burmese refugees and the Rohingya (pronounced row-hing-gah) culture.

[http://www.culturalorientation.net/learning/populations/burmese](http://www.culturalorientation.net/learning/populations/burmese)
Refugees from Burma - Cultural Orientation Resource Center

www.culturalorientation.net

Refugees from Burma. Read the COR Center Culture Profile, Refugees from Burma - Their Background and Experience, for information about the many elements that differ ...

I will be on vacation next Tuesday, therefore TTSTA Tuesdays will be back in the New Year on January 5th.

Be well,
Refugees From Burma
Their Backgrounds and Refugee Experiences


Editors: Donald A. Ranard and Sandy Barron
Acknowledgments

This profile is the result of the collective effort of a team of Burma area specialists and refugee resettlement professionals. Sandy Barron, a Bangkok-based writer and editor who has written extensively about Karen refugees in Thailand, oversaw the development of the first draft of the profile, and was the principal writer for the sections on the Karen and Karenni. John Okell, formerly a lecturer in Burmese at the University of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), wrote the section on Burmese language and also contributed his knowledge of Burmese language and culture to other parts of the profile. Saw Myat Yin, a Burmese writer, wrote the section on Burman culture, and the principal writer for the Chin section is Kenneth VanBik, instructor of linguistics, Patten University, Oakland, California, and postdoctoral researcher at the STEDT Project, Department of Linguistics, University of California, Berkeley. He is a native Hakha-Chin speaker. Zo T. Hmung, program officer, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, also contributed to the Chin section.

Arthur Swain, a Burmese art specialist and author, commented on early drafts of the profile, wrote the section on Burmese art and architecture, and contributed to the Burman culture and Chin literature sections. Anna J. Allott, senior research associate in Burmese Studies at SOAS, contributed the section on Burmese literature, and Emma Larkin, author of the highly praised book Finding George Orwell in Burma, wrote the section on Burmese history.

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Sanja Bebic, Director, Cultural Orientation Resource Center
Donald A. Ranard, Editor

Refugees from Burma
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Introduction

Resource-rich and fertile, Burma was once regarded as “the rice bowl of Asia.” Under military rule since 1962, its fortunes have steadily declined, and today it is one of the world’s least developed and least free countries. It is also the source of one of the world’s most protracted refugee crises.

More than half a million refugees from Burma, also called Myanmar, are in mainly neighboring and nearby countries such as Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, and Thailand. Around 150,000 people, mostly ethnic Karen and Karenni, are living in designated camps in Thailand; some have been in these camps for more than 2 decades. Another 22,000 are in camps in Bangladesh that date back to 1992. Most of the remaining refugees have little choice but to eke out precarious lives as illegal migrants.

To date, the United States has resettled nearly 5,000 refugees from Burma, according to the Department of State’s Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS). Of these, about 3,500 have been Karen. More than 1,000 Burmans and about 400 Chin have also been resettled. Most of the Karen and Burmans have been resettled from refugee camps in Thailand. Most of the Chin have been resettled from Malaysia.

This profile provides information about the richly diverse histories, cultures, and backgrounds of the refugees from Burma, with a focus on the Burmans (the country’s majority ethnic group), the Karen and their various subgroups, and the Chin. It also looks at their experiences as refugees in camps in Thailand and Malaysia and the early experiences of their fellow countrymen and women who have already been resettled in the United States.

The profile is intended primarily for refugee service providers who will be assisting the refugees in their new communities in the United States. But others may find it useful, too. Teachers may use it to educate students about once faraway peoples, now struggling to find their way in a new land. Local government agencies—the courts, the police, the housing and health departments—may use it to help their staff better understand, and so better serve, the new arrivals.

For readers who wish to learn more about the peoples of Burma, we provide a list of books, films, and Web sites at the end of this profile. But ultimately the best source of information about the peoples of Burma is the people themselves, and readers who find this profile interesting should consider taking the next step—getting to know those whose cultures and experiences are described on these pages. Readers who do so will discover people who are eager to share their lives and stories.
Burma: An Overview

The Peoples

An Ethnic Mosaic

Burma is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. Within the eight main ethnic groups inhabiting the country, anthropologists have counted more than 130 distinctive subgroups. Burma’s extraordinarily rich range of ethnicities and cultures—exemplified in the gala of color and design manifested in its various forms of ethnic dress—presents new students of the country with a picture that can seem dizzyingly complex.

Of the estimated population of 55 million, the largest ethnic group, the Burmans, or Bamar, form about 68%. Occupying mainly territories in the various border regions are other ethnic groups, such as the Chin, Kachin, Karen, Mon, Rakhine, Shan, and Wa.

Burma’s location helps to explain its rich cultural diversity, as Martin Smith, a leading Burma expert, explains in Burma: Insurgency and the politics of ethnicity:

In many respects, [Burma’s] cultural diversity reflects [its] location on a strategic crossroads in Asia. Here it has acted as a historic buffer between the neighboring powers of China, India, and Siam (Thailand). A fertile land . . . the country is protected by a rugged horseshoe of mountains that surround the Irrawaddy plains. Over the past 2,000 years, many ethnic groups have migrated across these frontiers, interacting with other people along the way. The result is a pattern of cultural interchange and human habitation which, in many areas, resembles more a mosaic than a map of homogeneous or easily separable territories.

Smith divides the peoples of pre-colonial Burma into two main groups:

• the valley-dwelling peoples—Burmans, Mon, Rakhine (Arakanese), and Shan—who were wet-rice farmers, Theravada Buddhists, and in many cases literate; and

• the diverse hill peoples, such as the Chin, Kachin, Karen, and Wa, who were dry-rice farmers, mostly spirit worshippers, and largely nonliterate.

American refugee agencies may meet people from both these categories—the Buddhist Burmans and the mainly animist (or, in the post-colonial period, Christian) hill peoples.
Shared Characteristics

Though there are great cultural, historical, and political differences among the various groups of Burma, there are of course some shared cultural characteristics. First and foremost, in common with all the cultures of Southeast Asia, is rice. Whether it is in the form of wet rice grown in the flooded paddy fields of the lowlands, dry rice grown as part of shifting cultivation at higher altitudes, glutinous rice known as sticky rice, or rice wine used for relaxation and festivities, rice is central to daily existence throughout Burma—so essential that it is regarded as virtually synonymous with life itself.

The patterns of life resulting from the tropical monsoon climate form another basic shared reality and common cultural reference point. Seasonal alternations between heavy monsoons and long, dry periods have historically determined the central patterns of life—everything from the appropriate time for doing various kinds of work and going on a journey to getting married and going to battle.

Certain very broad cultural values that have been cautiously ascribed to Asians by both Asian and Western scholars may also be applied to the peoples of Burma. Among them are an emphasis on family and community and a respect for elders and ancestors.

American resettlement agencies could encounter members of virtually any of the country’s ethnic groups, because most are included in the ranks of refugees currently living in neighboring or nearby countries. However, it is most likely that Americans will encounter people from three main groups: the Burmans, the Karen and their various subgroups, and the Chin.

Terms

The Burmese language has two forms of its name for itself and for its speakers and their country. It uses Myanmar in formal contexts (e.g., in book titles or the names of government agencies) and Bamar in informal conversation. The name of the country in other languages—English, French, German, Japanese, Thai—is based on the informal version. The difference between the two forms is rather like the way English speakers talk informally about going to Holland but address letters to The Netherlands.

In 1989, the military government of Burma announced that they wanted foreigners to stop using the words Burma and Burmese. Instead they wanted the world to use Myanmar for the country and its national people, and Bamar for the majority ethnic and linguistic group. Thus, members of the ethnic minorities—the Karen, for example—would be Myanmar by nationality and Karen by ethnicity, while the majority group would be Myanmar by nationality and Bamar by ethnicity. Previously, the same distinction was made by using Burmese for the nationality and the language and Burman for the ethnicity.
Other place names have been changed as well. Yangon, for example, is now the official designation for Rangoon, and the new name for the city of Moulmein is Mawlamyine.

Although the international business community and international organizations like the United Nations have adopted Myanmar as the new name without reservation, not everyone has accepted these name changes. Foreigners and Burmese expatriates who oppose the military government, and contest its right to rule, deliberately persist in using the old names, Burmese and Burma, as a symbol of their opposition and defiance. A third group, which includes the authors of this profile, continues to use the old names on the grounds that those are the names with which their readership is familiar, and that there are still many people who do not recognize the name Myanmar.

In summary, in most contemporary usage and in this profile, Burman refers to the majority ethnic group, and Burmese describes the language, citizenship, or country.

**Land**

Burma is bordered by Bangladesh, India, China, Laos, and Thailand. It covers an area of 261,000 square miles—a land mass just slightly smaller than that of Texas.

The largest country in mainland Southeast Asia, Burma has fertile rice-growing areas in the center and teak-filled forests covering high mountains in the west, north, and east. To the southwest and south, a long coastline fringes the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal.

Burma is divided into seven states and seven divisions. The states are ethnically based; the divisions are predominantly made up of Burmans. The seven states are Arakhan (Rakhine), Chin, Kachin, Karen (Kayin), Karenni (Kayah), Mon, and Shan.

There are three large cities: Rangoon (estimated population 5 million), now known as Yangon; Mandalay (population 927,000 in 2005); and Moulmein (population 300,000), now known as Mawlamyine. In late 2005, the regime astonished Burmese and foreigners alike by announcing that it was moving the capital of the country from Rangoon in the south to the town of Pyinmana (population 100,000), about 320 kilometers north of Rangoon on the Rangoon-Mandalay railway line, roughly halfway between the two cities. The new capital is now called Naypyidaw, meaning “royal city.” Construction began secretly under the guise of building an army camp in 2004 and is expected to continue until at least 2012. Many civil servants were relocated to their new offices on November 6, 2006. Foreign embassies and consulates are still in Rangoon, however.

**Climate**

Burma has three distinct seasons: the dry season from March to June; the rainy, or monsoon, season from July to October (roughly coinciding with the Buddhist Lent); and the cool season from November to February. It is very hot during
the dry season, especially in towns such as Mandalay, Monywa, and Myingyan in the Dry Zone, an arid area in the center of the country where temperatures can reach 110° F. The rainy season brings heavy rain to the southeastern and southern parts of the country. Moulmein, for example, has an annual rainfall of about 200 inches or more; Rangoon, the former capital of the country, has an average of about 100 inches of rain per year. During the cool season, the northernmost areas of the mountainous regions in the north, west, and east experience freezing temperatures and snowfall. In the Shan State, temperatures reach the freezing point.

Economy

Resource-rich Burma suffers from inefficient economic policies and government controls. Large portions of the economy were nationalized after the military takeover in 1962, followed soon after by a ruinous program known as the “Burmese Way to Socialism.” A limited return to a market economy in the mid-1990s has failed to lift the country out of least developed country status.

The economy is predominantly agriculture based, with rice the main crop and farming the main occupation of 60% to 80% of the population. Other important crops are corn, peanuts, beans, oilseeds, and sugar cane. Burma’s natural resources include natural gas, oil, tin, and tungsten, and gems such as ruby, jade, and sapphire. Manufacturing industries include textiles, footwear, wood, and wood products. Teak and other hardwoods are a major export. Burma is also known as a major producer of illegal opium in the northern region bordering on Laos and Thailand known as the “Golden Triangle.”

Chief trading partners are China, India, Japan, Singapore, and Thailand. The United States and the European Union have placed various economic sanctions on Burma.

History

The history of Burma, from ancient times to today, is marked by its ethnic diversity and characterized by ongoing geopolitical struggles between the country’s smaller ethnic groups and its largest, the Burmans.

The history of ethnic relationships in Burma is complex, and across the centuries there has been much cultural interchange. But in general, during the 8th and 9th centuries, the Burmans migrated south from the eastern Himalayas and occupied the central plains of Burma, where they established the great kingdom at Pagan, the ruins of which are still standing today. Neighboring ethnic groups were treated as vassal states or were required to pay tribute to the Buddhist monarchs, and over the following centuries, battles and power struggles saw the rise and fall of numerous rival kingdoms. When Pagan’s prominence began to wane in the 13th century, for instance, Mon rulers rebuilt their kingdom in the south and the Shan established another court in the east.

Refugees from Burma
In the 16th century, another Burman monarch, Bayinnaung, built up a great kingdom within the territories similar to the boundaries of modern-day Burma. The battles with various Mon, Rakhine, and other ethnic rulers continued, however. These ended with the dominance of Alaungpaya, who founded the Konbaung Dynasty in the 18th century, sending his troops westward to claim land from British-ruled India. The move instigated a series of three Anglo-Burmese wars which eventually led to England’s colonization of all Burmese territory by 1885.

In many respects, colonial rule exacerbated ethnic differences within the country. The British government practiced a policy of “divide and rule” in Burma by drawing clear lines between the Burmans, living in the central plains, and the ethnic minorities in the hills. While central Burma was administered through a British-style civil service and legal code, the frontier areas, such as the Shan and Karenni States, remained semi-autonomous under their traditional rulers and chieftains. Along with British rule came Christian missionaries, who built schools and hospitals in the hills areas and encouraged many among the Chin, Kachin, Karen, and Karenni to convert to Christianity. Overall, British rule left Burma with the physical legacy of an extensive transport infrastructure and the political legacy of the framework for a representative government. As in other British colonies, English and Western-style education left a legacy with lasting and ambiguous social implications. In particular, in Burman-majority areas, where there was an existing tradition of Buddhist monastery schools, high levels of literacy developed, while in the ethnic minority hills many non-Burmese languages developed writing systems, inspiring interest in education, social progress, and the promotion of different ethnic cultures.

Whatever contributions British rule made to Burma’s modern development, however, it also set the Burmans and many of the non-Burman peoples on largely different paths of political and economic development. National unity was not fostered, and until 1937 Burma was administered as a province of India.

By the time of World War II, a pro-independence movement had been set in motion, led by a charismatic Burman called Aung San. He is generally considered to be one of the few leaders who had the vision and ability to unify the country and its various ethnic groups, but he was assassinated, allegedly by a rival politician, just months before independence in January 1948. Furthermore, interethnic tensions had been dangerously inflamed during World War II when such minority peoples as the Karen and Kachin stayed loyal to the British while Aung Sang’s Burma Independence army initially joined with imperial Japan. Communal violence erupted in several areas.

At independence, civil war broke out almost immediately around the country. The Communist Party of Burma withdrew from the government and launched an insurrection against the central government in 1948. The Karen insurgency, which is still ongoing today, began in 1949, with armed struggles rapidly spreading to other ethnic groups, including the Karenni, Mon, Pa-o, and Rakhine.
In 1962, one of Aung San’s former colleagues, Ne Win, seized control of the government and imposed iron-fisted military rule. Gradually, the Burmese army regained control of opposition-controlled areas in central Burma with the notorious *hpyat ley byat*, or the “four cuts” policy, which was designed to cut insurgent armies off from their key sources of survival: food, funds, recruits, and information. Villages were razed to the ground, and villagers were used as living shields between the Burmese army and nationalist ethnic forces.

While Ne Win suppressed the ethnic minority peoples, his economic policies proved disastrous for the country as a whole. On coming to power, Ne Win launched the Burmese Way to Socialism, nationalizing private industry, expelling all foreigners, and closing the country off to the outside world.

After decades of economic degradation and authoritarian rule, widespread unrest culminated in a nationwide people’s uprising calling for democracy in August 1988 (the auspicious date, 8/8/88, is known in Burmese as *shiq ley lone*, or the “four eights”). The military regime’s response was brutal; over the following weeks of demonstrations, an estimated 3,000 people were killed by the security services.

In 1988, Ne Win stepped aside and a new lineup of ruling generals, known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), reassumed military control of the government. When the regime promised the people a general election, Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of Aung San, formed a political party called the National League for Democracy (NLD). The generals tried to prevent the immensely popular NLD from winning the elections by arresting thousands of its supporters and placing Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest. Regardless, the NLD won a landslide victory, securing over 80% of the parliamentary vote. The SLORC, however, ignored the results and continued to rule. Today, nearly 20 years since Ne Win stepped aside, the military regime, now renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), is still in power, and Aung San Suu Kyi has spent most of the intervening years locked up in her rundown family home in Rangoon.

Since 1988, the army has more than doubled in size and now has a staggering troop-force of almost half a million soldiers, around the same number as the U.S. army. It is estimated that 40% of the national budget is spent on building the army’s strength, while education reportedly receives as little as 1% to 2%. The regime’s finances are said to be buoyed up by trade in illegal drugs; according to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, Burma is the world’s second biggest exporter of illicit opiates.

By the end of the 1990s, most groups, wearied after decades of fighting, had brokered ceasefire deals with the regime. Though the various wars against ethnic nationalist armies appear almost over, human rights abuses continue in many areas of the country and hundreds of thousands of people of all ethnicities have been forced to flee.
The Burmans

Making up around 68% of the population of Burma, the Burmans live in Burma’s lowlands, where they populate the main cities, cultivate rice in the rural areas, and practice Theravada Buddhism.

Daily Life

In Burma, the day can start as early as 4:00 a.m., as food must be prepared for monks who come by foot on daily alms rounds. A token amount of food is also offered on the family shrine for Buddha. Breakfast takes place from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m., then those who live and work in the main cities go to work. Lunch is between 11:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon and dinner or supper between 5:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m., after the working family members return home. Bedtimes are at about 10:00 p.m., after a few hours of relaxing, watching TV or videos, or talking about the day’s events.

In farming areas, sowing and transplanting of rice and seedlings take place in the rainy season (July to October) and harvesting in the cool season (November to February). All members of the family may be required to help with farm chores, so children’s education may stop at around age 10.

Family and Gender Roles

The family, both immediate and extended, is the most important social unit in Burman life. Uncles, aunts, and cousins may live together under extended family arrangements. The mother usually takes care of the daily chores, helped by daughters or unmarried sisters. Those who can afford it may have one or two domestic helpers; in many cases, these may be poor relations brought in from the villages to the towns. Children from minority ethnic groups may be taken into urban homes where they help with light chores in return for an education and room and board.

After marriage it is usual for children to continue to live with parents. Economic pressures and housing costs make this even more common now, especially in the former capital Rangoon.

In Burman families, males have priority, with father and sons assuming first place. They wield greater authority, and are shown deference. Grandparents living with the family are also shown deference.

Females have many rights, however, including inheritance rights and the right to an equal share of property upon divorce. Enrollment in higher education shows almost equal numbers of females and males. Women work in all parts of
the economy, from small businesses to the professions, such as medicine, law, engineering, and teaching.

One area of gender distinction is in religious practice. Females are not allowed to enter some parts of monasteries nor to climb to the higher levels of pagodas.

Belief Systems and Values

Religious Beliefs

Around 90% of Burmans are Theravada Buddhist. Monks are given the highest respect and priority.

Buddhist beliefs include the belief in *karma*—the idea that good and bad events can be attributed to actions committed in the past—and in reincarnation, the rebirth of the soul in another body. A child with a birth mark, for example, might be thought to be a person who was similarly marked in his or her previous life.

The Burmans also retain many animistic beliefs. Many worship spirits called *nats*, who are believed to dwell in trees, mountains, lakes, streams, forests, and other natural objects or phenomena.

Traditional Medicine

Among the Burmans, traditional notions exist side by side with modern medical practices. Traditionally, it is believed that the health of a person is controlled by the four elements of fire, water, air, and earth, and any imbalance in these elements causes illness and disease. There are many kinds of traditional medicine practices. They include Ayurvedic medicine from India, a dietary system based on the planets, an indigenous massage system, and herbal medicine.

Belief in spells and black magic is also widespread. When a person has a mysterious ailment that cannot be cured by any kind of medicine, black magic is suspected, and a cure is sought by going to a healer who deals with such illnesses. More than a few of these healers are quacks eager to charge a lot of money for their “cures.”

Traditional Values

Respect for elders is important in Burman culture. Younger persons do not sit at a level higher than that of an elder in the same room, nor do they sit with their feet pointing at elders.

Children of both sexes are loved equally. The chief reason families would want a son is to have a novitiation ceremony (see the following subsection, “Rites of Passage”), which is believed to bring great merit to the parents.
Rites of Passage

Birth

When a new baby is 100 days old, families may hold a feast for monks and friends, after which a name-giving ceremony may also be held.

Novitiation

For the Burmans, the most important rite of passage is the novitiation ceremony, in which a boy of around 10 years of age becomes a novice in the monastic order for a few days. This is an occasion for offering food and other requisites such as medicines, dry provisions, books, and robes to the monks, and also for inviting guests for a meal. The boy’s head is shaved and he wears orange-yellow robes. He is taught the scriptures and meditation. Boys may also become monks for a short time after they reach adulthood.

Girls used to undergo an ear-piercing ceremony, but this is not carried out as much today. Girls may also become nuns for a short period, but this does not have nearly the same significance as the novitiation ceremony for boys.

Marriage

Western-influenced young urban couples intending to be married may hold an engagement ceremony. A wedding is not a religious ceremony; the bride and groom are married by a distinguished couple who are close friends of the parents or who are socially important. Wealthy urban families may invite hundreds of guests to a wedding ceremony held in a large hotel. In a civil ceremony, the bride and groom may sign a marriage contract before a judge.

In rural areas, wedding ceremonies are simple affairs in which a feast is offered for monks, either at the home or in the monastery.

Death

When a person dies, Buddhist families will offer food to monks on the day of death, on the day of the funeral, and on the seventh day after death. If a person dies outside the home, the body will not be brought back into the home or village but will be kept at the mortuary or crematorium in urban areas, or on a bed or a raised platform outside the village in rural areas. Burial or cremation is usual. Death is seen as just another stage in the cycle of life, and after death the family makes donations to various charitable causes in an effort to gain merit (and hence a better existence in the next life) for the dead. There is no taking care of graves in cemeteries, except in the case of families of Chinese descent, who have their annual offering ceremony at the tombs of their family members in April.
Food

The Burmans typically eat boiled rice accompanied by curry and condiments. The early morning meal may consist of fried leftover rice or steamed sticky rice, eaten with sesame and finely ground salt, boiled beans, and sometimes grilled dried fish. In the urban areas, breakfast might be bread and jam or Indian naan (flatbread) with boiled beans. The midday meal is usually rice and some kind of curry, which for the more well-to-do may be a meat dish accompanied by stir-fried vegetables and a soup. More side dishes, such as various fermented fish paste dips (eaten with boiled vegetables) and other meat or vegetable dishes, may be served, depending on the family's income. Evening dinner will be roughly the same fare, with some additional dishes if the family is wealthy.

On special occasions such as weddings and feasts, many more dishes may be served. Sometimes just one special dish, like the popular mohinga (rice noodles served with a fish-based soup) may be served to guests. Briyani (an Indian dish containing meat, fish, or vegetables and rice flavored with saffron or turmeric) is also a favorite single-dish meal served on special occasions.

Clothing

Burman men and women wear a longyi (pronounced /lon-jee/), an ankle-length skirt suitable for the hot climate. It consists of a sarong that is tied around the waist and teamed on top with a blouse (for women) or a shirt (for men). Men sometimes wear trousers to work, but the longyi is still very common among men, even in the large cities. Women in particular are inclined to wear longyi, even when living abroad. A rising trend among young women is to wear the longyis shorter and sometimes sewn like a skirt. Since the 1990s, younger Burmese women have started to wear Western-style skirts and jackets at work, and jeans and pants for leisure and sports.

One aspect of Burman grooming may strike Americans as particularly unusual. Women often wear a thick make-up on their face, called thanakha, which appears as a patch on either cheek, without being blended into the natural color of the skin. Thanakha is worn for two reasons: It is considered cosmetically attractive and it protects the cheeks from sunburn. Thanakha is not as common in urban areas as it once was, although it is still seen a great deal, and more so as one moves into the remote areas of the country.

Festivities

The most significant festivals for the Burmans are the Water Festival (Thingyan) that celebrates the New Year in mid-April, the Festival of Lights in October, and another Festival of Lights in November.

During the Water Festival, people throw water on each other or, in a more refined ceremony, sprinkle scented water on each other using leafy twigs. The water symbolically cleanses the old sins of the past year.
During the Festival of Lights, families light up their houses with colored electric lights, lanterns, or candles. They do this for 3 consecutive nights—before, on, and after the full moon—during the months of Thadingyut and Tazaungmone (the 7th and 8th months of the Burmese calendar). Thadingyut celebrates the end of the Buddhist Lent (the 3 months of the rainy season), and people offer robes to monks and pay respects to the elders such as parents, grandparents, and teachers with gifts of clothing, fruits, food, and beverages. In the month of Tazaungmone, it is the custom to offer robes to monks in a ceremony known as ka-htein.

Music and Dance

Burman classical music does not sound harmonious to the Western ear. The instruments in the Burman orchestra include the gong circle, drum circle, wind instruments, bamboo clappers, and cymbals. Classical music is mostly slow and heavy compared with modern Western music. Popular classical music includes Yodaya thachingyi (Thai classical songs).

Pop music in Burma follows popular Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Indian, and Western styles—including, recently, rap music—with Burmese lyrics.

Burman dances are staged performances rather than occasions for social dancing, although ethnic groups hold social dances, such as the Karen Don dance at Karen New Year. After Burma’s conquest of Siam (present-day Thailand), Siamese dance became popular in Burma; one such dance, Yodaya a-ka, is a famous dance often performed at shows. There is also the Dance with Oil Lamps, a difficult dance in which the dancers hold oil lamps in the palms of their hands. Solo dances, duets, and the Marionette Dance (in which the dancers mimic the movements of puppets dancing) are also well-known and well-loved dances.

Arts and Crafts

Burma is known for its rich traditions of arts and crafts. These include lacquerware, tapestry, gold and silver work, stone carving, wood carving, ivory carving, umbrella making, hand-woven silk and cotton textiles, and glazed pottery. Pagan (now called Bagan) is famous for its red lacquerware with its intricate, hand-decorated designs. Tapestries (called kalaga) are much sought-after wall hangings. They are embroidered cloths with appliqués on wool, velvet, or cotton, depicting zodiac animals, traditional Burmese dancers, and scenes from Buddhist legends. These kalaga are also stitched with glass beads and sequins.

Various types of carving work are found mainly in Mandalay. Bassein (now Pathein) is famous for its umbrella industry. The umbrellas are brightly painted with flowers and other colorful designs. Textiles of silk and cotton woven on hand looms are found all over the country, but the best come from Mandalay.
Many Pagan temples bear large tableaus of ancient Buddhist paintings. Though largely unknown to the rest of the world, they are a crucial link between the history of South Asia and Southeast Asia. Paintings of such extensive enterprise, so early in time, do not survive elsewhere in Southeast Asia, nor for that matter in India.

The Buddhism at Pagan was Theravadin, but there is a surprising religious diversity of imagery in the Pagan murals. They show not only Theravada interpretations of text, but also Buddhist Mahayanist, Hindu, and Tantric elements as well. After Pagan declined, the great temple building ended, and little painting appeared over the next 300 to 400 years. In the 17th century, however, painting recommenced on the walls of caves, and in the 18th century in small monasteries and libraries. Evidence of Chinese influence (in bird’s-eye perspective, for example) is notable in the 18th century murals. In the 19th century, European effects appear in the winged Renaissance-like angels in the last great Buddhist mural of Burma, at Kyauktawgyi Temple in Amarapura, constructed in 1849.

In the 19th century, parabaik painting was also common, though its roots as a medium for colored painting may have reached back much further in time. Parabaik are folding books, similar in concept to the Chinese scroll. Some of the best of these parabaik are currently in the British Library in London and the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin.

Modern Painting

Modern painting in Burma dates back to the first decade of the 1900s, when artists were exposed to the work of British painters who toured the country, painting its scenes and people. Later, in 1913, amateur British colonial painters founded the Burma Art Club as a means to develop their own talents and to pass on instruction in Western painting to Burmese artists. In the 1920s, club members induced the colonial regime in Burma to send two painters, U Ba Nyan and U Ba Zaw, to study at the Royal College of Art in London. Ba Nyan returned...
Most writers start their careers by penning verses.

Literature

The oldest surviving traces of Burmese literature are inscriptions on stone, dating from around 1050, that record religious donations to the Buddha and the sangha (the Buddhist order of monks). Among the historical details and passages of Buddhist piety, there are occasional lines of verse. By around 1500, religious verse in praise of royalty and the Buddha, scratched on strips of palm leaf (called pe-sa) with a metal stylus, was flourishing.

Up to the 19th century, imaginative literature was written mostly in verse; prose was not considered an artistic medium and was reserved for works of a practical nature, especially for the interpretation of the Pali Buddhist scriptures. This love of poetry continues, as most writers start their careers by penning verses.

Modern prose literature in Burma is considered to have begun at the beginning of the 20th century with the first Burmese novel, a love story inspired by an episode from Alexander Dumas’ The Count of Monte Cristo. More novels followed, together with short stories, helped by the establishment of Burmese newspapers around 1915. Detective stories modeled on Sherlock Holmes and patriotic anti-colonialist novels were especially popular before 1940.

Since the 1950s, the variety of topics and genres has increased immensely, encouraged by government literary awards, privately sponsored short story competitions, and the Burmese love of reading and respect for the written word. The late start of television (in the early 1980s) and the monotonous nature of
Almost 100 magazines are published every month, almost all containing four to five short stories. The fact that every publication—as well as every video, cinema film, and song—is subject to strict government censorship has not stemmed the flow of stories. It only inhibits writers from tackling certain taboo topics, such as government corruption, prostitution, poverty, democracy and lack of freedom, and any reference to Aung San Suu Kyi.

Two novels by Ma Ma Lay (1917-1982), a leading woman writer, have been translated into English. Not Out of Hate, published in 1955, tells of the conflict between Western and Burmese cultures. Blood Bond is the story, in both urban and rural settings, of a Japanese woman's tireless search for her Burmese half-brother, born during World War II when her father, a Japanese officer fighting in Burma, fell in love with and married a Burmese woman.

An important left-wing politician and writer, Thein Pe Myint (1914-1978), wrote novels, biographies, and travelogues and has had a considerable number of his short stories translated into English. Sweet and Sour, Burmese Short Stories includes stories written between 1935 and 1965. Another leading left-wing writer, novelist and translator Mya Than Tint (1929-1998), who spent 11 years in prison, became an important interpreter of Western literature and philosophy through his numerous translations. Inspired by books of oral interviews by the American writer Studs Terkel, he published a series of interviews with ordinary people in a Burmese monthly magazine, excellently translated into English as On the Road to Mandalay, Tales of Ordinary People. They are better than any guide book as an introduction to real life in Burma.

Some émigré Burmese writers have attracted critical acclaim abroad. Tin Moe, who died in the United States in January 2007, was Burma's most famous émigré poet. A prominent émigré novelist is Wendy Law Yone, whose father, Edward Law Yone, was a famous Anglo-Burmese newspaper publisher and dissident who was jailed in Burma during the mid-1960s. After the father was released from jail, the family left Burma. Wendy Law Yone's 1983 novel, The Coffin Tree, tells the moving and turbulent story of a brother and sister living in limbo in the United States as émigrés. In 1993, she published another novel about Burma, Irrawaddy Tango, and has continued with other publications.

Two partly autobiographical accounts of Burma by the post-1988 generation of Burmese writers living abroad have also received many plaudits. From the Land of Green Ghosts by Pascal Khoo Thwe is the graphic story of an ethnic Kayan (Padaung) student who flees the turmoil of Burma into refugee exile and eventually enrolls at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom. The River of
Lost Footsteps by Thant Myint-U, the grandson of former UN Secretary-General U Thant, is an informative reappraisal of Burma’s tortuous history, seen from a contemporary viewpoint.

Printing

Until the introduction of Western-style paper and book binding, texts were written on locally produced paper that was folded fanwise to make books or on more durable sheets of prepared palm leaf, which were stacked and held together by thin stakes. Printing in Burmese script was introduced by Christian missionaries around 1800. Burmese typewriters became available in the early 1900s, and fonts for computer input and output in Burmese script were first made in the mid-1980s.

Education and Literacy

The government education system consists of 4 years of primary school, 4 years of middle school, and 3 years of high school. Arts and science subjects, as well as economics, accountancy, and social studies, are taught.

Government expenditure on education is very low. Although figures are unreliable, an estimated 1% to 2% of gross domestic product is spent on education. Teaching salaries are correspondingly meager, and most teachers take second jobs. In rural areas, villagers often have to organize their own schools by collecting funds, building the schools, and finding the teachers, texts, and equipment. In Rangoon and other urban centers, private schools at all levels of education have begun to cater to wealthy families.

After student pro-democracy demonstrations in the late 1980s, the university system was thrown into disarray. Universities were closed or moved out of Rangoon, and new ones opened in towns around the country. Teachers failed to receive adequate incentives to relocate. Poorer standards, shorter semesters, high costs, and the remote locations of the new institutions have resulted in increasing numbers of students turning to correspondence courses, private English lessons, and vocational training courses to acquire more marketable skills.

Thanks to the tradition of education in Buddhist monastery schools, the Burmese have long had a relatively high literacy rate. In 1964, the government launched a campaign to increase literacy throughout the population. The movement depended on volunteer teachers, mostly students, who established warm relationships with the villagers they taught. The campaign raised overall literacy to 67% (compared with 37% in 1940), with rates varying widely among districts, and earned Burma a UNESCO prize in 1971.
Language

Burmese is the mother tongue of the Burmans, the majority ethnic group of Burma. As the national language and the medium of administration and trade throughout the country, Burmese is also spoken as an acquired language by many members of the other ethnic groups. Karen and Chin refugees who have lived in close proximity with ethnic Burman are likely to understand and speak Burmese. Those who are from more remote areas of Burma and have not interacted with ethnic Burmans are much less likely to know the language.

The closest relatives of Burmese are the languages spoken by smaller linguistic groups in the Southeast Asia region, such as Atsi, Lahu, Lisu, Maru, and many others. More distant relatives in the Tibeto-Burmese subgroup are the different Chin and Kachin languages and dialects. More distant still are the languages of Tibet and China.

Dialects

Spoken Burmese is remarkably uniform over its large language area. There is sometimes talk of a Rangoon dialect and a Mandalay dialect, but the differences between the two are very small—a different sentence intonation in some speakers and a few different vocabulary items.

Variants that are appropriately called dialects are Rakhine (Arakanese) and Tavoyan, spoken on the coastal strips, and Danu, Intha, and Yaw, spoken in the hills. The differences between these dialects and the standard language are mostly found in the vowels (e.g., Intha /-en/ for the standard /-in/), though there are some differences in consonants too (e.g., Arakanese /r-/ and /y-/ for the standard /y-/), and there are of course vocabulary items peculiar to each dialect.

Colloquial and Literary Styles

When Burmese speakers write a letter to a friend, they write just as they speak. However, when they are writing something that needs more gravity, such as an academic article or an application to a government department, they use a markedly different style.

Literacy specialists usually call the normal conversational style the colloquial style, and the formal one the literary style. The difference between the two lies almost entirely in the function words—that is, words such as if, from, because, but, when, and from, which indicate grammatical relationships between parts of the sentence. In Burmese, one set of function words is used in the colloquial style and a different set is used in the literary style. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>from</th>
<th>because</th>
<th>but</th>
<th>noun plural marker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burmese Colloquial</td>
<td>gá</td>
<td>ló</td>
<td>dàw</td>
<td>dwe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burmese Literary</td>
<td>hmá</td>
<td>ywé</td>
<td>mu</td>
<td>myà</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Refugees from Burma
Apart from a few exceptions, all the other words—nouns and verbs and so on—remain the same in both styles.

The contrast between the two styles can be seen most clearly in fiction. The narrative sections of a novel are written in literary style, but the dialogue between characters is written in the colloquial style.

**Pronunciation and Grammar**

The sound system and structure of Burmese differ from English and the more familiar European languages in several striking ways.

In its sound system, Burmese makes use of distinctions between several pairs of sounds that seem almost identical to the ears of English speakers. For example, in Burmese the sound transcribed as $t'$ is different from the sound transcribed as $t$. The first sound is similar to the English /t/; the second sound does not exist in English. In Burmese, the difference between the two is critical to meaning, as can be seen in the words $t'aun$ (“prison”) and $taun$ (“mountain”). English speakers find such pairs hard to differentiate.

Another feature of the Burmese sound system that makes the language different from English is the distinction it makes between syllables by means of pitch (high vs. low), voice quality (creaky vs. plain), and final sound (final glottal stop vs. open syllable or nasalized vowel). For example, although the following words all have the same consonant and vowel, they are differentiated by their tone:

- $te$ “to establish” (low pitch, normal voice)
- $té$ “to be aligned” (high pitch, creaky voice)
- $tè$ “to live temporarily” (high pitch, normal voice)
- $teq$ “to ascend” (high pitch, final glottal stop)

Notable features of Burmese syntax include the following:

- Markers corresponding to English prepositions follow the noun. (The English phrase “from Manadalay” becomes “Mandalay from” in Burmese.)

- The verb always comes at the end of the sentence. (Instead of “The patient drank the medicine,” the Burmese would say, “The patient the medicine drank.”)

- All subordinate clauses precede the main clause. (The English sentence “She couldn’t come with us because she had to go to a meeting” would appear in Burmese as “She meeting go have to because, us with not come could.”)
• Relative clauses precede the nouns that they modify. (The English clause “the clock I bought yesterday” is rendered in Burmese as “the I yesterday bought clock.”)

• The language makes use of classifiers, special words used when items are counted that indicate the semantic class to which the item being counted belongs. (The English phrase “two pens” becomes “pen-two-rods” in Burmese.)

**Script**

The first dated example of written Burmese is an inscription from the year 1112. The writing system used then—and now—is an adaptation of the Indic syllabary that forms the basis of writing systems for many languages of the Indian subcontinent and South East Asia, such as Bengali, Javanese, Khmer, Lao, Mon, Sinhala, and Thai.

The following—the text of an inscription on a pagoda wall, recording the names of the family who paid for tiling the wall—is an example of Burmese script:

```
မြန်မာပြည် (မန္တလေး)မြောက် တိုင်းဒေသကြီး
ပုံစံကားများအတွက် အခြေခံကြားဖို့ အခြေခံဖို့ မြန်မာပြည်
```

**Romanization Systems**

Early travelers to Burma Romanized names of places and people in an ad hoc way, attempting to reproduce in Roman letters the sounds they heard by ear (e.g., Mandalay and Mindon), and the convention continues to this day.

This conventional approach to Romanization has the advantage of being familiar to many readers, but when precise equivalents are needed, the system is totally inadequate. It fails to make vital distinctions in Burmese that do not exist in English (such as between high and low pitch, between plain and aspirate consonants, and between the vowels /e/ and /eh/). It is also inconsistent: The same sound may be Romanized one way in one word and a different way in another (e.g., shwe and zay, two words that rhyme with each other).

Some Burmese who need to write their names in Roman letters deliberately adopt an uncommon spelling so as to differentiate their names from others. Thus, names Romanized by the conventional system as Win, Winn, Wyn, Wynn, Wynne, and so on, are all different ways of writing the same name. Many linguists have attempted to establish a systematic Romanization for Burmese, but to this day there is still no universally accepted system.
One striking feature of the conventional approach to Romanization is the use of *ar* for a sound like the *a* in British English *tomato, dance,* and *bath.* It is based on the *ar* spelling in the southern British English pronunciation of *Martha, dalm,* and *barter,* in which the *r* is silent and not sounded as in Scottish and American English. Thus, a girl’s name like *Marlar* and the name *Myanmar* itself have no *r* sound in them.

**Personal Names**

While most Burmese names are made up of two syllables (e.g., *Aye Ngwe* and *Nay Win*), some names have three syllables (*Khin Zaw Win* and *Kyaw Moe Tun*) or two elements with one of them doubled (*Nyein Nyein Lwin* and *Than Than Nu*). Names that have just one syllable, or four or more syllables, are less common. Most words used as names have a pleasant or auspicious meaning, such as *Hla* (“pretty”), *Mya* (“emerald”), *Naing* (“victorious”), *Aung* (“successful”), and *Nyein* (“calm”).

Many individual names are chosen following a naming system in which certain letters of the alphabet are assigned to each of the 7 days of the week. Thus a person born on a Tuesday might have a name formed by using the letters *sa, hsa, za,* or *nya.*

Traditionally, Burmese do not have family names. A man named *Htay Maung* might have a wife named *Win Swe Myint* and two children named *Cho Zin Nwe* and *Than Tut.* None of the names has any relationship to the others; each is individual. The absence of surnames creates problems when Burmese are asked to fill in forms in Western countries. People with names of more than one syllable usually put the last syllable in the surname box and the remainder in the given name box.

Now and then one encounters a woman who has added her husband’s name to her own to avoid confusion when living or traveling abroad: Ambassadors’ wives often find it convenient to do this (e.g., *Madame Hla Maung*). And some parents add elements of their own names to their children’s names. But families that do this are the exception. There are also some Burmese who use Western names, like *Kenneth* and *Gladys,* either as nicknames (often originating in schooldays) or to make life easier for Western friends.

**Prefixes to Name**

In addressing people other than small children and close friends, it is customary to precede the name with a prefix corresponding to titles like *Mr., Mrs., Colonel,* and *Dr.* in English. Using a name without a prefix sounds quite offensive to Burmese.

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The two most common prefixes are *U* (pronounced /oo/), which corresponds to Mr., and *Daw*, which corresponds to Mrs., Miss, or Ms. Thus, a man and woman named Htay Aung and Win Swe Myint would be addressed and referred to as U Htay Aung and Daw Win Swe Myint.

Other prefixes used include the following:

- *Ko* (from the word for brother) to address younger men
- *Ma* (from the word for sister) to address younger women
- *Maung* (from the word for younger brother) to address boys
- *Saya*: Teacher (male)
- *Sayama*: Teacher (female)
- *Bohmu*: Major
- *Bogyoke*: General

**Common Words and Phrases**

The words and phrases below use one system of romanization; other systems use other conventions. In the system used here, letters are pronounced as they are in English, with the following exceptions:

- -a ˘ like *a* in English *among*
- -e like *ay* in English *hay*
- -eh like *e* in English *bell*
- -q glottal stop, like *q* in Cockney *Woq is iq?* (”What is it?”)
- -auq, -aun like *out, own* in English *tout, town*
- -aiq, -ain like *ike, ine* in English *mike, mine*
- -ouq, -oun like *oat, oan* in English *moat, moan*
- -eiq, -ein like *ake, eign* in English *rake, reign*
- c- like *c* in Italian *ciao, cello*
- th- like *th* in English *thing*
- j- like *j* in English *jam*
- k’, t’, p’- like *k, t, p* in English, but with a brief *h* between the consonant and the vowel (they are aspirated consonants)

**Numbers**

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*Refugees from Burma*
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<td>kò-ya</td>
<td>9000</td>
<td>kò-daun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|       |         |      |       |   |           |
| zero | thoun-nyá | 1,000 | tät’aun |
| 1    | tàk’ú/tiq | 10,000 | täthaún |
| 10   | täs’eh   | 100,000 | tättheín |
| 100  | täya     | 1,000,000 | tätthàn |

**Greetings and Farewells**

How are you?  Ne-kaùn-là?
— I’m fine. Ne-kaùn-ba-deh.
— I am not very well. Theiq ne mäkaùn-ba-bù.
— How about you*? Are you well? [You*]-gàw? Ne-kaùn-là?

How are things?
— It’s good, fine. Kaùn-ba-deh.
Goodbye (person leaving) Thwà-meh-naw? (lit: “I am going, OK?”)
— Goodbye (person remaining) Kaùn-ba-bi.
See you later, OK? Twé-oùn-meh-naw?

**Everyday Words and Phrase**

Thank you. Cè-zù tin-ba-deh.
— That’s OK. Yá-ba-deh.
Fine, OK. Kaùn-ba-bi.
Do you understand? Nà-leh-thálà?
— I don’t understand very well. Theiq nà-mà-leh-ba-bù.
This is OK, isn’t it? Yá-deh-naw?
— Yes, it’s OK. Houq-kéh. Yá-ba-deh.
Please write it down here. Di-hma yè-pè-ba.
Have you finished? Pì-bì-là?
— Yes, I have. Pì-bì.
Just a moment. K’äná-lè.
Is that everything? Da-bèh-là?
— Yes, that’s everything. Da-ba-bèh.
— No, there is something else. Shí-ba-thè-deh.

*In Burmese, the most common way of saying you is to use either the person’s name or a kin term. Thus, when speaking to a man named Ù Tin Hlá, a Burmese speaker is likely to say, “Does Ù Tin Hlá want to go?” rather than “Do you want to go?”

Refugees from Burma 22
What is your name? Na-meh beh-lo k'aw-thäläh.
— It's Tin Hla. Tin-Hlá-ba.
Please say that again. Pyan-pyâw-ba-oûn.
My name is X (male speaker*) Câ'âw na-meh-gâ X-ba.
My name is X (female speaker*) Câ'mâ na-meh-gâ X-ba.
I am happy to meet you. Twé-yâ-da wùn-tha-ba-deh.
— And I am happy to meet you too (male speaker*). Câ'âw-léh wùn-tha-ba-deh.
— And I am happy to meet you too (female speaker*). Câ'mâ-léh wùn-tha-ba-deh.

Please come in. Win-ba.
Please sit down. T'ain-ba.
Please drink some tea/ coffee/ water. Là'eq-ye/ kaw-p'i/ ye thaüq-pa.
I will come. La-géh-meh.
Please come again. La-géh-ba-oûn.
I will come again. La-géh-ba-oûn-meh.
I will come again on Sunday. Sunday la-géh-ba-oûn-meh.

**Time Expressions**

One o'clock Tâ'âna-yi
Two o'clock Hnâna-yi
Three o'clock Thoûn-na-yi
4:15 Lè-na-yi s'éh-ngâ mí-niq
Half past five Ngâ-na-yi-gwèh
Today Di-né
This morning Di-né mâneq
This afternoon Di-né nyâ-ne
This evening, tonight Di-né nyá
Tomorrow Mâneq-p'an
Tomorrow morning Mâneq-p'an mâneq

**Kin Terms**

(often used in place of you and sometimes I)
Uncle Ù-lè
Auntie Daw-daw
Older brother Āko
Older sister Āmâ
Younger brother (male speaker*) Nyi-lè
Younger brother (female speaker*) Maun-lè
Younger sister Nyi-mâ-lè
Son Thà
Daughter Thâmì
Friend Meiq-s'we
Teacher (male), Teacher (female) Sâ'â, Sâya-má

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*Male and female speakers use different forms for certain pronouns and kin terms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Male Speaker</th>
<th>Female Speaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>câ'naw</td>
<td>câ'mâ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my</td>
<td>câ'naw</td>
<td>câ'mâ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>younger brother</td>
<td>nyî OR nyî-lè</td>
<td>maun OR maun-lè</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Communication and Body Language: Cultural Considerations**

Every culture has its conventions of communication to show respect and deference. The following are some things to remember about the Burmese:

- Treat older people, Buddhist monks, and Buddhist images and objects with respect. For example, one would not normally place household objects above a Buddha image in a home.

- Don’t tower over people senior to yourself: Lower your head a little if you have to pass close in front of them.

- Don’t point your feet toward a senior person. The feet are regarded as the least noble part of the body, and it is disrespectful to point them toward someone deserving your respect.

- Don’t touch people on the head, which is considered the spiritually highest part of the body.

- Use both hands to give something to, and receive something from, an older person.

- Try not to show anger with Burmese even in the most frustrating situations. Losing one’s temper is a sign of bad manners and poor upbringing, and such behavior is not easily forgiven.

- Understand that the up-front behavior that Americans take as honest communication is not regarded similarly by the Burmese. Burmese tend toward discretion with others, at least until friendships are formed.

**English Language Proficiency and Challenges**

**A Long and Uneven History**

Many Burmese speak English proficiently. This is particularly true of the older generation and those who attended school after 1990.

Burmese proficiency in English reflects the country’s long historical relationship with the language. The British annexed Burma in three stages, in 1826, 1854, and 1886, and retained power until Burma won independence in 1948. English was widely studied during this period: It was the medium of instruction in the universities and some schools, and was seen as the key to career advancement.
Patriotic sentiment from the 1920s and 1930s led to increasing use of Burmese in place of English. In 1964, Burmese became the medium of instruction at all levels of education, and English was relegated to tool language status.

The pendulum swung back during the 1980s, and by 1991 English was back in use at all levels of university teaching: Textbooks in Burmese were replaced by books in English, and teachers’ handouts and student exams and essays were (and still are) written in English. Today, the same is true of the last 2 years of high school, and children now start learning English in kindergarten. The state-run newspapers are published in both Burmese and English editions, and the state-produced comic strips for children carry an English translation of the text.

Today, the desire to acquire English is widespread and intense, and many Burmese have at least some competence in the language. English is seen both as a gateway to wider reading and information, especially on the Internet, and as a requirement for employment in the lucrative tourist and import-export trades, or for traveling and working abroad. It is not surprising that English language classes are so numerous in Burma, though increasingly they are being matched by classes in Chinese, Japanese, and Thai.

**Problems with English**

Burmese speakers encounter difficulties in the areas described below.

**Pronunciation**

The right column shows the way Burmese typically pronounce the standard English sounds from the left column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Standard English</strong></th>
<th><strong>Burmese English</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ur (as in further and Burma)</td>
<td>sounds like faifthah and Bahmah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ow (as in now and brow)</td>
<td>sounds like noun and brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ie (as in pie and lie)</td>
<td>sounds like pine and line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu (as in tuba and tutor)</td>
<td>sounds like chuba and chutah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Less proficient English speakers typically have problems with consonant clusters, inserting vowels into them, so that ski sounds like saki and plug sounds like paluk.

**Stress**

Stress is often wrongly placed by Burmese speakers of English (e.g., vegeTABLE instead of VEGetable, develOpmen instead of deVELopment), especially in syllables ending with the sounds /U/, /k/, and /p/ (e.g., homeSICK instead of HOMEsick, PATricia instead of PaTRricia).
Grammar

Burmese speakers of English typically have problems with verb tenses, inasmuch as Burmese verbs are not conjugated the way English verbs are. Thus, a Burmese speaker might say “He had lost his job” when “He lost his job” would be the called-for form. Past participles used as adjectives are also problematic: A Burmese speaker might say “You are boring” when “You are bored” is meant.

Comparative forms of adjectives can present difficulties. “I work more harder” is a common mistake made by Burmese speakers. Prepositions, the bane of all English language learners, present particular problems to Burmese speakers of English. A Burmese speaker might say, for example, “Please help for this” instead of “Please help me with this.” In Burmese, personal pronouns are not distinguished by masculine and feminine forms. As a result, Burmese speakers often confuse the two forms, saying, for example, “I know him” when “I know her” is meant.

The Refugee Experience

After a quarter century of economic hardship and repression under military rule, the Burmese people held massive demonstrations in 1987 and 1988 that were quickly and brutally quashed by the regime. The military government held elections in May 1990, but refused to recognize the results after a landslide victory by the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by the charismatic Aung San Suu Kyi.

Democracy activists were targeted for repression, and thousands of students, intellectuals, and elected politicians were forced to flee the country. Many headed for the rugged jungles on the Thai-Burmese border, where the educated urbanites experienced malaria, wild animals, hunger, and fevers, and encountered for the first time the ethnic armies whose struggles against the military regime were of a much older vintage than their own.

Some of the young activists tried to continue anti-regime activities from the border, setting up groups such as the All Burma Students’ Democratic Front (ABSDF). But by the mid-to late-1990s, the majority of students had taken refuge inside Thailand in cities such as Bangkok and Chiang Mai in the north. A few found asylum further afield.

Thailand, which is not a party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, responded to the influx in different ways at different times. Ethnic minority refugees on the Thai-Burmese border were permitted to set up designated camps supported by private relief agencies, while ethnic Burman refugees were allowed to make asylum claims with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This afforded those who succeeded in doing so a small monthly stipend but limited protection. Most Burman dissidents continued to live in virtually the same precarious situation as illegal migrants, unable to find adequate work or other life opportunities and vulnerable to police harassment or even deportation if they were arrested without documents.
A number of Burmese—both Burman and non-Burman—continued working on Burma-related causes through grassroots and nongovernmental organizations that were sometimes tolerated by the Thai authorities and on other occasions suppressed. Some Burmese received training, backed by international donors, in skills such as English, management, accounting, organizational capacity building, and journalism. A few found opportunities to study in correspondence courses or in Thai open universities.

Thai policy toward the Burmese refugees and activists hardened over time, as political and economic relations improved between Bangkok and Rangoon and after an incident in which a splinter Burmese rebel group attacked a Thai hospital. The offices of nongovernmental and activist groups were raided and closed down, and in 2003 the Thai government announced that all urban refugees registered with UNHCR would have to move to designated border camps. The change was deeply unpopular among the approximately 4,000 registered refugees, who feared isolation, lack of opportunities, and lack of protection in the spartan and remote camps. Some were ethnic Karen who had separated from their leadership and feared the uncertain welcome they faced from their leaders and fellow Karen. Soon after the policy was announced, expanded resettlement opportunities were opened up for the urban refugees, and many began to be resettled to third countries such as the United States.

On top of the general hardships attached to exile and uncertain legal status, refugees from Burma have suffered various traumatic and distressing experiences. These include prolonged separation from their families in Burma. Many middle-aged refugees have experienced the death of parents and other family members they have not seen since they left home around 15 years ago. In some cases, family members in Burma suffered repression as a result of the refugees’ political actions or exile status. Refugees lost friends and colleagues in the military crackdown in Rangoon and to sickness and other causes on the Thai-Burmese border. Refugees who are former political prisoners may have been subject to torture, forced labor, and poor diet over a number of years.

A 1992-1993 study of 104 Burmese dissidents in Thailand, by the Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma, reported that 89% had suffered interrogation, 78% had suffered imprisonment, 70% had suffered threats of deportation, and 38% had suffered torture. Many reported poor health and symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Few, however, reported substantial social disability. The report, published in the American Journal of Public Health in 1996, suggested that survival strategies, such as camaraderie and a Buddhist concept of self-confidence (weria), may have accounted for the refugees’ surprising resilience.
The Karen and Karenni

Geographically and linguistically, the Karen can be divided into three broad groups: Southern, Central, and Northern. These three groups can be further divided into many subgroups. Of these, the largest and best known are the Sgaw and Pwo (Southern), Karenni (Central), and Pa-o (Northern).

In this section we will be looking at the Sgaw, Pwo, and Karenni. Each of these groups has its own name for itself that is different from the name by which they are known to outsiders. The Sgaw call themselves *B’gen Yor*, the Pwo call themselves *G’ploung*, and the Karenni call themselves *Kayah-lii*.

Though the groups broadly share many cultural traits and traditions, their languages are for the most part mutually unintelligible. Among the Burmese refugees living in Thai border camps, around 70% are Sgaw Karen, 7% are Pwo Karen, and 13% are Karenni.

Outsiders generally refer to the subgroups of the Karen, other than the Karenni, simply as Karen. We have followed that convention here.

The Karen

Less than half of Burma’s Karen live in Karen State, located in southeastern Burma next to Thailand. Substantial Karen populations dwell in other parts of lower Burma, especially in the Irrawaddy Delta region around such towns and cities as Bassein, Myaungmya, and Rangoon. Over the decades of conflict, many Karen, especially educated Karen and supporters of the armed nationalist movement, have moved from these districts to the Thai border and refugee exile.

Estimates of Burma’s Karen population vary widely, from 3 million to 6 million. Around 70% of Karen live in rural areas, where they engage in farming and hunting, and some 30% reside in towns or cities.

Land

Karen State covers an area of approximately 12,000 square miles stretching along part of eastern Burma’s 1,125-mile border with Thailand. The capital of Karen State is Pa’an, with a population of around 41,000 in 1981. Other towns include Hlaing-Bwe, Kaw-Kareik, Kya-Inn-Seikkyi, Myawaddy, Shwe-Gun, and Than Daung.

Much of the territory consists of high mountains, forests, and valleys. There are significant plains areas around the Karen State capital Pa-an and lower slopes suitable for various forms of agriculture to the south. One of Asia’s great rivers, the Salween (*Thanlyin* in Burmese and *Qo Lau Klo* in the Karen language) runs through part of the state. Karen environmental groups and others are opposing plans by the regime to build dams on the Salween and other important rivers.
The mountain areas are home to a great but dwindling variety of animal life, including elephant, tiger, deer, and bear.

Karen State has a tropical monsoon climate. The weather is hot from February to May, rainy from June to October, and cool and relatively dry from November to January.

**Economy**

Agriculture and related activities are at the center of the Karen economy. In the mountain and forest regions, Karen farmers practice shifting rice cultivation and crop rotation. In the plains and lower areas, they practice wet rice cultivation, using oxen and buffalo.

Other crops include betel nut, ground nut, sesame, peas, beans, a wide variety of fruits, sugar cane, coffee, and tea. Teak and other forms of hardwood have long made Karen areas a target of outside logging companies.

Karen in the hills also hunt many kinds of animals, birds, insects, and fish for food. They have extensive knowledge of forest animals and plants and have beliefs and taboos regarding their appropriate uses. As seen in the saying *Au ti k’tau ti; aû kàu k’tau kâu* (“Use water, take care of water; use the forest and land, take care of the water and land”), traditional Karen beliefs stress the protection of natural resources. Another saying reflects the Karen awareness of the fragility of the forests: *Tô kau’ si t’bêi s’yû kàu nwi kàu; kâu yoo pgà si t’du s’yû pgà nwi pgà* (“One hornbill dies, seven Banyan trees become lonely; one gibbon dies, seven forests become sorrowful”).

In farming communities, dyeing cloth, weaving, and basket-making are important supplementary activities. Besides farmers, Karen communities typically include small traders, teachers, medics or traditional healers, and religious leaders.

**History**

The early origins of the Karen are a matter of some speculation. They are thought to have migrated downwards from the Tibetan region and from Yunnan in China many centuries ago, eventually settling in lower Burma and the mountainous region between Burma and Thailand. There are around 400,000 Karen living in Thailand.

The first written records of the Karen are in Burmese and Thai documents of the 1700s, where they are mainly described as “forest people.” As such, they were required to pay tribute to their more powerful neighbors by providing them with products such as eaglewood, teak, elephant tusks, animal skins, sapan wood, and spices, and sometimes by providing them with labor.

A British colonial officer who visited the jungles between Burma and Siam (Thailand) wrote in 1835, “The whole of this belt is clothed in dense primeval
forests. It is filled with wild beasts, and the valleys formed by the interior ranges give shelter to those Karian [Karen] tribes who disdain or avoid, as far as they are able, any dependence on either of the nations.”

Under British colonial rule, the Karen became more involved in wider affairs. Though a majority remained Buddhist or animist, many converted to Christianity. Significant numbers of Karen started to take advantage of the educational opportunities offered by missionaries and their converts. A prominent Christian Karen, Dr. San C. Po, played an important role in Burma’s political life in the early part of the 20th century. Karen soldiers provided support to British forces against the Japanese during World War II.

But after Burma achieved independence in 1948, the Karen felt abandoned and betrayed by their former allies, the British. They soon rose up against Burmese rule in a push for self-determination that continues today.

Over the last two decades, the Karen National Union (KNU) and its military wing the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) have lost control over most of their former territory, known to the Karen as Kawthoolei. Thousands of civilians have fled regions now controlled or patrolled by the Burmese army, which in some areas works in collaboration with a Karen splinter group, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA). Some of the refugees, mainly farmer civilians, have found shelter in Thailand; others survive in precarious circumstances as internally displaced people in remote pockets along the border.

In 2004, a temporary “gentlemen’s agreement” ceasefire was reached between the KNU and Burma’s military government. However, reports of human rights abuses, including forced labor, the burning of villages, arbitrary taxation, rape, and extrajudicial killings, continue to emerge from Karen State, and in 2006 the ceasefire agreement appeared to have unraveled.

**Daily Life**

The day starts early among the Karen—as early as 4:30 a.m. for some farmers and mountain people. In this peaceful time before dawn, a slow, leisurely waking-up period includes the simple jobs of making a fire, brewing tea, and preparing the first rice meal of the day. The day’s chores include activities such as tending rice fields and orchards, fetching water, mending utensils, and weaving. Families generally eat together, without much chatting or fanfare, in meals taken on the floor three times a day. Bedtime comes as early as 7:30 or 8:00 p.m.

**Family and Gender Roles**

The nuclear family is the central social unit. In Karen State, families live in spacious villages, traditionally headed by a village chief or headman (hî kô). Houses are made of bamboo or wood and are raised on stilts, with space below for animals and rice milling. At the front is a covered porch for socializing, often
with an uncovered platform extending from this. The interior consists of a single room with a hearth and smaller compartments used as sleeping rooms.

In farming communities, husband and wife often work as close partners, with women perhaps taking the greater share of cleaning the house, taking care of children, feeding animals, gathering and chopping firewood, fetching water, and cooking. Women also do the weaving of clothes and blankets. Men do the heavy work of plowing, growing vegetables, hunting, and building and maintaining the family home. They also weave baskets.

Karen trace their ancestors through the female line, in beliefs and rituals called bga. When a man and woman marry, they often stay in the home of the wife’s family for a year before setting up their own home. Young men and women are generally free to choose their own marriage partners, and after marriage strict monogamy is expected. Men assist with the raising of children.

Belief Systems and Values

Buddhism and Christianity
It is estimated that about 70% of Karen are Buddhist, Buddhist-animist, or animist, and about 20% to 30% are Christian.

Karen Buddhists are Theravada Buddhists, for whom key beliefs include karma, the notion that all actions have consequences, and reincarnation. Pockets of Pwo Karen hold to a messianic belief in the imminent arrival of the fifth Buddha.

During the British colonial period, many Karen converted to a wide variety of Christian denominations, becoming Catholics, Anglicans, Seventh Day Adventists, Lutherans, and Presbyterians, among others. Educated Christians went on to take the majority leadership role in the Karen independence struggle, a development that ended with a faction of Karen Buddhists breaking into a splinter group in the mid-1990s.

Traditional Beliefs
Aspects of Karen traditional beliefs are said to have helped pave the way for Christian missionaries. Ancient stories related to Karen origins held that they once believed in a god called Ywa, knowledge of whom resided in a book that the Karen had lost and that one day would return to them via a white brother who would come from the sea.

Karen Buddhists and Christians retain elements of the original Karen animist beliefs. Animists believe in the omnipresence of spirits, found in trees, mountains, rocks, and rivers, that must constantly be appeased. The beneficence of important spirits such as the Rice Goddess and the Lord of the Water and Land is sought through rituals. Karen also believe in the existence of pgho, an omnipresent unknown force that cannot be overcome.
Traditional Karen beliefs about time and space reflect the nature of the land and surroundings. When a Karen is describing the size of an object, he or she may compare it to a body part. Thus, a bamboo piece may be described as being as large around as one’s arm, or the limb of a tree as being around the size of one’s thigh. The most common way to describe distances is according to how long it takes to walk there.

In the mountains, the Karen divide the daytime into seven parts: dawn, sunrise, sun high overhead, noon, declining sun, evening, and sunset. The night is also divided: sun deep down, midnight, and cock’s crow.

**Traditional Medicine**

In traditional belief, each person possesses 37 souls, or kla, a handful of which reside in the body and the remainder in the environment. The kla is constantly in danger of being lost or taken by the spirits, and the Karen believe that losing kla puts a person in danger of illness. One way of keeping one’s kla is through the tying of string around the wrist, usually by an elder or religious shaman. The kla is said to leave the body at death and then reappear in the form of the kla of a newly born child.

In traditional belief, the abdomen is held to be the seat of the passions and diseases, and moods and bodily conditions are attributed to the presence of wind, fire, or water. Wind is associated with pride, ambition, avarice, evil desires, and hilarity; fire is associated with envy, malice, hatred, and revenge; and water is associated with peace, love, kindness, patience, quietness, and other allied virtues. Karen men, in general, have elaborate and extensive tattoos that are a mark of character and a protection against harm.

To cure sickness, a traditional healer may make offerings of chicken or larger animals to propitiate or drive away the spirits causing the illness. Such ceremonies and offerings are not generally practiced by Christian or Buddhist Karen. Certain herbs, plants, and concoctions may also be used as cures by traditional healers, but the main emphasis is on banishing the spirits.

**Community Values**

Traditional Karen community life operates on relatively egalitarian lines, with little emphasis placed on the acquisition of material goods. Values such as consensus, cooperation, and harmony are rated more highly than individualism, assertiveness, or entrepreneurialism. The importance of harmonious relations among the Karen is encapsulated in a saying: “The future is long, the past is short; love of peace gives a wide space; love of evil gives a narrow space.” Other highly rated virtues include respect for elders, duty to parents, cheerfulness, and humility.

Karen have a low regard for laziness, uncouth language, covetousness, spite, hatred, lying, quarrelling, adultery, and stealing. Suicide may be viewed as an act of cowardice and the person denied an honorable burial. Disputes are usually settled by the headman or by a religious leader, often through payment of a fine.
Rites of Passage

A Karen belief goes, “A human being will celebrate at least three times in life: First, when one is born (dû tà blei), when all the people in the community stop working for a day to welcome the new member; second, when one gets married (dû tàu khô blei), when all the people in the community stop working in order to celebrate; and third, when one dies (dû na k’krau), when all the people stop working and gather to send the spirit to a peaceful world. If anyone works on this day, the spirit of the dead person will bring them trouble.”

Birth

Soon after a child is born offerings are made to the spirits, and a string is tied around the child’s wrist to keep its kla from being enticed away.

Marriage

Karen mainly marry within their own local language and cultural group, a custom that has helped each group maintain its noteworthy ethnic unity. Young people generally choose their own partners, but sometimes a mediator is brought in to help in matchmaking. March and April are the favorite months for marriage. Weddings are lively, boisterous affairs, with the groom and his family and friends approaching the bride’s home with a great fanfare of music and drums before the ceremonies begin.

Death

Christian Karen bury their dead, while Buddhists perform cremations. In animist tradition, the body is often cremated as well.

When a person dies, relatives are called together to perform the funeral rites. Funerals of adults are feasting occasions. Much rice and liquor are consumed, and the mourners chant poems. The idea is to encourage the spirit to leave rather than hang around the living.

Food

White rice is the staple of the Karen diet, eaten at every meal and cooked so that it is not too soft. The Karen also eat many kinds of animal meat, fish, and insects, as well as maize, roots, millet, sweet potatoes, eggplant, bamboo sprouts, gourds, and fruits. Chilies, salt, and spices such as turmeric are used in every meal, and fish paste is a favorite for adding flavor.

Meals are served with rice in a common container, and separate dishes are laid out for people to help themselves with a spoon or by hand. There is often not much talking during meal times. After the meal, people may drink tea or sweetened coffee. Many older people like to chew betel nut, a piquant combination of nuts, spices, and lime that has a mild soporific effect and turns the teeth red. Rice wine, a kind of whiskey, is also popular.
Clothing

Karen ethnic dress is highly distinctive, with the dominant red providing a bolt of brilliant color against the greens and browns of the forest landscapes. In refugee camps, the Karen generally wear a combination of Western and native clothes.

There are differences in traditional dress between the Sgaw and Pwo. Unmarried Sgaw girls wear a long white tunic reaching to the ankles and decorated with tassles and embroidery. Married women wear a short-sleeved dark blue blouse, the lower portion decorated with striking red and white beads. The skirt is red or lilac, cross-banded with fine designs; a red, pink, or white turban adds even more color.

Sgaw men wear short-sleeved red tunics decorated with tassels, loose dark blue or black pants, and turbans of various colors. They also wear earrings similar to those of the women. Pwo men traditionally wear a colorful shoulder bag over a short tunic that is similar in style to that of Pwo women. Men also sometimes wear a turban. Younger men sometimes wear beads around their necks.

Unmarried Pwo girls wear a long white tunic similar to that worn by Sgaw girls, but more highly decorated. Married Pwo women wear either a shin-length red or white tunic with vertical stripes of colored beads, or a short red or white similarly adorned tunic with red sarongs whose upper part is decorated with horizontal bands of embroidery.

Virtually all Karen, both men and women, carry a woven bag slung over the shoulder.

Festivities

The Karen hold two annual festivals: one before planting, called Nî sau khôò, and another held midway through the growing cycle, called La khò pò. Such festivals are designed to bind Karen families and communities together. This is signified through the tying of white thread around the wrist, which symbolizes good will, reaffirms ties, and retains the kla.

During festivities, Karen eat five different foods, each carrying a special meaning. Regular rice signifies Karen unity, while sticky rice symbolizes sincerity and loyalty. Bananas stand for honesty, friendship, mutual help, and, along with the rice, Karen unity. A kind of flower (paw gyi) and sugar cane represent the continued vitality of the Karen. Water is drunk for its life-giving properties.

During festivities, elders sing traditional songs that explain the ancient meanings of the ceremonies to follow, starting with requests to the kla to return from where they are roaming and stay in the family and community circle.
Music and Dance

Karen instruments include drums, cymbals, gongs, the harp, the Jew’s harp, a bamboo guitar-fiddle, xylophone, flute, graduated pipes, gourd bagpipe, and wedding horn (a three-note instrument made of either buffalo horn or elephant tusk). At harvest time, blowing the horn signifies hope and happiness.

In the old days, poems were chanted to the accompaniment of harps and other instruments. Since the arrival of Christianity, hymns and other Western songs have become very popular. The traditional dohn dance, performed by groups of young people, is also popular at festivals and other events. In the dance, groups of young men and women in colorful traditional dress perform energetic and versatile movements, sometimes with the aid of props such as bamboo sticks and string, that signify aspects of Karen culture.

Arts and Crafts

The Karen are known for their elaborate weaving skills that find expression in their traditional dress, bags, and blankets, created on either small hand looms or large wooden ones. Other weavers create handsome baskets for carrying wood and other items, and some make elaborate hats.

Literature

Karen literature is mostly oral, containing hundreds of poems, legends, and mythical stories handed down over the centuries. Such stories and poems, called ta, are a vital, living, and ever-changing aspect of Karen culture. According to one saying, “The number of ta is the same as the number of all the leaves in the world.” Ta poems are highly dynamic, and their meanings shift and alter depending on the context in which they are told.

Today young Karen in the refugee camps produce magazines with local and international news, poetry, and accounts of human rights abuses for a community audience. Thra Baw Poe, a leader of one refugee camp, has become known for the ta poems he creates (and publishes) based on his own humorous and sad experiences. Small groups of refugees have also been formed in the camps to try to preserve ancient Karen stories, poems, and proverbs.

Education and Literacy

Many Karen place a high value on education, dating back to the mid-1800s when mainly Christian missionaries and Sgaw Karen began to set up village schools. In 1962, the military takeover and subsequent “Burmese Way to Socialism” program outlawed such private schools. Chronically underfunded national schools in Karen areas have since been unable to provide a high standard of education.
Karen nationalists were able to keep their own school system functioning until the mid-1980s, when the Burmese army took control of large portions of Karen territory. Since then, organizations such as the Karen Teachers Working Group have struggled at great risk to run teacher training and classroom programs among displaced communities hiding from Burmese troops.

In a functioning Karen school, a typical syllabus includes three languages (Karen, English, and Burmese); math and general science; and social studies (geography and world, Burmese, and Karen history). Hygiene and civics, domestic science, gardening, cooking, and needlework are also taught.

The Karen language has different writing systems: *Li wa*, a Burmese-style script; *Li ro mei*, a Romanized Karen script; and *Li hsau wai*, a form of writing developed by 19th-century missionaries and used and understood by very few people today. The Pwo Karen, who have been closely associated with the Mon, use Mon characters to write their language.

**Language**

Karen is a member of the Sino-Tibetan language group. The two main Karen language groups are Sgaw Karen and Pwo Karen, followed by Karenni and Pa-o (or Taungthu). Sgaw Karen is the principal language of 70% of all residents of the Thai refugee camps. Pwo Karen is the principal language of almost 7%.

The Sgaw and Pwo dialects differ little in structure and word root, but they sound quite different due to differences in pronunciation. Some Karen elders who have traveled widely in Karen State are able to speak a variety of dialects, but Sgaw and Pwo speakers who have not lived close to one another cannot easily understand each other’s language. In Thailand, the Sgaw and the Pwo tend to speak in Thai when they meet; in Burma, they tend to speak Burmese.

**Characteristics of Karen Language**

Karen is monosyllabic and tonal. A tonal language is one in which pitch changes meaning. Tonal languages are difficult to Romanize accurately.

In the following examples illustrating the use of tones in the Eastern Pwo dialect of Karen, the first three diacritical markers placed over the vowels indicate a low tone, a high tone, and a falling tone. A fourth diacritical marker, an apostrophe, indicates a short vowel and glottal stop.

- *mà* low tone “to do”
- *m̀á* high tone “crocodile, moral failure”
- *m̀à* falling tone “wife”
- *m̀à’* short vowel and glottal stop “son in law”

As these examples show, the tone is critical to the meaning of a word.
The typical order of words in a Karen sentence (a subject followed by a verb and an object) is similar to that of English. Sentences that contain a question end with áh?, while sentences that are affirmative end with mei or a mei in Sgaw and with lór in Pwo Karen.

Verbs are not conjugated in Karen as they are in English. Instead, sentences include a word or expression to specify the time of the action (e.g., last month, yesterday, tomorrow), or words such as already or not yet are added at the end of the sentence to indicate that the action has or has not been completed.

Like Burmese, Karen uses classifiers. Classifiers are special words, used when items are counted, that indicate the semantic class of the item being counted. For example, in Pwo, round objects take the classifier l’plóung and flat objects take the classifier béíng. Thus, “three leaves” would be làa sóeng béíng (“leaves three pieces”) and “four bags” would be tóeng lìi plóung.

**Guide to Pronunciation of Pwo and Sgaw Words**

Most letters have their usual English value, but note the following:

- -oe like e in English alert
- -ae like e in English red
- -e like the long a sound in English they
- -i like the double ee in see
- -ü like German ü
- -ou like ow in English glow
- -oung like ow in glow but with an added nasalized sound at end
- -aun like own in English town
- -aung like own in English town but with a nasalized sound
- -ai like i in English mike, mine
- -ei like a in English rake
- -ch like ch in English child
- -t like t in English table
- -j like j in English jam
- -p like p in English people
- -kh like k in English keep
- -hr like j in Spanish Juan

**Numbers in Pwo**

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>loe</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>ni</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>soeng</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>lì</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>yae</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>hrò</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>nwae</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>hrú</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>kh’wi</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>chi</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Refugees from Burma**
10  loe chi  100  loe yaa  1000  loe môeng
20  ni chi  200  ni yaa  2000  ni môeng
30  soeng chi  300  soeng yaa  3000  soeng môeng
40  li chi  400  li yaa  4000  li môeng
50  yae chi  500  yae yaa  5000  yae môeng
60  hrò chi  600  hrò yaa  6000  hrò môeng
70  nwaé chi  700  nwaé yaa  7000  nwaé môeng
80  hrú chi  800  hrú yaa  8000  hrú môeng
90  kh’wi chi  900  kh’wi yaa  9000  kh’wi môeng

**Numbers in Sgaw**

1  te  11  t’ si te  21  jhi si te
2  khi  12  t’ si khi  22  khi si khi
3  se  13  t’ si se  23  khi si se
4  lwì  14  t’ si lwì  24  khi si lwì
5  yài  15  t’ si yài  25  khi si yài
6  hrù  16  t’ si hrù  26  khi si hrù
7  nwi  17  t’ si nwi  27  khi si nwi
8  hraù  18  t’ si hraù  28  khi si qaàu
9  khwi  19  t’ si khwi  29  khi si khwi
10  t’ si  20  khi si  30  se si

10  t’ si  100  t’ k’ ya  1000  t’ k’ to
20  khi si  200  khi k’ ya  2000  khi k’ to
30  se si  300  se k’ ya  3000  se k’ to
40  lwì si  400  lwì k’ ya  4000  lwì k’ to
50  yài si  500  yài’ ya  5000  yài k’ to
60  hrù si  600  hrù k’ ya  6000  hrù’ to
70  nwi si  700  nwi k’ ya  7000  nwi k’ to
80  hraù si  800  hraù k’ ya  8000  hraù k’ to
90  khwi si  900  khwi k’ ya  9000  khwi k’ to

**Everyday Words and Phrases**

**English**  Pwo  Sgaw

Where?  Tóng Khô Láe?  pai laiâ?
Are you hungry?  Noe sa wee mì åh?  Tà mò åu sà le mei ah?
It tastes good.  Aung wi lor!  A wi k’ tè
What did you eat?  Noe áung mì dae nór láe?  N’âu m’ ta lâi?
It is hot.  choe ko  Ta ko
It is salty.  choe raung  A hau
It is sweet.  choe choeng  A se
Drink  O  Au
Water  ti  ti
Drink water  O ti  Au ti
Coffee  Gafae  Ka fai
Do you like coffee?  Noe o gafae wi åh?  N’ ai dau åu Ka fai ah?
It is cold (weather).  Choe rong  Ta ge
Do you understand?  
— Yes, I do.  
— No, I don’t.  

Can you write?  
I can write.  
Can you read?  
I can read.  

Sit down.  
Let’s go.  

Have you finished?  
I have not finished.  

What is your name?  
My name (is) ________
Mother  
Father  
Grandmother  
Grandfather  
Sister (older)  
Sister (younger)  
Brother (older)  
Brother (younger)  
Son  
Daughter  

How many children do you have?  
Where are your children?  

Names
Karen use names and nicknames; there are no first and last names. In Thailand, however, the authorities typically give Karen a first and last name (that are very different from the Karen name), so most Karen should be familiar with the concept.

Pwo Karen names for men often end with the word phôr, meaning “flower.” Thus, two common names are Dea Phor and Wjea Dai Phor. Women’s names are often prefixed with naung, similar in meaning to the English “Ms.” Thus, a woman named Dai Wja would be addressed as Naung Dai Wja, and Mari would be addressed as Naung Mari. Most Karen have nicknames used in everyday speech. The nickname calls attention to a particular characteristic. Two common Pwo nicknames for a boy are Tôr Mae (“long teeth”) and Kola Wàa (“white man”).

A Karen villager normally addresses others not by name but by terms denoting a kinship relation. For example, Pwo men and women of the same age address one another as khwa mü (“cousin”) if the person is a woman and maung khwa if the person is a man. The Sgaw address an older man as pa ti (“uncle”), and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Karen Name</th>
<th>English Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you understand?</td>
<td>Nnoe nasi ah?</td>
<td>Yes, y’ nà pe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Yes, I do.</td>
<td>Yoe nasi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— No, I don’t.</td>
<td>Yoe nasi áe or</td>
<td>Yoe nasi ba’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y’ nà t’ pe ba</td>
<td>N’ nà pe ah?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you write?</td>
<td>Noe gwe lai si áh?</td>
<td>N’ kwa li sei ah?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can write.</td>
<td>Yoe gwe lai si lór</td>
<td>Y’ kwa li sei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you read?</td>
<td>Noe go lai si ah?</td>
<td>N’ kwa li sei ah?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can read.</td>
<td>Yoe go lai si lór</td>
<td>Y’ kwa li sei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sit down.</td>
<td>Che náung</td>
<td>Sèi nàu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let’s go.</td>
<td>Boe li lór</td>
<td>Lai dau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you finished?</td>
<td>Noe rong yau áh?</td>
<td>N’ ma wi li ah?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have not finished.</td>
<td>Yoe rong ba dai ae’</td>
<td>Y’ ma t’ wi di ba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your name?</td>
<td>Noe meing bae si læ?</td>
<td>N’ mi di lai?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My name (is) ________</td>
<td>Yoe meing</td>
<td>Y’ mi le ________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Mò</td>
<td>Mò</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Pà</td>
<td>Pà</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>Pî</td>
<td>Pî</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandfather</td>
<td>Pû</td>
<td>Pu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister (older)</td>
<td>Wae mü</td>
<td>Wae mü</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister (younger)</td>
<td>Pü mü</td>
<td>Pü mü</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother (older)</td>
<td>Wae kwâ</td>
<td>Wae kwâ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother (younger)</td>
<td>Pü kwâ</td>
<td>Pü kwâ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Pó hkwâ</td>
<td>Po kwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Pó mü</td>
<td>Pó mü</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many children do you have?</td>
<td>Noe pó or hre rà láe?</td>
<td>N’ po or hrai rà lài?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where are your children?</td>
<td>Noe pó or khôrlae?</td>
<td>N’ po or pai lai?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cousin</td>
<td>Kwa mü (female)</td>
<td>Dau t’ kwa mü (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mauang khwâ (male)</td>
<td>Dau t’kwa (male)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Refugees from Burma
both the Pwo and Sgaw address an older woman as m’y ra (“aunt”). Elderly women are addressed as phi (“grandmother”) and elderly men as phu (“grandfather”) by both groups.

**English Language Proficiency and Challenges**

Although a minority of Karen, particularly older men and women who attended English-medium schools, speak English well, most Karen who are being resettled in the United States will have little or no knowledge of English.

In terms of pronunciation, English words that end in final consonants will be problematic for the Karen because the sounds do not exist in their language. A Karen English language learner would typically have problems pronouncing the final sounds in *house*, *drug*, *hat*, and *hack*, although Pwo Karen speakers of English often nasalize certain final vowels in English (e.g., pronouncing the words *now* and *pie* as *noun* and *pine*).

Less proficient English speakers typically have problems with consonant clusters, inserting vowels into them, so that *sky* sounds like /soe’ky/, *slow* will be /sa’lou(ng)/, *crystal* will be /cri sa ta/, and *table* will be /taboe loe/.*

In terms of grammar, Karen speakers typically encounter problems with English verb tenses, because verbs do not change form in Karen. Personal pronouns are not distinguished by masculine and feminine forms in Karen, and a Karen English language learner may confuse the words *he* and *she* and *him* and *her*. In Karen, there is no equivalent to the English comparative forms of adjectives (e.g., *harder* and *stronger*). Instead, a word meaning “more” is added to the adjective. A Karen speaker often does the same thing in English, saying, for example, “I work more harder.”

**Communication and Body Language: Cultural Considerations**

Here are some things to keep in mind when interacting with the Karen:

- Avoid walking in front of others. Go behind those who are seated, or ask first and apologize. Normally Karen walk behind those who are their seniors and elders.

- If you accidentally pick up something belonging to another person, apologize.

- When Karen invite you to eat with them, refuse first. If they ask you repeatedly, accept, but do so gently.

- Do not be upset if someone answers a question with “No” when an affirmative answer might seem more appropriate. Saying “no” is often a way to be modest.

*Throughout this publication, we use slash marks to indicate the pronunciation of certain words or sounds. Although slash marks are typically used for phonemic transcriptions using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), we generally do not use IPA symbols here. Instead, we use our own informal system of transcription based on the way sounds are typically spelled in English.
The Karenni

Like their more numerous Karen kin also in the eastern border areas of Burma, the Karenni (also known as Kayah-llii, or Red Kayah) are traditionally animists, many of whom have converted to Christianity. They are mainly farmers and hunters, as well as skilled weavers and basket makers. Community life takes place in roomy villages of stilt houses, under the leadership of a headman. Communities highly value their traditions and independence. Karenni cultural practices are similar in many essential aspects to that of their Karen kin (see previous section as a general guide to life and customs). Below are some additional pointers on the Karenni.

Land and History

Karenni, or Kayah, State is the smallest state in Burma, with a total population of around 260,000 and a total land surface area of 4,500 square miles. The state is located just above Karen territory, and includes the southernmost point of the Shan plateau and strips of lowland areas lying along river valleys. The highest peaks rise to between 3,970 and 5,499 feet. The state capital is Loikaw.

Karenni State was incorporated into independent Burma in 1948. Along with the Shan State, it was granted the right to secede after a 10-year period—a right that was later not recognized by Burma.

Since 1962, when Burma became subject to military rule, there has been a significant Burmese military presence in the region, especially in and around Loikaw. While one Karenni group, the Karenni Nationalities People’s Liberation Front (KNPLF) has entered into a ceasefire with Rangoon, another, the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), continues to fight the regime. Civilians living in areas under Burmese army control have been subjected to many human rights abuses, including forced labor, land confiscation, arbitrary taxation, and forced relocation. It is estimated that one third of the population in Karenni State has been displaced since 1996.

Around 20,000 Karenni refugees live in two camps in Thailand near the northwestern town of Mae Hong Son.

Economy

Karenni State has both wet rice and dry rice farming. Wet farming is limited mainly to the plains around Loikaw and Ngwe Daung. Other crops include sesame, ground nut and sunflower, maize, millet, and wheat. Forest products, including shellac, beeswax, honey, wild orchids, and thanaka (the bark of the sandalwood tree, used as a cosmetic), are still important. Tin and tungsten mining, logging, and cattle trading are important economic activities. A significant proportion of the population does not own land, and some landless people rely on poorly paid and often unavailable daily agricultural work.
Culture and Customs

Clothing
Women traditionally wear a simple black tunic that is draped around one shoulder and tied with a broad white sash, sometimes decorated with red and green tassels. Over this they may wear a red cloak, fastened at the chest and reaching behind to the thigh. A turban consisting of a long piece of cloth may be draped over the head.

Some women still bind their knees with coils of lacquered cane rings. They may also pierce their ears and wear large and heavy silver earrings and silver bracelets. Around their necks, they wear multilayered necklaces of colored beads and separate necklaces made of silver coins and other silver elements.

Men traditionally wear woven jackets and loose pants. Traditional formal attire for men, now worn mostly on ceremonial occasions, includes embroidered red short trousers that were once used in warfare as a sort of identifying uniform. It is from this costume that the name Red Karen is derived.

Belief Systems
Many Karenni retain their original animist belief system based on the appeasement of spirits, which requires a variety of rituals and sacrifices. Chicken bones are sometimes used to divine a situation.

Spirit houses are built in the base of large trees into which the Karenni put rice wine. Like the Karen, the Karenni believe that a person possesses a number of souls, kla, and that it is vitally important to retain the kla, which might flee for various reasons (in connection with a mental breakdown, for example).

Language and Literacy
Karenni is a Central Karen language. Literacy rates among the Karenni are low, including in the Kayah dialect, which has its own script known as Kayah Li. Most literate Karenni use the Burmese language and script. In the schools in the refugee camps, the use of Karenni declines, and the use of Burmese and English increases, as students progress through the system.

Other Groups in Karenni State
Karenni State includes a number of related ethnic Karen subgroups. In addition to the majority Kayah, there are Kayan, Kayaw, and Pa-o. Ethnic Shan also live in valley areas in the state.

The following briefly describes the Kayan, Kayaw, and Pa-o. For a brief description of the Shan, see p 63.
Kayan
Around 30,000 Kayan (known in Burmese as Paduang) live in an area northwest of Loikaw, the state capital. A few hundred are living in villages camps across the border in Thailand, where they are popular tourist attractions because of their women’s distinctive dress and the brass rings they wear around their necks. A larger population of Kayan live in adjoining districts of the Shan State.

Kayaw
A smaller subgroup who speak a dialect that is not intelligible to other branches, the Kayaw are known for the highly distinctive red costumes and elaborate silver and brass jewelry of the women.

Pa-o
The Pa-o live mainly in Shan State to the north of the Karenni State, with some also found in Karen and Mon States. Pockets are found in Karenni State. The Pa-o are Buddhists and dress mainly in black or dark blue with silver or gold ornaments. They live in houses on stilts, with plots surrounded by bamboo fences. They cultivate mainly dry rice and crops such as sweet potato, maize, yams, cucumber, pumpkin, gourds, beans, chilis, sesame, and fruits. In Burmese, they are known as Taungthu (“Hill People”), and in Shan they are called Tong-su.

The Karen and Karenni Refugee Experience

The first large wave of ethnic Karen refugees fled to Thailand in January 1984, after Burmese government troops overran an important Karen military base. In following years, thousands more Karen were joined by Karenni, Mon, Shan, and others, as the Burmese army gained control over more and more territories inside the 1,100-mile Thai-Burmese border.

Thailand, which has never ratified the 1951 Convention Regarding the Status of Refugees, allowed those who were deemed to be fleeing from fighting to set up what were designated “temporary shelters” along its heavily forested Western border.

Early camps had the character of village settlements in which communities were organized along lines similar to those of the refugee’s home places. Simple houses made of bamboo and thatch, built in or near forests and mountains, enabled the exiles to retain some sense of familiarity in their difficult new situations. Many of the refugees were farmers from deeply remote areas whose traditional ways of life had survived virtually untouched for centuries.

In 1995, large numbers of educated and mainly Christian Karen political leaders, educators, and others were forced into Thailand when the capital of the Karen resistance, Manerplaw, fell to the Burmese army. At around the same time, the refugee camps in Thailand came under attack from Burmese government troops and from a Karen splinter group, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), which had become unhappy with the mainly Christian leadership of the armed opposition Karen National Union (KNU).
Citing security concerns, Thailand began to consolidate the refugee settlements into a smaller number of larger camps, of which Mae La near the Thai town of Mae Sot became the biggest, with some 40,000 inhabitants squeezed into a long and narrow strip of land tucked in front of a steep mountain.

Adding to the stress of the newly overcrowded conditions, refugees were restricted in their freedom to leave the camps to work or to collect firewood and other forest products. Entry into the Thai camps from Burma also became more difficult.

By 2007, there were approximately 150,000 refugees in nine camps: Ban Don Yang, Ban Kwai/Nai Soi, Ban Mae Surin, Mae La, Mae La Oon, Mae Ra Ma Luang, Nu Po, Ban Don Yang, and Umpium.

During early 2007, the situation on the border became more volatile when a leading KNU commander in the area opposite Mae La brokered his own ceasefire agreement with the central government and joined in alliance with the DKBA. As local fighting broke out, this new split in the KNU caused increasing pressures for refugees and internally displaced persons in the border area.

Ethnic Karen account for about 90% of residents in the camps. The remaining occupants are highly diverse: Within the camps are found an extraordinary 54 languages or distinct dialects.

**Camp Organization**
Karen refugees, many of whom originally came from areas controlled by the KNU, impressed outsiders by the speed with which they organized themselves after arriving in Thailand. They soon set up committees to administer their affairs and interact with outside donors and Thai officials. A young educator, Pastor Robert Htwe, sent out letters to church groups and others pleading for rice aid. More than 20 years later, he is still at the helm of the Karen Refugee Committee (KRC).

The refugees' main initial support came from a group of international voluntary agencies that formed itself into the Burmese Border Consortium, later renamed the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC). It has been the main supplier of food, housing materials, and other assistance to the refugee communities.

The refugees themselves took charge of virtually all aspects of the day-to-day running of the camps. They set up committees for education, women’s affairs, youth affairs, justice issues, and social welfare. Assistance from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in areas such as education and water and sanitation was provided in cooperation with the refugee committees and in a low-profile manner. This approach has helped the refugees retain a greater sense of control over their own affairs, although that sense of independence has been undermined in recent years as the camps have been subjected to stricter controls.
Education

Education is a high priority for the refugees. All camps have primary and, to a lesser extent, middle schools. Teachers drawn from the refugee community are paid very modest salaries by nongovernmental organizations. The sight and sound of children singing lustily in class is one of the high points of a visit to the remote camps.

Nevertheless, camp conditions—overcrowding, poor facilities, a chronic shortage of books and equipment—make learning and teaching a challenge and contribute to relatively high dropout rates. Moreover, the lack of work opportunities has reduced enthusiasm for the value of education among older children. The situation has improved somewhat since 2005, when the Thai government began discussions about improving educational and vocational opportunities in the camp. Since then, a few young adult refugees have been able to attend a smattering of continuing education courses.

In surveys carried out by UNHCR in late 2005 and 2006 of more than 6,000 adult residents who applied for resettlement to the United States and other countries, about two thirds reported having received primary, middle, or secondary education, and about one third reported having received no education. Fewer than 100 people had received vocational training or attended university. (For a breakdown of the figures by educational level, see p. 48.)

Employment

The lack of work opportunities for refugees who have lived in camps for up to 2 decades, or who may never have lived anywhere else, has placed great pressure on residents’ psychological well-being.

Although employment is forbidden, some camp residents have been able to find sporadic seasonal work on nearby Thai farms. Opportunities for young people are so restricted that when bright youngsters are asked what they would like to be when they grow up, the vast majority say “medic” or “teacher”—the only career opportunities in the camps.

The 2005 and 2006 surveys revealed that about half of the refugees had been farmers, one quarter had had no employment experience, and the rest had had a range of professional and vocational experiences. (For a breakdown of figures by occupational category, see p. 49.)

Social Affairs

Groups such as the Karen Women’s Organization (KWO) and women’s groups from the Karenni and Muslim communities play an important role in the camps. They push women’s concerns at the camp leadership level, promote education and occupational opportunities for women, and provide support for the many vulnerable community members, such as orphans, widows, and the victims of domestic violence. KWO programs for weaving traditional garments and blankets help keep community traditions alive and provide a modest income for female weavers.
Youth groups organize sports and cultural events, including the showing of Asian and Western movies on weekends using small generators. Youth groups also address social issues such as the protection of the environment, with classes on recycling and on gardening in a limited space.

**Morale**

Though a strong sense of ethnic identity and social cohesion is a feature of Karen and Karenni cultures, inevitably problems such as alcoholism, drug addiction, and domestic violence have grown over the years as space, opportunities, and hope have dwindled. Though little research has been carried out on the impact of the refugees’ experiences on their mental health, a psychological portrait emerges from a 2001 Centers for Disease Control (CDC) study by researchers Cardozo, Talley, Burton, and Crawford.

Later published in the journal *Social Science & Medicine*, the CDC study found that the most common trauma events experienced by the Karenni refugees in the previous 10 years were the following:

- Hiding in the jungle (79%)
- Forced relocation (67%)
- Lost property (66%)
- Destruction of houses and crops (48%)
- Forced labor (50%)
- Missing or lost family members (29%)
- Death of family or friend while in hiding because of illness or food shortage (19%)
- Murder of family or friend (7%)
- Rape (3% of women and 3% of men)

Prevalence rates were 41% for depression, 42% for anxiety, and 4.6% for post-traumatic stress disorder. (General rates for depression and anxiety in the U.S. population are 7% to 10%.) While 60% of respondents reported that life was neither pleasant nor unpleasant, 27% described their quality of life as miserable or very miserable. Women were more likely than men to have symptoms of anxiety. Older age and lack of sufficient food correlated significantly with worse social functioning.

When Karenni respondents were asked what constituted “feeling bad,” culture-specific symptoms such as numbness, thinking too much, or feeling “hot under the skin” were common responses. Strategies to make oneself feel better...
included talking to family or friends (59%), sleeping (19%), and thinking about the homeland (14%). Also mentioned were visiting the medical clinic (5%), singing or playing music (2%), and drinking rice wine (1%).

The authors pointed out that depression rates among Karenni refugees were similar to those of Bosnian refugees 1 to 2 years after trauma exposure and lower than rates found among Cambodian refugees on the Thai-Cambodian border.

The mean social functioning among the Karenni was calculated at 63%, a relatively high figure under the circumstances. The authors concluded that “despite extensive traumatic experiences and high rates of anxiety and depression symptoms, Karenni refugees appear to function relatively well as a whole.” They also attached a caveat to their study: “Standardized measures to detect mental health problems developed in the West may give a distorted picture in a culture as different as that of the Karenni.”

**Tham Hin: A Special Case**

Tham Hin is a Karen refugee camp nestled deep in the hills of Ratchaburi Province in western Thailand. In 2005, the United States announced that it would offer resettlement to the entire population of almost 9,500 people in the camp. By September 2006, around half the population had accepted the offer and some 1,200 had already left for the United States.

The people in Tham Hin had fled to Thailand in 1997 after Burmese troops overran Karen bases and rural villages in the lush and fertile Tenasserim region of southern Burma. The majority of the refugees were Christian Sgaw Karen, with a small minority of Pwo Karen and other groups.

Villagers, including the elderly and infants, arrived in Thailand in destitute condition. For a year they were permitted to live only in rudimentary plastic tents. Eventually they were given around 16 acres of land on which to settle.

**Camp Conditions**

The small and arid space can accommodate the inhabitants only with great difficulty. Houses in Tham Hin are smaller and closer together than those in other camps. They are also hotter, as the only roofing material allowed is plastic sheets because of fear of fire spreading in the overcrowded lanes. There is not enough space for the Christian Karen to bury their dead. Cremations have to be performed instead.
Health Conditions

Sanitation facilities are constantly under pressure, and the incidence of infectious diseases has been higher than in other camps. A 2005 report by Jerrold Huguet and Sureepom Punpuing, published by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), indicated that the rate of incidence of diarrhea equaled 22.7 per thousand, compared to 14.8 in all camps. Malaria was 6.2 per thousand, compared to 3.4 for all camps, and many people had suffered dengue fever. The incidence of sexually transmitted disease was 2.6 per 1000, compared to 0.9 in all camps. The NGO Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) introduced various programs to counter malnutrition among infants.

Psychological Health

Tham Hin residents have been more strictly confined than refugees in other camps and have had fewer opportunities to do the daily agricultural labor that relieves financial pressures and tedium in other camps. Over the years, some mainly male residents took the risk of slipping away for short periods anyway, but this was a dangerous and seldom satisfactory solution to their predicament.

Though there has been no formal research into the psychological well-being of residents, anecdotal information suggests that the prolonged confined, uncomfortable, and isolated conditions at Tham Hin clearly have taken a toll on residents. It is not Karen cultural style to complain about mental health issues, but one 41-year-old former leader quoted in a 2004 Thailand Burma Border Consortium report, Between Worlds: Twenty Years on the Border, admitted that he felt his life was slipping away in a state of limbo, and hinted at unspoken despair beneath the surface of camp life. He pointed out that over the past year the camp medical clinic had received an increasing number of visits from refugees whose problems they were unable to diagnose. “Finally they diagnosed depression,” he said.

Refugee Backgrounds

A series of UNHCR surveys in 2005 and 2006 found that Tham Hin residents had the following educational and employment backgrounds:

**Education**
- Primary school: 55%
- Middle school: 7%
- Secondary school: 3.5%
- No education or informal education: 32.8%
- Vocational training or university: under 1%

(Since the survey, the camp has introduced some vocational training in sewing, mechanics, food and baking, Thai language, animal husbandry, and agriculture.)
Few camp residents claim to speak English.

Employment
- Farmers: 57%
- Teachers: 4%
- Healthcare workers: 2%
- Other occupations: 14%
  (Other occupations included doctors, food vendors, ship deck crew, sewer workers, construction workers, and religious professionals.)
- No previous employment experience: 21%
  (These would include young people who grew up in the camp and have had no job opportunities.)

Language Use
The Tham Hin camp’s population of about 9,500 is broken down into the following language groups:

- Sgaw Karen 7,913
- Pwo Western Karen 1,051
- Pwo Eastern Karen 407
- Burman 388

Other languages spoken by fewer than 100 people each include English, Hpon (a language related to Burmese that is spoken by a tribal people from North Burma), Karen Paku (also called White Karen), Mon, Sansu, Tavoyan (a southern dialect of Burmese), and Thai.

Although few camp residents claim to speak English, some young people have learned at least a smattering of English words at school. A handful of elderly residents of Tham Hin speak a beautiful British English, a remnant of British rule in Burma before the country received independence in 1948.
The Chin

Introduction

The Chin live mostly in Chin State, Burma, but they are also found in Mizoram State, Chittagong Hills Tract of Bangladesh, and India. The term Chin is misleading because it suggests one people with a single language, whereas in reality the Chin are made up of many related peoples whose languages are not mutually intelligible. The Chin speak 20 to 25 languages that can be divided into four groups based on linguistic similarity: Northern Chin (Tedim, Sizang, Kuki); Central Chin (Hakha, Falam, Mizo); Southern and Plains Chin (Matupi, Mindat Cho, Khumi, Asho); and Maraic Chin (Senthang, Zophei, Zotung). Among the Northern Chin group, Tedim is the most widely spoken; Hakha and Falam are the most widely spoken among the Central Chin. Mindat Cho represents the lingua franca of the Southern Chin, although many Khumi do not speak it.

To describe the Chin people, one would ideally describe at least three Chin languages, such as Hakha, Mindat Cho, and Tedim. Since that is not possible in this short profile, the focus here will be on just one group, the Hakha Chin, chosen for two reasons: The author is most familiar with this group, and the majority of Chin refugees being resettled in the United States belong to it.

Land

The mainly mountainous Chin State covers approximately 14,400 square miles, or an area slightly smaller than Switzerland. The maximum north-south length of Chin State is roughly 250 miles and its width is less than 90 miles. Chin State is bordered by Bangladesh and India in the west, Rakhine State in the south, and Magwe and Sagaing Divisions in the east. The average elevation varies between 5,000 and 8,000 feet. The highest mountain, Nat Ma Taung, or Mt. Victoria, in southern Chin State, is 10,017 feet above sea level.

The area is rich in natural resources, most of them forest based. Animal life includes a range of monkey species and birds, barking deer, and wild goats. Teak and other hardwoods are found at elevations below 3,000 feet, while oaks and pines are found at higher elevations.

The climate is mild, hot, and wet at lower elevations and includes three main seasons: the summer, winter, and rainy seasons. Annual rainfall can reach around 100 inches a year, and temperatures range from 30° F at upper elevations in the cold season to 90° F at the lower elevations. April and May are the hottest months of the year. For the most part, the Chin live at the higher levels. Hakha, the capital of Chin State, is 6,000 feet above sea level.

Economy

The main economic activity is shifting rice cultivation, with some terrace cultivation introduced on lower slopes. Other crops include corn, beans, wheat, maize,
coffee, oranges, apples, and potatoes. Important forest products include teak, pine wood, cane, resin, and turpentine. Hand weaving of blankets and clothing in the traditional style is an important tradition that continues today. Transport and communications are difficult, with poor roads and electricity supply.

Transporting Indian goods and medicines to Burma proper has been a popular trade among the Chin. Many Chin traders also transport electronic goods and cattle to Mizoram State, India.

**History**

The origins of the Chin are unclear. Chin folklore traces their original homeland to a place they call Lung Rawn Khua, a plains area (unlike the hilly Chin State), possibly located in central Burma or southern China. Traditionally, the Chin can count back 25 generations.

In 1895, the British colonized the northern Chin State, annexing it to Burma. Southern areas of the state were not annexed until 1920. The British allowed the traditional Chin chiefs to govern their own area, and in return, the chiefs agreed to take orders from the British officers or administrators appointed by the colonial power.

After Burma achieved independence from the British in 1948, the Chin people decided to do away with the traditional rule of the chiefs and govern themselves by a democratically elected parliament. In fact, the Chin National Day (February 20) celebrates the day that the Chin chose democratic government.

The democracy in the Chin hills did not last very long. In 1962, General Ne Win seized control of the central government and imposed his Burmese Way to Socialism on the whole country. Most Chin went along with that system until the democracy movement of 1988, when the Burmans divided themselves into two groups: those who wanted to maintain military rule, and those who wanted to govern the country under a system of democratic government. Most of the Chin sided with those who supported democratic change.

With that, the Chin National Front was born. The military government began to persecute the Chin on two fronts: religious and ethnic. Many Christian crosses were pulled down from the Chin areas, and many Chin have been conscripted into forced labor. Apparent support of the Chin National Front is a crime punishable by 10 to 15 years in prison, with the severity of punishment dependent upon the size of the bribe a family can afford. Under these circumstances, many Chin have fled the country.

**Daily Life**

In a typical town in the Chin State, daily life for most people consists of part-time farming, even for people with a regular government job such as teaching. Every household has a small garden or farm where the family grows vegetables...
to offset their grocery expenses. Only those in high government positions would not need to grow their own vegetables.

In the rural areas, life is typically devoted to full-time farming. Farmers go to the fields at about 8:00 a.m., after breakfast, and come back at about 5:00 p.m. In many towns and villages, people rest on Saturday to prepare for church service.

**Family and Gender Roles**

In the Chin family, the husband is head of the household. In rural areas, the husband and wife work together, with the wife working harder, because in addition to the farm work that she shares with her husband, she is also responsible for cooking and cleaning the house. Sons and daughters are equally valued, but only sons inherit family property.

**Belief Systems and Values**

The first Christian missionaries arrived from the United States in the Chin State on March 15, 1899, and today a large number of Chin in Burma are Christians. Most belong to various Protestant denominations, with Baptists being the most numerous, but some Chin are Roman Catholic. The percentage of Chin Christians varies widely from area to area, from a high of 96% in Hakkha township to a low of 15% in Paletwa, according to one recent survey. It can be expected that most Chin refugees coming to the United States will be Christian, and that most of these will be Protestants.

Some non-Christian Chin practice traditional animism. They believe that large trees and high mountains are the dwelling place of spirits, and that there are good spirits and bad spirits. Believers try to appease the bad ones, who are capable of harming people.

Among the Chin in urban areas, traditional medicine is virtually nonexistent because of the influence of modern Western medicine. In rural areas, honey mixed with oil is used for ointment for wounds, and the consumption of peppers in large amounts is supposed to heal common colds and the flu. When Western medicine fails to cure people of certain ailments, such as mental disorders, some people ascribe the illness to *hnam*, an evil spirit that dwells within humans.

Chin communities are still conscious of the clan they belong to, and will expect support from clan members in addition to support from family members.

**Rites of Passage**

The Christian Chin celebrate the birth of their child with *nau-chuah-lawmh* (literally, “child-birth-celebration”). Pastors, elders, and relatives are invited to take part in the celebration.
The process that culminates in Chin marriage normally includes a visit to the bride’s family from the groom’s family; the giving of man (which involves the exchange of money, among other things, and formally establishes bonds between the two families); and the marriage celebration itself, which takes place in a Christian church. The process may begin with or without the consent of the couple, although nowadays it is more common to proceed only after consent has been achieved. Man, it should be noted, is often misunderstood by outsiders as simply a marriage price, but in fact it is more of a social gesture connecting the groom with the bride’s family.

The Chin bury their dead and did so even before they became Christians. They do not have funeral homes. The dead body is normally adorned with a puan, a Chin traditional blanket, and put on a bed in the living room of the family until it is taken to the cemetery. Relatives and neighbors bring food for the visitors who stay around the clock. Those who knew the deceased sing funeral dirges, which normally focus on the person’s life achievements. The burial is a Christian ceremony conducted by the local pastor.

Food

Among the Chin, rice is the staple. Corn, potatoes, fried meat, and a variety of vegetables are also eaten. Meat is usually boiled with vegetables such as mustard greens or cabbage, or fried with oil. Soy beans are a source of protein and are usually fermented in a clay pot to preserve them for later consumption.

Every festival and special occasion, such as a wedding, the New Crop Festival, or the new year’s celebration, involves killing and consuming domestic animals, including cows, chicken, and mythuns (buffalo-like animals found in the Himalayan foothills).

Clothing

The Chin generally do not wear traditional dress except on special occasions, such as Sundays, marriage ceremonies, Chin National Day, and Christmas. On other days, Chin men dress in Western clothes, wearing trousers, shirts, and jackets, or they wear the longyi, the sarong-like garment worn by Burmans. Women wear blouses and the longyi.

Traditional Chin dress for women consists of cotton and silk shawls wrapped around the waist as a long skirt and tied with a belt made of several strands of silver. A piece of decorated cloth covering the chest is held in place with a necklace. Men wear cotton and silk shawls over one or both shoulders and another piece of material as a loincloth. Over the loincloth, men usually wear a blanket, puan, which is wrapped around the shoulders and chest and hangs down to the knees. The loincloth is worn by itself during wrestling matches.

Traditional clothing is made of hand-woven cloth, whose colors and patterns vary from group to group. For the Hakha, the main color is red. Hakha pat-
terns are especially intricate; it can take up to a month to make one garment. Traditional garments cannot be washed because the colors run; as a result, clothing items are treated with great care and love and worn until they fall apart. While commercially woven cloth is more common today, the Chin community and a growing number of foreign enthusiasts are bringing back the traditional weaving methods and material patterns.

**Festivities**

In addition to celebrating regular Christian holy days, such as Christmas, Chin hold their own festivals, including Chin National Day and New Crop Festival. New Crop Festival is celebrated around the end of October or the beginning of November and is known by different names, such as Fang-er (Falam Chin), Thlai-thar Tho (Hakha Chin), and Khua-do (Tedim Chin). The Khua-do of the Tedim Chin seems to be the most elaborate of the New Crop Festivals, as it involves different members of the family performing different functions.

**Arts and Crafts**

The Chin are very proud of their traditional and locally woven clothing. Nowadays, bags, hats, and even slippers are made in the traditional way, in addition to items such as blouses and skirts. Chin also weave bamboo baskets for catching fish and carrying loads. Chin are also adept at weaving bamboo into dolls and animals. The traditional Chin house features many carved posts and gates.

**Literature**

Most written Chin literature is Christian. The Bible (in some cases only the New Testament) has been translated into Chin languages. There are some bilingual dictionaries, such as David Van Bik’s *Chin (Hakha)-English Dictionary*, Father Jordan’s *Chin (Mindat Cho)-English Dictionary*, and Kam Khen Thang’s *Paite (Tiddim Chin)-English Dictionary*, to name a few.

Other Chin literature is made up of common folktales shared among its people dispersed in diverse locations. There is also a long tradition among the Chin of oral songs and poetry in a heroic, sometimes elegiac, style. These songs record the history of the people and have been passed down for centuries from one generation to the next, and are memorized and recounted at festivals, feasts, and funerals. The songs are often biographical or autobiographical, recounting the lives and achievements of individuals, and may be memorized by family or clan members. Today many of these songs are written down.

The autobiographical songs can go on for pages, divided by stanzas, which are presented in fast and slow cadences, normally finishing with an epilogue. For example, Vum Ko Hau, who rose in politics to become a member of the Burmese national cabinet and served as an ambassador to several Asian and European capitals, included the 69-stanza song of his paternal grandfather,
Chief Thuk Kham Lunman, in his 1963 book, *Profile of a Burma Frontier Man*. Also included in the book is Vum Ko Hau’s autobiographical song, an important aspect of the history for his clan, the Siyin.

Another prominent member of the Chin community, Pu Vumson Suantak, wrote and published a book entitled *Zo History* (Zo being another name for the Chin) in 1986. His autobiographical song was recorded by the Chin community, and Vumson undertook a partial translation of it into English before his death in 2005. As the following sample stanzas show, his song celebrates the old traditions of the Chin and mourns their loss, showing how they came in conflict with Christianity. It also speaks of the difficulties of living abroad as an émigré, among foreign peoples.

My grandfather,
my source of life,
you are as strong as
a sharp weapon

You founded our village,
you successfully bred mythuns
and you were a rich man

Death came in succession to my brother;
grief overwhelmed my parents
and their parents

My grandparents and
my parents sought
the shadow of God.

Because we worshipped God
since childhood,
I did not learn my traditions.

*****
I married a white woman
and shared my life harmoniously
with white people

I have them as friends;
they are no different from us.

I spent sleepless nights
thinking in distant lands.

*****
Oh! How I miss the warmth
of sharing meals together
with my kind and relatives
in my native land.

His song speaks of the difficulties of living abroad as an émigré.
Music and Sports

Western-style music is popular with the Chin. At church, songs and hymns are often accompanied by piano, organ, and guitar. Some Chin traditional songs are sung in the style of American country music, thanks to the influence of American Baptist missionaries.

Chin musical instruments include sa-ki (hollowed animal horns), khuang (drums), and cheng-cheng (cymbals). Pure Chin traditional songs, however, are increasingly falling out of fashion, with Christian churches finding it difficult to integrate traditional music into their services. The Web site of the Chin Association for Christian Communication (http://cacc.info/) includes some examples of pipu hla, Chin ancestors’ songs.

In terms of sports, traditional Chin wrestling, soccer, tennis, and volleyball are popular among the Chin. Group fishing, nga-hring-dawi (literally, “chasing-alive-fish”) is an activity normally enjoyed by young men and women together, with the emphasis more on social enjoyment than the catching of fish.

Education and Literacy

The education system in the Chin State includes primary, middle, and high school. The only postsecondary educational institutions are theological schools (e.g., Zomi Theological School in Falam and Chin Christian College in Hakha), which are recognized internationally.

Chin adult refugees may not have had formal education if they grew up in rural areas of the Chin State. Some will have been educated to middle school level, and a handful may have graduated from high school and even college. Because of a serious shortage of good teachers in the Chin State, the current high school exit exam given to all students in Burma can be difficult for Chin students. Few opportunities for schooling exist for Chin refugee youth in Malaysia.

A Chin writing system using the Roman alphabet was created by Surgeon-Major A.G.E. Newland in the latter part of the 18th century. Educated Chin have continually improved the writing system with the help of the American Baptist missions.

Today, Burmese government policies discourage the learning of minority languages in Burma, including Chin languages. With Burmese as the official language in minority areas, Chin and other minority languages have been significantly restricted in their use. Chin languages are no longer taught in public schools. In private elementary schools, a local Chin language may be taught only through Grade 2. Otherwise, teachers are required to use Burmese with their students at all times. Chin churches are the sole institutions involved in the preservation of Chin languages.
**Language**

Hakha Chin (also known as *Hakha Lai*) belongs to the central subgroup of the Kuki-Chin branch of the Sino-Tibetan family. It is spoken mainly in the area of Hakha and Thantlang townships. It is also spoken as a second language by other Chin because Hakha is the capital of Chin State.

**Characteristics of Hakha Chin**

*Pronunciation*

Approximate pronunciation of the Hakha orthography is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hakha Chin</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>the vowel sound in <em>but</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aw</td>
<td>the vowel sound in <em>law</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>begins like a <em>t</em> (as in <em>stop</em>), but ends as an <em>s</em> (as in <em>some</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ch</td>
<td>the sound of <em>ch</em> in <em>church</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>occurs only in loan words from Burmese or English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>the vowel sound in <em>bee</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j</td>
<td>occurs only in loan words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k</td>
<td>the nonaspirated sound of <em>k</em> in <em>skin</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kh</td>
<td>the aspirated sound of <em>k</em> in <em>kin</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l</td>
<td>l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hl</td>
<td>no equivalent: start to make the / sound, hold it, release some air through the mouth, and finish the / sound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hm</td>
<td>no equivalent: breathe out through the nose, then make the <em>m</em> sound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hn</td>
<td>no equivalent: breathe out through the nose, then make the <em>n</em> sound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ng</td>
<td>the final sound in <em>sing</em>. Unlike in English, in Hakha this sound occurs at the beginning of words too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hng</td>
<td>no equivalent: breathe out through the nose, then make the <em>ng</em> sound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o</td>
<td>the vowel sound in <em>go</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>the nonaspirated sound of <em>p</em> in <em>spin</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ph</td>
<td>the aspirated sound of <em>p</em> in <em>pin</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q</td>
<td>occurs only in loan words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hr</td>
<td>no equivalent: make the <em>r</em> sound, hold it, release some air through the mouth, and complete the <em>r</em> sound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Refugees from Burma*
the sound of \textit{th} in \textit{thing} (but nonaspirated—that is, without a puff of air)

\textit{th} similar to the aspirated initial consonant sound in \textit{thing}

\textit{t} the nonaspirated \textit{t} sound in \textit{stop}

\textit{th} the aspirated \textit{t} sound in \textit{top}

\textit{tl} no equivalent: start to make \textit{t} sound, then finish with the \textit{l} sound

\textit{thl} no equivalent: start to make the \textit{th} sound, then quickly add the \textit{l} sound

\textit{u} the vowel sound in \textit{boot}

\textit{v} \textit{v}

\textit{z} \textit{z}

\textbf{Tones}

Chin is a tonal language, with three tones. They are not marked in the orthography. The following three words exemplify the three tones in Chin:

ba “be in debt” (falling tone)
ba “be tired” (rising tone, used only in certain contexts)
ba “yam” (level tone)

The tones in Chin are not as prominent as in Karen. A person who speaks Chin without the tonal contrast will still be understood most of the time.

\textbf{Grammar}

Chin word order is quite different from that of English. In Chin, verbs come at the end of sentences, and prepositions follow their nouns. Thus, the English sentence, “The girl eats under the tree” would appear in Chin as “The girl tree-under eats.”

Verb tenses are not conjugated the way they are in English. Instead, particles indicating past or future time are added after the verbs, or temporal markers such as yesterday, last year, or tomorrow are used.

Like Burmese and Karen, Chin makes use of classifiers—words used before objects to describe their shapes. For example, with the word \textit{thei} (“fruit”), the classifier for round objects (\textit{pum}) is used; \textit{thei pum tum} means “three fruits.” In addition to these classifiers, which are almost always required, Chin has another system of classifiers, in which the noun can function as its own classifier—for example, \textit{vok vok khat} (“a pig”), \textit{caw caw hnih} (“two cows”), and \textit{inn inn thum} (“three houses”). The classifier in these cases is not required, however.
**Everyday Words and Phrases**

**Numbers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pa-khat</th>
<th>Pa-hlei-khat</th>
<th>Kul le khat (le = and)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pa-khat</td>
<td>Pa-hlei-khat</td>
<td>Kul le khat (le = and)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pa-hnih</td>
<td>Pa-hlei-hnih</td>
<td>Kul le hnih</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pa-thum</td>
<td>Pa-hlei-thum</td>
<td>Kul le thum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pa-li</td>
<td>Pa-hlei-li</td>
<td>Kul le li</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pa-nga</td>
<td>Pa-hlei-nga</td>
<td>Kul le nga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Pa-ruk</td>
<td>Pa-hlei-ruk</td>
<td>Kul le ruk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Pa-sa-rih</td>
<td>Pa-hlei-sa-rih</td>
<td>Kul le sa-rih</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Pa-riat</td>
<td>Pa-hlei-riat</td>
<td>Kul le riat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Pa-kua</td>
<td>Pa-hlei-kua</td>
<td>Kul le kua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Pa-hra</td>
<td>Pa-kul</td>
<td>Sawm thum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10 | Pa-hra | 100 za khat | 1000 thong khat |
20 | Pa-kul | 200 za hnih | 2000 thong hnih |
30 | Sawm thum | 300 za thum | 3000 thong thum |
40 | Sawm li | 400 za li | 4000 thong li |
50 | Sawm nga | 500 za nga | 5000 thong nga |
60 | Sawm ruk | 600 za ruk | 6000 thong ruk |
70 | Sawm sa-rih | 700 za sa-rih | 7000 thong sa-rih |
80 | Sawm riat | 800 za riat | 8000 thong riat |
90 | Sawm kua | 900 za kua | 9000 thong kua |

**Time Expressions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Burmese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>Zing ka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midday</td>
<td>Chun lai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>Chun hnu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Zanlei (zan =night, lei=towards)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When?</td>
<td>Zeitik ah?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today</td>
<td>Nihin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yesterday</td>
<td>Nizan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The day before yesterday</td>
<td>Tihni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I came yesterday</td>
<td>Nizan ah ka ra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomorrow</td>
<td>Thaizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will come tomorrow</td>
<td>Thaizing ah ka ra than lai.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Greetings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greeting</th>
<th>Burmese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How are you?</td>
<td>Na dam ma?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you eaten?</td>
<td>Na ei cang ma?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have eaten.</td>
<td>Ka ei cang.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where are you going?</td>
<td>Khawi na kal lai?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where are you coming from?</td>
<td>Khawika in dah na rat?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Refugees from Burma
### Other Common Expressions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Burmese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where?</td>
<td>Khawika?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you hungry?</td>
<td>Na paw a þam ma?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It tastes good</td>
<td>A thaw ngai.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did you eat?</td>
<td>Zei dah na ei?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It (weather) is hot.</td>
<td>Khua a sa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is salty.</td>
<td>A al.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is sweet.</td>
<td>A thlum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Ti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drink water.</td>
<td>Ti ding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>Kawfi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like coffee?</td>
<td>Kawfi na duh ma?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is cold (weather).</td>
<td>Khua a sik.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you understand?</td>
<td>Na lung a fiang ma?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I do.</td>
<td>A fiang ko.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, I don’t.</td>
<td>A fiang lo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you write?</td>
<td>Ca þial na thiam ma?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can write.</td>
<td>Ca þial ka thiam ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you read?</td>
<td>Ca rel na thiam ma?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can read.</td>
<td>Ca rel ka thiam ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you finished?</td>
<td>Na dih cang ma?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sit down.</td>
<td>Þhu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let’s go.</td>
<td>Kal hna usih.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have not finished.</td>
<td>Ka dih rih lo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your name?</td>
<td>Na min aho dah a si?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My name is_________</td>
<td>Ka min cu_________ a si.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where are your clothes?</td>
<td>Na thil puan khawika dah an um?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Nu le pa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are your parents still alive?</td>
<td>Na nu le na pa an nung rih ma?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Nu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Pa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>Pi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandfather</td>
<td>Pu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>Far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Þa (when called by a sister)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nau (when called by an older brother)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U (when called by a younger brother)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisters and brothers</td>
<td>Þa le far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Fa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many children do you have?</td>
<td>Fa pa-zeizat dah na ngeih?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where are your children?</td>
<td>Na fa-le khawika dah an um?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Names

Among the Chin, there is no last name, first name, and middle name in the Western sense. This becomes a challenge for refugees when they apply for refugee status and are required to fill out forms that ask for first and last names.

When a child is born, the family usually asks someone they admire to name the child. The person tasked with naming will come up with a name that reflects his or her own successes, achievements, and aspirations. For example, the author of this section and his wife asked the author’s father to name their daughter. The father, who had translated the entire Bible into Hakha Chin and had compiled the Hakha Chin-English Dictionary, named the child 牒满丁丁 (literally, “Satisfaction With Writing”). Thus, the girl’s name celebrates her grandfather’s achievements as a writer and reflects the grandfather’s wishes that the child follow in his footsteps.

Before having a child, a couple will be known by their own names or nicknames, but after having a child, the parents will be known as the father and mother of their child.

Communication and Body Language

Some Chin body language is opposite in meaning to that of American body language. For example, among the Chin, looking a speaker in the eye can be considered an act of challenge. Thus, a Chin student will not normally establish direct eye contact with a teacher. Walking with the body bent at the waist in front of the elderly or other individuals deserving respect is common Chin practice, as is crossing both arms across the body and interlocking them. A cursing gesture, the equivalent of the American middle finger, is made by putting the big thumb between the index and middle finger.

English Language Proficiency and Challenges

English is taught as a subject in schools, and Chin who have been educated in the urban areas will know some English. Those from the rural areas will know little or no English.

Chin familiarity with the Roman alphabet has helped them in their learning of English, but English stress and pitch pose problems for them. For example, the end of an English sentence is marked by a falling pitch, which is not the case in Chin languages; this is something Chin speakers will need to learn and practice. As already noted, most Chin languages have final consonants such as p, t, and k but not b, d, and g. As a result, many Chin will have difficulty pronouncing English words ending with b, d, or g.

English verb agreement (e.g., third-person marking, as in she speaks) and tenses may present difficulties for Chin speakers, because Chin verbs do not change...
form in this way. The subject-verb-object word order of English may also be somewhat problematic because Chin verbs come at the end of sentences.

Chin Refugee Experience

The Chin Refugee Committee (CRC), a Chin advocacy group, estimates that there are 20,000 to 25,000 Chin refugees in Malaysia. Most are men. Because Malaysia has not signed international agreements that protect refugee rights, the Chin in Malaysia are considered illegal immigrants and receive little or no institutional assistance or legal protection. However, the CRC estimates that the UNHCR in Kuala Lumpur has managed to extend protection and assistance to about 1,500 to 2,000 Chin refugees.

According to Refugees International, the Chin in Malaysia “are on the run, taking shelter where they can, finding employment—and often exploited—as day laborers, attempting to evade the police and immigration authorities, and often being subjected to detention and deportation.” In urban areas, they live together in extremely crowded conditions, with as many as 40 people sharing a two-bedroom apartment. Others live in makeshift huts and tents in the jungle. Most men work as day laborers on construction sites; women generally work as waitresses. As illegal immigrants, they are vulnerable to exploitation by employers who demand long hours and pay low wages, knowing that Chin workers will not report them to the authorities. Chin refugees commonly complain of harassment and extortion by the police.

Chin asylum seekers have no access to government health care and other social services in Malaysia, although a local NGO, A Call to Serve (ACTS), works in conjunction with Doctors Without Borders to provide basic medical care. There are an estimated 300 school-age children among the refugees. In the absence of local educational opportunities for them, a group of young, college-educated Chin have established a mutual assistance association, Chin Students’ Organization, that provides basic schooling for children, with support from Swedish and Canadian NGOs. The focus of the curriculum is Chin culture and survival life skills in Malaysia.

Other Ethnic Groups of Burma

Kachin

An estimated 1 million of the total population of more than 2 million Kachin live in Kachin State in the far north of Burma. Others live in China’s Yunnan province and India’s Arunachal Pradesh. Most Kachin are Christians. The largest Kachin armed opposition group, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), entered a ceasefire with the military regime in 1994. However, economic progress has been slow, and the humanitarian situation in the state remains grave. A growing
number of Kachin have left Burma during the past decade, forming expatriate communities in Japan, Thailand, and the United States.

**Mon**

The 4 million or so Mon from the Mon-Khmer linguistic group are descendants of a once powerful and influential Southeast Asian civilization. The Mon introduced both Buddhism and writing to Burma. Mon kings once ruled over much of what is now southern Burma, but their influence declined in the mid-18th century as Burmese influence rose.

Today most Mon speakers live in Mon State, located in lower Burma, and in adjoining districts of the Karen State and Tenasserim Division. The New Mon State Party (NMSP), which controls territories along the Thai border, entered into a ceasefire with the military regime in 1995, but the humanitarian and economic situation in the state remains serious. There are around 12,000 former Mon refugees in resettlement sites across the border in Burma that still receive some assistance from the Thailand Burma Border Consortium.

**Shan**

With an estimated population of 6 million, the Shan live primarily in the Shan State, Burma’s largest ethnic state, located in the northeast of the country. The Shan dwell mostly on the plains of the Shan Plateau, which is drained by the Salween River. Smaller ethnic groups, such as the Kachin, Lahu, Palaung, Pa-o, and Wa, live in the surrounding hills.

The capital of Shan State is Taunggyi, a small city of about 150,000 people. Other main Shan cities include Kengtung and Tachilek. The Shan also inhabit portions of Kachin State, Karenni State, and Mandalay and Sagaing Divisions. The Shan language is part of the family of Tai-Kadai languages, and the Shan (or Tai) are closely related to peoples in southwest China, Laos, and Thailand.

In the precolonial period, the Shan were ruled in small kingdoms by local lords, or sawbwas. During the British colonial period, the Shan kingdoms were transferred to British control. The Shan principalities were administered as separate colonies by the British, as protectorates with limited powers given to the sawbwas.

Most Shan are Theravada Buddhists. Traditionally they are wet rice cultivators, traders, and artisans. But, against a backdrop of conflict, Shan State has been notorious for illicit opium cultivation since independence, becoming the world’s largest producer at one stage in the 1990s.

Since the early 1960s, some Shan and other ethnic inhabitants of the state have been engaged in intermittent civil war against the Burmese government. The main Shan force is the Shan State Army, which is divided largely into two groups: the Shan State Army North (SSA-N), which has a ceasefire with the government, and the Shan State Army South (SSA-S), which has continued
armed struggle from bases along the Thai border. Another ethnic opposition force in the state is the United Wa State Army, which has a ceasefire with the government and has begun resettling populations along the Thai border, raising tensions with the SSA-S.

During conflicts with the Burmese government, many Shan villages have been destroyed and their inhabitants internally displaced or forced to flee into Thailand. Unlike the Karen or Karenni, however, they are not recognized as refugees by the Thai authorities and instead many work as illegal or undocumented laborers.

**Resettlement in the United States**

This section looks at the early resettlement experiences and needs of Burman, Chin, and Karen refugees in the United States. It is based on information provided by refugee resettlement agency staff in California, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Texas.

**General Adjustment Strengths and Challenges**

Refugees from Burma are generally described as highly motivated. One resettlement agency director described her agency’s experience working with refugees from Burma as “a rewarding one,” going on to note that “refugees have formed long-lasting friendships with congregational co-sponsors.” Refugee communities are also described as well knit and well organized. For both Karen and Chin, religion is very important and a source of community cohesion.

As with other refugee groups, Burman, Chin, and Karen refugees who have had experience living in urban areas in Malaysia and Thailand generally adjust more quickly to life in the United States than those whose background experiences are primarily rural and camp based. For all three groups, adjustment to cold weather has been a challenge. Another area of concern is inadequate understanding of American laws—particularly those regarding hunting and fishing licenses and drinking while driving.

One cultural characteristic of the refugees that service providers praise—their politeness and modesty—is also one that has been the occasional source of misunderstanding. In the words of one volunteer worker, “The refugees give you the answer they think you want to hear.” Without a clear idea of what refugees want, service providers find it difficult to assess not only immediate needs and wants, but hopes, dreams, and plans for the future as well.

**Housing**

Refugees are arriving with varying levels of familiarity with modern housing and amenities. Those with urban experience in Thailand and Malaysia have
adapted quickly to American housing, while those coming from camps where life in bamboo houses did not include electricity, plumbing, or telephones have required a more thorough orientation to the use of these modern conveniences. Nevertheless, agency staff describe new arrivals as quick learners who are soon expertly using their stoves, microwaves, and washing machines.

The disposal of toilet paper has been especially important for refugees to understand, as they commonly place it in a nearby wastebasket. Refugees have also had to learn how to identify, store, and use cleaning supplies. Some refugees are unfamiliar with the use of keys and locks. New arrivals are generally unfamiliar with landline phones but know how to use cell phones, which they used in the camps.

Because they are not accustomed to cold temperatures, new arrivals need to be shown how to use sheets and blankets. Otherwise, they may sleep on top of them on the bed.

A commonly heard complaint among recent Karen arrivals is that their apartments are too big; they do not like to live with so much space, note agency staff in one resettlement site. Despite being placed in apartments with the appropriate number of bedrooms, refugees often crowd into one or two rooms to sleep at night, with young children sleeping in the same room as their parents and often in the same bed. Parents have been known to remove the bed frames and place the box spring and mattresses on the floor, explaining that the beds are too high for their children.

Refugees’ strong sense of community has led agency staff in one site to place the entire refugee community in two adjoining apartment complexes. Feedback from the refugees has been extremely positive, say staff, who highly recommend this practice as a way to foster refugee morale and promote community development.

**Employment**

Refugees from Burma, whether Burman, Chin, or Karen, bring to resettlement a very strong work ethic. Those who have spent years in camps are eager to find work after many years of feeling useless. As a result, employers hold this population in high regard, often specifically requesting employees from this group. In one Midwestern site, staff report that men often find jobs in manufacturing and assembly, while the women do well in housekeeping and sewing positions.

Refugees arrive with varying work backgrounds, from farming and fishing to professional employment. Agency staff at one site report that for the most part Burman and Karen husbands are very supportive of their wives working outside of the home. In another site, agency staff say that the Chin “do not appear to have an issue” with women working outside the home.
Whatever their ethnicity, women with rural backgrounds have had little work experience outside of the home and do not understand the work opportunities that are available to them. Most are not comfortable leaving small children in daycare settings and prefer to work different shifts from their husbands so that someone will be at home at all times to take care of the children.

In general, refugees have little understanding of the job application and interview process. The notion of “selling oneself” seems entirely alien: Agency staff say that the refugees are extremely reluctant to talk about themselves in an interview and will downplay their skills. It often takes several conversations to learn a refugee client’s full employment skills in order to help place him or her in a job. Eye contact in an interview may also be an issue, as refugees often look down as a sign of respect. Once hired, they may not ask many questions about their position or the paperwork required of them and will need guidance through the entire process of orientation to the workplace.

One agency representative, an ethnic Karen, reports that Karen who have been assigned a Sunday work shift face a difficult dilemma, because Sunday is a day for worship and not work for the deeply religious Christian Karen.

Food

Resettlement staff note a preference among refugees from Burma for their own often-spicy food; most have not added American food to their diets, although in one site agency staff note that the Chin have developed a fondness for ice cream. Because rice is a staple for all refugee groups from Burma, a rice steamer in the home is considered a necessity. Some refugees are used to eating with their fingers; others use a fork and spoon together.

Agency staff in one site note that they had to educate Karen families about food expenses after the refugees spent exorbitant amounts on red meat and sea food, causing them to run out of food money in the early weeks of the month.

Clothing

Appropriate dress may be an issue, depending upon the climate of the resettlement site. Coming from the hot and humid climes of Malaysia and Thailand, refugees resettled in cold-weather sites will need to be taught the importance of wearing socks and winter shoes or boots, as well as coats, hats, and gloves. It is not uncommon in colder climates to enter a refugee family’s apartment and find a woman in a traditional skirt wearing one or more sweaters and a hat, but no socks or slippers. Refugees often wear slippers outside and not in the home, and may wear them without socks. Boys and men enjoy bright colors and may not understand the teasing that results from showing up at school or work dressed in more traditionally female colors. In one resettlement site, after a Karen father took to wearing a lavender coat with fluffy white fur trim, agency staff followed the suggestion of the Karen interpreter and assigned clothing to each family member.
Finances

Most refugees have never had to pay bills before and will need help with this aspect of resettlement. In cold-weather sites, agency staff have advised refugees to dress warmly inside their homes in order to keep down the high cost of heating their houses and apartments. One area of difficulty for refugees from Burma, as for other refugee groups, is the tendency to send money back to relatives and friends still overseas, sometimes without regard to their own financial situation. Long distance phone bills can also be a concern; new arrivals know people all over the United States and in other countries and want to contact friends and family still in the camps. Refugees familiar with computers may use email as an easy and cheap means of communicating. Library access, with free use of the Internet, will be important for new arrivals.

Agency staff in one site report that the Chin are acutely aware of their finances and are careful never to spend money on anything they do not absolutely need. “If asked to go out to lunch or dinner, they will decline, saying they don’t want to spend the money on such wastefulness,” agency staff report. Instead, every penny is saved for large purchases, such as cars, homes, and businesses. Chin refugees who have been in the United States 2 years or more usually have computers in their homes and carry cell phones. Their children save up for the latest electronic devices that their friends have.

For the most part, refugees are eager to repay their travel loans and want to establish good credit ratings for their future home ownership.

Legal Issues

Refugees often arrive with little understanding of legal issues in the United States, agency staff in one site report. In particular, fishing without a license can pose problems. Agency staff in another site say that the refugees need to gain a better understanding of U.S. laws regarding domestic abuse.

Understanding of legal responsibilities varies among the Chin, report agency staff in a site where drinking and driving has been a problem—not because the refugees are in the habit of drinking to excess, but because they often do not understand that just two or three drinks can affect their driving.

The freedom to walk around without fear of the police is a new and unfamiliar experience for refugees from Burma and is something that may have to be encouraged.

Education

Refugees arriving from urban areas generally have had more access to education than those from the camps. While recent Karen arrivals are all able to read and write in Karen to varying degrees, there is little knowledge of Burmese. Occasionally a refugee will speak Thai. Few have English skills.
Despite these obstacles, Karen refugees are all eager to learn English, and some with more advanced levels of proficiency are working toward their GED. They are excited to have their children in school and want to participate in their children’s education. They are eager to have tutors work one-on-one with their children to help them succeed in school.

Agency staff who have resettled Chin report that, in general, adults have not pursued further educational options, apparently because they do not see the connection between more education and better employment opportunities. Their children, however, tend to be eager and successful students. They generally graduate from high school with good grades and often go on to college to pursue a career or to learn how to start their own businesses.

**Family and Parenting Issues**

Families often need to develop a better understanding of appropriate parenting in the United States. In the relative safety of the camps, children were allowed to roam and play freely, and their parents often do not understand the dangers of following similar practices here in the United States. Young children are sometimes seen outside waiting for the school bus alone while parents tend to infants inside the home. They are also seen playing in parking lots or in areas extremely close to busy streets. By U.S. standards, there appears to be little discipline of children.

In the event of domestic abuse among the Karen, other refugees are extremely reluctant to get involved, or even to make the problem known to others or seek help on the family’s behalf.

**Health**

Service providers report no major health issues, although outbreaks of scabies and lice have been reported. Notes an agency representative, “To date, there is no malnutrition, lead levels in children are at normal levels, there have been few cases needing medication for tuberculosis (TB), and no positive tests for parasites. Children are arriving with vaccinations. Refugees are accustomed to visiting a clinic, due to the presence of the UN hospital in the camp, and there appears to be no practice of home remedies among this group. Women gave birth in the UN hospital and do not mention wanting to have home births here in the United States.”

Refugees who smoke need to understand where they may and may not do so, agency staff in one site point out. Experience has shown that many of the Karen men drink beer, sometimes to excess. Agency staff point out that many new arrivals do not actually believe that beer is alcohol, and education on this topic has generally not been well received. When possible, refugees chew betel nut, which they obtain from new arrivals or find for purchase in some of the Asian stores.
Resettlement staff in one site report an interest among Karen women in learning more about different birth control methods. According to agency staff in a Chin resettlement site, however, the subject of birth control is an uncomfortable one, as the Chin feel this is not something that is acceptable to discuss with other people, including doctors. Generally, Chin women want to control their cycles naturally, do not wish to have gynecological exams, and do not feel comfortable discussing these issues with the doctor.

Agency staff in one site report that there has been a high level of false TB cases, which they attribute to a vaccine taken in Burma that can cause a false positive among TB test takers in the United States. Because of this, follow-up visits for further testing and evaluation are required in this site.

Helping Karen Refugees: Some Practical Tips

Here are some everyday aspects of Karen life—and some tips on simple things resettlement staff can do to make the first few weeks in America a little more familiar and a little less difficult for new Karen arrivals. The content is based on interviews by Sandy Barron, one of the principal writers of this profile, with residents of Tham Hin Refugee Camp in the spring of 2006.

Food

Rice is the key to a decent Karen day. Karen like white rice, not the brown unhusked variety. In the United States, Thai brands (Jasmine or Homali) would be most favored. Of the Asian cuisines readily available in the United States, Karen will be happiest with Thai or Chinese dishes.

Karen are familiar with potatoes, which are boiled in soups or fried. Meats such as chicken, pork, or beef are popular, as are eggs. They like any green leaf vegetables and plants, including kale, galangal, and morning glory, as well as tomatoes, eggplant, and onions. Chilis are essential, and Karen like the most fiery (small red) varieties. Mixed spices such as the masala spice mixture are much used. Along with salt and pepper, many Karen also like to add monosodium glutamate, popularly known as MSG, to a dish. Mung beans are popular. Noodles are not, but could be thrown into a curry in a pinch.

Canned fish is familiar and well liked. Fish, shrimp, or prawn paste has been a well-regarded staple of the Karen refugee diet for years. Karen do not drink regular milk but find tinned condensed milk essential, mainly for adding to instant coffee or black tea. Many like green tea as well. Fruits such as bananas, oranges, and mangoes are a treat. Karen do not eat bread.
Many Karen are addicted to the simple pleasure of chewing betel nut, a mildly stimulating mixture of areca nut, lime, and leaf. So fond of this ancient Asian cultural practice are most older Karen that one elderly refugee said he would not go to the United States if he could not find betel there. Another elderly man had already begun to try to wean himself off betel by chewing melon seeds instead. Chewing gum might also work as a (pale) substitute.

**Cooking Utensils**

A large, round, ordinary metal cooking pot or saucepan of about 28 inches in diameter, with handles, is favored for cooking rice. Every family uses a wok for frying. Gas cookers will work fine, but many Karen will need to be made aware of the need to switch off the safety valve if the cooker is attached to a gas canister.

Karen commonly use metal-enamedled or plastic plates, and young children may thus be likely to break ceramic versions. Other essentials for cooking include a chopping board and, if possible, a mortar and pestle.

**Other Items**

Many Karen like to eat and hang out in comfort on the floor, and would love to have plastic mats on which to do so in a new home. Low stools are also popular. The usual chairs, tables, and cupboards of Western homes will make a pleasant if unfamiliar change for many.

Many families would appreciate having simple plastic plant pots and soil to grow herbs and vegetables. A large plastic basin for washing clothes would add a familiar touch to a new home.

Karen of both sexes generally wear a form of long skirt at home but are also fairly used to Western-style clothing such as shirts, T-shirts, trousers, shorts, and, for women, long skirts.

**Manners, Habits, and Conventions**

The Karen are a reticent, even shy people, and many will be surprised and perhaps worried by American directness of speech, voice levels, and body language. With the Karen, a quiet, low-key style of communication works best, peppered with lots of reassuring and friendly smiles. It is generally not good to approach issues too directly or straightforwardly, and it is good to re-ask a question to which no answer has yet been received, perhaps in different ways.

When a Karen folds his arms in front of him while talking to you, it is a sign of respect, not aggression or defensiveness. A Karen does not like to walk in front of
It is disconcerting for a Karen to be touched by a stranger.

another person and, if it is unavoidable, will pass with head slightly lowered to indicate respect or apology. Westerners should do the same with a Karen. It is disconcerting for a Karen to be touched by a stranger, however friendly or affectionate the intention. When handing something to another person, it is polite to use both hands, not just one.

Karen commonly do not call each other by name, but use instead titles like Grandfather, Auntie, Sister, and so on. It is startling for a Karen to be addressed by name only. Here are a few common titles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Karen</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Puu</td>
<td>Grandfather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pee</td>
<td>Grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tee</td>
<td>Mr. (or Uncle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mü ra</td>
<td>Ms. (or Auntie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naw</td>
<td>Miss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saw</td>
<td>A young Mr.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, the Karen like to be very self-reliant and to pursue an independent lifestyle within their own culturally close-knit communities. If a Karen is offered something, he or she may be reluctant to take it, even if the item is needed. Persevere gently. Karen do not like to boast or put themselves forward. They also do not like to complain.

In Karen families, males are generally the heads of household. Elders are given the greatest respect. Karen are very loving yet quite strict with children, and many parents use their hand or a rod to discipline a child.

It is good to be aware of the age and gender conventions when dealing with families, especially if it is easier—but not necessarily more tactful—to communicate with younger family members who may have more English.

The families in refugee camps have had access to only basic medical care for many years. Some people have become used to self-medicating and, in the interest of thrift, of using as little as possible. This may be a problem when it comes to following a course of medication.
Bibliography

This bibliography is in two parts. The first part lists the works that writers of this profile used to prepare their sections. The second part, which is annotated, lists books, reports, films, and Web sites for readers who would like to learn more about Burma and its peoples.

Sources


Vumson. (1986). Zo History, with an introduction to Zo culture, economy, religion, and their status as an ethnic minority in India, Burma, and Bangladesh. Mizoram, India: Author.

The sections on refugee experiences in Burma, Malaysia, Thailand, and the United States are based on information provided to the writers by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Bangkok, the Thailand Burma Border Consortium, resettlement agency staff in the United States, and the refugees themselves.

**Recommended Reading and Viewing**

**Books and Reports**

A PEN American Center Freedom to Write Report on writing under the military dictatorship, featuring stories by seven Burmese writers, selected and translated with an introduction and explanatory notes by Allott.

A fascinating reminiscence of the author’s many years in Burma, recounting strange tales of his encounters with Burmese spiritualism, the occult, and art.

A novel detailing the tragic story of a Burmese dissident in a Rangoon prison and his complex relationship with his jailers. Finalist for the 2006 Kiriyama Prize.

An in-depth look, based on personal in-country interviews, at how the fear of informers affects the lives of ordinary people.

The definitive work on Burmese crafts, filled with hundreds of photos.

Rangoon, Burma: Khin Myo Chit Theidi Sazin.
Entertaining essays on many aspects of Burmese culture.
A sensitive and penetrating account of life in modern Burma, with evocative descriptions. Recipient of the 2005 Kiriyama Notable Book award.

(Original work published in 1983)
The moving and turbulent story of a brother and sister living in limbo in the United States as émigrés.

(Original work published by in 1993)
A witty, vibrant novel about growing up in a repressive country.

A travelogue through Burma in the early post-World War II era, considered a classic of the genre.

Reportage of the 1988 uprising and the arrival of Aung San Suu Kyi on the Burmese political scene.

A novel about the conflict between Western and Burmese culture, offering insight into the social history of the late colonial period.

A novel about a Japanese woman’s tireless search for her Burmese half-brother born during World War II when her father, a Japanese officer fighting in Burma, fell in love with and married a Burmese woman.

New York: Counterpoint.
A travelogue that follows in the footsteps of a Victorian adventurer and civil servant in Burma.

Interviews with ordinary Burmese, providing an introduction to everyday life in Burma.
A short course in the spoken language, focusing on the practical; four cassette tapes and a handbook.
Available from http://www.microworld.uk.com/audioforum.asp

Based on Orwell’s experience as a police officer in colonial Burma, this novel casts a baleful eye on all whom it surveys, whether jaded colonial or Burmese.

Memoir of the author’s childhood in a remote part of Karenni State and his extraordinary journey from jungle guerrilla fighter to English student at Cambridge University. Awarded the 2002 Kiriyama Prize for nonfiction.

A highly readable history of Burmese painting from the Pagan period to the present, with over 250 photographs.

A fine account of what is polite and what is offensive in Burmese society.

A report on human rights abuses in Burma that also gives the reader an excellent picture of the ethnic complexity and difficult problems facing the country.

An academic study that is very accessible to the lay person, with hundreds of photos of the ancient architecture, painting, and sculpture of Pagan.

A fresh and provocative look at Burma’s history and current dilemmas.

A travelogue through remote Kachin areas in northern Burma.
Films

A 30-minute film chronicling the fascinating story of 70-year-old freedom fighter Major Mary, who now lives in a refugee camp on the Thailand-Burma border.

A moving 55-minute account of the lives of Burmese refugees on the Thailand-Burma border made over a period of 5 years.

A 90-minute documentary about the filmmaker’s trip from England to Burma with her Burma-born mother, who had deliberately “forgotten” her Burmese origins.

An absorbing movie about a young American doctor caught up in Burma’s 1988 uprising.

Web Sites

**Burma**

www.burmalibrary.org/
An enormous collection of documents on arts, education, recreation, society, and many other topics relating to contemporary Burma.

www.burmanet.org
An English language online news service, published outside Burma, compiling recent news articles and opinion pieces about the country.

www.irrawaddy.org
The online version of The Irrawaddy, a monthly magazine on Burma run by exiled Burmese journalists.

www.myanmar.com/myanmartimes/
www.myanmar.com/newspaper/nlm/index.html
The Burmese government newspaper Web site.

www.myanmar.gov.mm/Perspective/
The online version of Myanmar Perspectives, a magazine published from Burma presenting official government views on culture and politics.

**Chin**
www.cacc.info/
The Web site of the Chin Association of Christian Communication (CACC), providing general information about the Chin Christians.

www.chro.org/
The official Web site of the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO), providing up-to-date information on the situation in Chin State and the condition of Chin refugees.

**Karen**
www.khrf.org

www.freeburmarangers.org
The Rohingya are an ethnic, linguistic and religious minority from Arakan State in Myanmar. They are predominantly concentrated in the three townships of northern Arakan State adjacent to Bangladesh. They are ethnically related to the Chittagonian Bengali people living across the border in Bangladesh and practice Sunni Islam. Claiming the Rohingya are in fact Bengali, successive Myanmar governments have refused to recognize them as citizens. The 1982 Citizenship Law of Myanmar stripped the Rohingya of their nationality, making them stateless. Severe repression in the early 1990’s led to the flight of approximately one half million Rohingya from Burma into Bangladesh and 14,000 into Malaysia. Approximately 236,000 were repatriated from Bangladesh to Burma but have since returned due to ongoing persecution in Burma.

Daily Life

Camp Realities in Bangladesh
- 28,000 UNHCR-registered Rohingya live in two camps at the southernmost tip of Bangladesh
- More than half of camp population was born in camp
- UNHCR reports that 53% of camp population is at risk of personal safety, including SGBV, other threats and violence, detention and abduction for trafficking
- UNHCR reports exploitation of refugees by their own leaders

Urban Realities in Malaysia
- 20,000 UNHCR-registered Rohingya live in Malaysia without the protection of a camp
- Subject to same vulnerabilities as other refugees from Burma, including arrest, detention, deportation, trafficking and a lack of access to education and health care.
- UNHCR reports exploitation of refugees by their own leaders

US Resettlement Implications and lessons learned from Australia*
- Worried about family members and friends left behind, send remittances and call frequently*
- Population requires more intensive case management to learn life skills but they are eager to learn*
- Need special help learning about contacting emergency services, public transportation, modern h/h appliances, planning and budgeting, seeking and finding community services, English literacy and numeracy*
- Extremely grateful and receptive, resilient, hopeful and industrious*

Language (Rohingya language is similar to Chittagonian, which is closely related to Bengali)

Camp Realities in Bangladesh
- 14 % speak Bengali
- 3% speak English, of those 90% are men
- 2% speak Burmese, mostly elderly

Urban Realities in Malaysia
- Less than 20% speak Burmese
- Many speak Malay

US Resettlement Implications and lessons learned from Australia*
- Rohingya or Chittagonian language resources will be needed

Religion

Camp Realities in Bangladesh
- Camp population is 100% Muslim
- Informal worship in camp organized by refugees themselves

Urban Realities in Malaysia
- Often rely on local mosques to provide support in times of financial crisis
US Resettlement Implications and lessons learned from Australia*

- Want to be able to pray in mosques
- Mosques offer comfort in familiar rituals and ceremonies and provide context for adjustment as Muslims to new husband/wife role expectations, care and discipline of children, dress and cultural norms*

**Women/Girls**

**Camp Realities** in Bangladesh
- Religiously conservative, wear burkas
- Mostly illiterate
- Polygamy practiced by 10% of camp population
- UNHCR reports that sexual and gender-based violence is a major yet underreported protection concern
- UNHCR reports that some practice early marriage at 13 or 14, when puberty reached
- Girls stop going to school at puberty for security reasons
- Women do not work or do shopping in camp for security reasons

**Urban Realities** in Malaysia
- Women typically do not work outside the home, some street selling and domestic work close to home

**US Resettlement Implications** and lessons learned from Australia*

- Most cannot sign their name
- Single mothers may not want to live apart from each other
- Single mothers have most challenges – very fearful, difficulty with solo parenting and discipline, living on a limited budget, managing the household, leaving younger children in the care of older siblings*
- A needle, thread and fabric might help them feel at home

**Families**

**Camp Realities** in Bangladesh
- Average family destined for resettlement has four children
- 20% of households are headed by single women
- Family sizes fall along educational lines, more schooling, fewer children
- Camp schools only reach grade 5
- Children run throughout camp without supervision
- Many young children do not wear clothing from the waist down and urinate on the ground
- UNHCR reports that many children are forced to work at an early age (same activities as adults)
- UNHCR reports that domestic violence is rampant

**Urban Realities** in Malaysia
- UNHCR estimates that only slightly over 20% of the registered population of school-aged children is obtaining any form of education, in community-run or religious schools.
- Boys often work as unskilled laborers to help support the family

**US Resettlement Implications** and lessons learned from Australia*

- Will need comprehensive information and coaching on child safety and parenting
- Many children will be attending school for the first time
- Diapers and child toileting practices will be new to most
- Require education on domestic violence laws and protections
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Camp Realities</strong> in Bangladesh</td>
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<tr>
<td>- No formal employment available or allowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Some men find day labor outside camp farming, fishing, tailoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Two percent of men and women participate in camp programs in soap-making, pedicab repair, cell-phone repair, mushroom growing, sewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban Realities</strong> in Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Men and teenage boys perform unskilled labor such as grass cutting, scrap metal and garbage collection, fishing and restaurant work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Women typically stay in the home, some perform domestic work or sell items on the street</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**US Resettlement Implications** and lessons learned from Australia* |
- Men may have some employment history |
- Women will be fearful of leaving home alone

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<td>- Due to lack of security, afraid to open windows, live in dark, suffocating spaces</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Unhygienic food preparation and storage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- No familiarity with western bathrooms or kitchens; cook with compressed rice husks on dirt floors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Betelnut spitting very common</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Camp diet: rice, lentils, fish, chicken, goat, duck, salt, sugar, spices, palm oil. Insufficient due to sharing with unregistered refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban Realities</strong> in Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Large families live together under one roof, often 10 to 15 in a two bedroom dwelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Houses are very basic, containing little except some cooking implements and perhaps a few mattresses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Diet is insufficient due to lack of financial resources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**US Resettlement Implications** and lessons learned from Australia* |
- In Australia, suburban living made Rohingya feel profoundly sad and isolated at first* |
- Household cleanliness a persistent problem in Australia* |
- Need to learn hygiene to reduce infections |
- Only Halal food are consumed |
- Like food VERY spicy

<table>
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<td>- Anemia</td>
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<td>- Malnutrition</td>
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<td>- Tropical infections</td>
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<td>- Vision impairment</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Mental health – anxiety and trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban Realities</strong> in Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lack of access to health care which is considered an unaffordable luxury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Women give birth at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Preference in treating conditions such as diabetes and hypertension with traditional remedies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**US Resettlement Implications** and lessons learned from Australia* |
- Need to learn how to buy and prepare fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods |
- Little or no familiarity with western medicine |
- Anxious and traumatized due to past experiences

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE
theIRC.org/usprograms
TTSTA Tuesday
Week #14

Happy New Year!

This week will focus on immigrants and refugees from Bhutan. Starting from a Global to the Local perspective. The first website is information from the World Health Organization. The second provides information from a project the US government completed in the early 1990's called 'Country Studies' The table of contents links directly to the topics. Finally, the last link is to the WI Department of Health Services' Bhutanese refugee report. The two attachments provide further detail on the plight of the Bhutanese.

http://www.who.int/countries/bh/en/

WHO | Bhutan

www.who.int

The WHO country health profile of Bhutan provides key statistics and links to health topical databases, plus news, features and Bulletin journal articles on the ...

http://countrystudies.us/bhutan/

Bhutan Table of Contents - Country Studies
countrystudies.us

Custom Search Country Studies Index
BHUTANESE REFUGEE DATA SUMMARY 12/2013 – PRELIMINARY REPORT

www.dhs.wisconsin.gov

1 BHUTANESE REFUGEE DATA SUMMARY 12/2013 – PRELIMINARY REPORT. Bhutanese refugees started coming to Wisconsin in 2009. We had 17 arrivals that year.

Best,
The United States has launched a program to resettle tens of thousands of Bhutanese refugees from refugee camps in Nepal. The refugees, almost all ethnic Nepalis from southern Bhutan, have been living in camps in eastern Nepal since they were expelled from their homes in Bhutan more than 16 years ago. The refugees are unable to return to Bhutan or to settle permanently in Nepal.

Of the more than 100,000 refugees in Nepali camps, the United States will consider for resettlement at least 60,000. The first small group of refugees is expected to arrive in the United States before the end of 2007, with larger numbers anticipated by March and April 2008.

This Backgrounder provides Reception and Placement (R&P) agency staff and others assisting refugee newcomers with an overview of the Bhutanese refugees to help them prepare for the refugees’ arrival and resettlement needs. The Backgrounder briefly discusses the causes of the refugee problem, explains the need for third-country resettlement, and describes the characteristics of the refugee population.

Causes of the Refugee Problem

The great majority of Bhutanese refugees are descendants of people who in the late 1800s began migrating to southern Bhutan—lowland, malarial-infested regions shunned by the Druk Buddhist majority—in search of farmland. There they became known as Lhotsampas (“People of the South”).

Contact between the Druk in the north and the Lhotsampas in the south was limited, and over the years, the Lhotsampas retained their highly distinctive Nepali language, culture, and religion. Relations between the groups were for the most part conflict free. Under Bhutan's Nationality Law of 1958, the Lhotsampas enjoyed Bhutanese citizenship and were allowed to hold government jobs.

In the 1980s, however, Bhutan’s king and the ruling Druk majority became increasingly worried about the rapidly growing Lhotsampa.
work and earn a living. Only a small number of refugees have been able to acquire legal citizenship in Nepal. This occurs through marriage or descent.

With neither repatriation nor local integration a realistic possibility for the great majority of refugees, resettlement to a third country, such as the United States, has emerged as the only durable solution to the 16-year-old problem. The plan to resettle the refugees has been a divisive issue in the camps. While many welcome the chance to begin new lives in other countries, a group of politically active refugees opposes the resettlement plan, saying that repatriation to Bhutan is the only acceptable solution.

Characteristics of the Refugee Population

Camp Demographics
Approximately 107,000 refugees reside in seven camps in eastern Nepal: Beldangi-I, Beldangi-II, Beldangi-II Extension, Sanischare, Goldhap, Timai, and Khudunabari. A few hundred refugees are living outside the camps. The population is nearly evenly divided between males and females. Children under 18 make up a little more than 35% of the population, with nearly 8% under the age of 5. Adults age 60 and older make up nearly 7% of the population.

Ethnicity, Language, and Religion
Almost 97% of the refugees are ethnic Nepalis. The non-Nepalis include the Sharchop, Drukpa, Urow, and Khenpga ethnic groups. Nearly all refugees speak Nepali as a first or second language. UNHCR estimates that about 35% of the population has a functional knowledge of English.

Of the refugee population, 60% are Hindu, 27% are Buddhists, and about 10% are Kirat, an indigenous religion similar to animism. The percentage of Christians in each camp varies from 1% to 7%.
Education

Education in camp schools is conducted in Nepali and English and follows a modified version of the Bhutanese curriculum through Grade 10. Beyond Grade 10, students attend local Nepali schools outside of the camp. Some students have attended secondary schools and universities in India.

Social and Occupational Backgrounds

Like the Nepalis in Nepal, the Nepalis from Bhutan divide themselves into castes. Their caste system separates people into different social levels and influences the choice of marriage and other social relationships. Interestingly, the percentage of refugees with no education does not vary greatly by caste, probably because there is equal access to education in the camps. High-caste individuals are much more likely to have a postsecondary education than members of low castes, however.

In their occupational backgrounds, most refugees identify themselves as farmers or students. Other occupations include primary and secondary teachers, social workers, tailors, weavers, and housekeepers. Most refugees have not had opportunities to acquire job skills in the camps. Plans by UNHCR are underway to provide camp residents with vocational training.

Family and Gender Roles

The average household size is approximately 8 persons and typically consists of elderly parents, married sons and their wives and children, and unmarried children. Refugees consider extended family members, such as aunts, uncles, and cousins, part of the immediate family. After marriage, women traditionally move from their parents’ household to that of their husband.

Polygamy, while not common, is practiced: Of the more than 15,000 households in the camps, there are more than 500 with a polygamous marriage or relationship within the household. Often the two wives are sisters or other blood relatives, and in some cases, one of the women is disabled or otherwise in need of special help.

Gender roles are distinct and clearly defined. Girls experience heavier household workloads than boys, a distinction that continues into adulthood. Women generally do not have equal access to information and resources and do not enjoy equal decision-making authority in the family and the community. In certain social groups, divorced and widowed women have a low position within the extended family and often must raise children without the support of family members. A female victim of sexual abuse or rape and her family typically face ostracism and harassment by the community.

Ties to the United States

The Bhutanese community in the United States is extremely small, with an estimated 150 Bhutanese living in areas surrounding Atlanta, New York City, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. As a result, almost none of the refugees have family ties in the United States.

Diet

A typical meal for the refugees consists of rice, lentils, and curry. Some people abstain from meat. Because of the Hindu belief that cows are sacred, Hindus do not eat beef, and as a result it is generally not available in the camp. Refugee camp residents commonly eat chicken and goat.

Exposure to Modern Amenities and the West

The camp population includes refugees with little exposure to urban amenities and very limited knowledge of life in the West. Refugees cook on solar rice cookers and with charcoal; most will not be familiar with modern cooking appliances and practices.

Traditional Practices that May Conflict with U.S. Customs

In addition to the occasional practice of polygamy, arranged and early marriages are a feature of traditional culture. Traditional medicine practices exist alongside modern medicine. Among Hindus, animals are sacrificed during festivals and marriage ceremonies.
Resettlement Considerations

Refugees approved for resettlement will undergo an intensive 3-day/15-hour pre-departure orientation to prepare them for their first few months in the United States. Cultural Orientation (CO) sessions will be held initially at the Damak Office of the International Organization for Migration in eastern Nepal. It is envisioned that once conditions allow, 3-day CO courses will be held in the refugee camps with a 1-day refresher class to be held at the transit center in Katmandu before departure. Based on CAL’s Welcome to the U.S. guide and video, the CO curriculum will cover the following topics: pre-departure processing, role of the resettlement agency, housing, employment, transportation, education, health, money management, rights and responsibilities, cultural adjustment, and travel.

For rural refugees who have lived for years in camps with little opportunity to work, employment will be a challenging experience. English language training will be an important need for many within this population, who will arrive in the United States with little or no English. Some refugees will have completed secondary school and will arrive with aspirations for higher education.

The refugees are reluctant to be separated from extended family members and may prefer to adapt to their new surroundings amid strong and supportive family relationships.
The following material is intended to augment the Refugee Backgrounder, *Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal* (published by the Cultural Orientation Resource Center at the Center for Applied Linguistics in October 2007), in advance of the completion of an Enhanced Refugee Backgrounder on this population. The information was provided by UNHCR Department of International Protection, Resettlement Service, Senior Resettlement Coordinator Jennifer Ashton, and area expert Mangala Sharma; it was also reviewed and supplemented by other UNHCR staff with expertise on the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal.

**Background**

The complex Hindu caste system of the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal (based upon and similar to the Indian caste system, but not exactly the same) is a means for ensuring social and economic cohesion and hierarchy in a population that is ethnically diverse. Traditionally, certain occupations are ascribed to each caste: Brahmins are teachers, Chettris are warriors, others are merchants or skilled craftsmen, and so on.

Each refugee’s caste is designated by their surname. For example, the surname “Sharma” indicates that its bearer is a Brahmin, while the surname “Gurung” indicates a member of a Tibeto-Burman ethnic group. As such, refugees can tell immediately who belongs to which caste.

While the more modern and educated members of the population do not necessarily adhere to all elements of the caste system, the more traditional members are very strict, particularly if they are of what are known as the upper castes. Caste is considered an important means of protecting purity, and intermingling of castes in certain circumstances can mean that this purity is disturbed. (Additional information on caste relationships and surnames will be included in the forthcoming Enhanced Refugee Backgrounder.)

**Resettlement Considerations**

While the complexities of caste are something with which a service provider need not be familiar, there are certain important considerations for resettlement staff members and volunteers.

**Housing:** Grouping members of different castes in the same house or apartment (such as housing singles together) is likely to present substantial difficulties. The use, and “purity,” of kitchens and prayer areas is particularly sensitive for older people of “higher” castes. Such traditions are well-respected by different castes, so co-occupants of different castes are likely to find a way to adjust. However, this means that such mixed-caste groupings would require separate kitchen spaces.

**Visits:** For some families, if visitors not of their caste enter their house, ritual purification by a priest will be required after the visit. Thus care should be taken to seek the permission of a family before entering the house. It is also important to request permission to enter prayer rooms and the kitchen, and food should not be touched. Unexpected visits may also be unwelcome.
Meals: Many older members of the refugee group (and most of the older orthodox Hindus of higher caste populations) will not eat food that has meats, eggs, or any cooked food. Resettlement agencies should focus more on providing fruit, bread, lentils and rice (to be cooked later by the refugees themselves) and other vegetarian items. Refugees of different castes may also not be able to share a meal.

Social Gatherings: Some refugees may not appreciate efforts to have all the Bhutanese refugees resettled in a community gather for social occasions. Sometimes members of different castes may attend the same function, but prefer to sit at different tables.

Special Populations: As the most traditional members of the refugee populations, older refugees are likely to benefit from a meeting place where they can talk, perform prayers together, and secure services from agencies. Widows may also require particular attention, as may wives divorced by polygamous husbands obligated to divorce all but one wife in order to gain admission to the U.S. These groups may require additional material, emotional, and spiritual support as they resettle.

Resources

Additional information on the caste system and culture of various ethnic groups included in the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal can be found at http://countrystudies.us/Nepal (once at this site, you can either type “31.htm” at the end of the URL address, or scroll down to select the section on “Caste and Ethnicity” within the chapter on “The Society”).
TTSTA Tuesday
Week #15

Good Morning,

Happy TTSTA 'Tuesday' #15. This week focuses on the refugees from Iraq. The first link takes you to a quick snapshot of the Iraqi health screening data from 2013. That is the most up-to-date data available on the WI-DHS website. The second link is the most up-to-date and comprehensive information from the CDC. It takes a bit of time to review the report, but it will leave you with a good sense of the people, culture, practices, health, and plight of the Iraqi refugees. Similar information is linked below from CulturalOrientation.net but it is not as current. I did appreciate the easy to understand content presented. I will continue this series with the Somalis next week.

https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p0/p00505.pdf

IRAQI REFUGEE DATA SUMMARY 12/2013 – PRELIMINARY REPORT

www.dhs.wisconsin.gov


U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for ...

www.cdc.gov

1 IRAQI REFEGEE HEALTH PROFILE U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic ...

http://www.culturalorientation.net/learning/populations/iraq
Refugees from Iraq. Hear from a refugee senior from Iraq, and other refugee seniors, as they discuss their experiences and give advice to others considering...
Refugees from Iraq
Their History, Cultures, and Background Experiences

Writers: Edmund Ghareeb, Donald Ranard, and Jenab Tutunji
Editor: Donald A. Ranard

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http://www.cal.org
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Proofreading: Craig Packard
Cover: Ellipse Design
Design, illustration, production: Ellipse Design

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The Iraqis: Their History, Cultures, and Background Experiences

Acknowledgments

This Enhanced Refugee Backgrounder is a new and substantially revised version of a 1995 publication by the Center for Applied Linguistics: The Iraqis: Their History and Culture, written by Barbara Robson with Margaret Nydell. Like past Refugee Backgrounders and Culture Profiles, this publication is the result of a joint effort by area specialists and refugee resettlement professionals. The sections on Iraq's history, culture, and society were prepared by two scholars of the Middle East, Dr. Edmund Ghareeb and Dr. Jenab Tutunji. Dr. Ghareeb is the first Barzani Scholar of Global Kurdish Studies at American University's Center for Global Peace and an internationally recognized expert on the Kurds and Iraq. Dr. Tutunji is a lecturer in political science at The George Washington University, specializing in the Middle East and comparative politics, and the former managing editor of The Jordan Times.

The sections on Iraq's refugees and their resettlement needs were written by the editor, Donald A. Ranard, based on information and text sent by staff of the Overseas Processing Entities in Egypt and Turkey and by U.S. refugee resettlement agencies.

We are grateful to Dr. Peter Sluglett for carefully reviewing the Backgrounder for accuracy, detail, and balance. Dr. Sluglett is Professor of Middle Eastern History, University of Utah, and a leading historian of modern Iraq. We are also grateful to Fadi Jajii, an Iraqi Arabic translator in Boston, for translating the Arabic words and phrases that appear in the Backgrounder.

We would also like to acknowledge the valuable assistance of our colleagues at the Center for Applied Linguistics. In particular, we would like to thank Dora Johnson, who provided us with lists of possible writers and reviewers; Colleen Mahar-Piersma, who reviewed and commented on early drafts of the manuscript; Craig Packard, who worked closely with the Arabic translator; and Jeannie Rennie, who corrected and improved the text through her expert copy editing.

Finally, we would like to thank the Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) at the U.S. Department of State, whose support made this Enhanced Backgrounder possible. Special thanks go to Barbara Day, Domestic Section Chief in the Office of Admissions at PRM, for her guidance and assistance throughout the development of this publication.

Sanja Bebic, Director, Cultural Orientation Resource Center
Donald A. Ranard, Editor
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Introduction

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that more than four million Iraqis have been displaced by the war in Iraq and its aftermath. Of these, about two million people have found asylum in neighboring countries, where many eke out a marginal living in poor, inner-city neighborhoods, often by working illegally for low wages as laborers, drivers, and restaurant workers. Most Iraqi asylees are living in Syria and Jordan, but Iraqis have also sought asylum in Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, and Turkey.

Because most Iraqis are unable to return to Iraq safely or to settle permanently in the countries to which they have fled, Western nations, including the United States, have begun to resettle those refugees who are considered by the UNHCR to be at greatest risk. The new Iraqi arrivals will be joining previous groups of Iraqi refugees resettled in the United States. After the 1991 Gulf War, an estimated 12,000 Iraqis were admitted to the United States, and in 1996, about 6,500 Iraqis who had links to a U.S.-sponsored coup attempt against the regime in Iraq were granted asylum.

Before Iraqis came to the United States as refugees, thousands entered the country as immigrants, and today there are thriving Iraqi-American communities in many American cities, with Detroit, Chicago, and San Diego hosting the largest populations. In the 2000 U.S. Census, 90,000 people claimed Iraq as their birthplace. Many of the 120,000 Christians who have fled Iraq since 2003 are believed to have relatives in the United States.

This Enhanced Refugee Backgrounder provides basic information about the history, cultures, and background experiences of the new Iraqi arrivals. It also looks at the experiences of refugees in the countries of first asylum and potential resettlement issues. For readers who wish to learn more about Iraq and its peoples, we provide a list of books, articles, reports, and Web site resources at the end of the Backgrounder.

This publication is intended primarily for refugee resettlement agency staff who will be assisting the refugees in their new communities in the United States. But others may find the Backgrounder useful, too. Local government agencies—the housing and health departments, the courts, and the police—may use the Backgrounder to provide the new arrivals with the services they need, while teachers may use it to help their students better understand events that are shaping their future world.

People

Iraq includes a number of diverse ethnic groups, religions, and languages. According to the CIA’s online World Factbook, Iraq’s population is currently about 28 million, of whom 75% to 80% are Arabs and 15% to 20% are Kurds, with smaller numbers of Armenians, Assyrians, and Turkomen. Islam is the predominant religion, practiced by 97% of the population. Of Iraqi Muslims, 60% to 65% are Shi’i Arabs and 32% to 37% are Sunni Arabs or Kurds. A small number of Iraqis, including Ali-Ilahis and Yazidis, are syncretic Muslims. Christians make up 3% of the population: Armenians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans are all Christians, and there are also some Arab Christians. Arabic, the national language, is spoken with some level of proficiency by all Iraqis.
Land and Climate

Land

The origin of the term Iraq is a subject of debate among scholars. References to it are made in pre-Islamic Arab poetry and by early Muslim historians. Some say it is derived from the country’s ancient name, Araqi, meaning “on the land of the sun.” Others believe that the term is the Arabized version of Irah, which in ancient Asiatic languages meant “sea coast” or “riverside.” Still others say it derives from the Persian word erag, meaning “lowland.”

With an area of about 172,960 square miles, Iraq is slightly larger than the U.S. state of Texas. Located in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq is bounded on the north by Turkey, on the east by Iran, on the southeast by Kuwait, on the south and southwest by Saudi Arabia and Jordan, and on the west by Syria. Its shallow coastline on the Gulf extends only about 37 miles from Ras Bisha to Um Qasr. As part of the shortest land route between Europe and Southeast Asia, Iraq has served as a bridge between Asia, Africa, and Europe, and between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean.

Iraq’s flat desert lands to the southwest and its numerous passes through the northern and eastern mountains have made the country vulnerable to foreign invasions and migrations since the dawn of history. Its population, comprising a diverse mosaic of ethnic and religious groups, reflects this history.

Climate

Iraq is located in the warmer part of the Northern Temperate Zone. Hot and dry summers usually last from May to October, when temperatures range from 97°F to 110°F in the central and southern regions and may reach a daytime high of 120°F. Temperatures in the hilly and mountainous northern areas are usually cooler. Humidity is generally low except in areas close to rivers, lakes, marshes, or the sea.

Winter usually lasts from November to early March. Winter nights are very cold whereas days are mild. The northern areas have longer autumn and spring seasons. Rains fall in winter and spring and are heavier in the mountainous areas. The desert, central, and southern areas receive an average of 6 inches of rain annually, but in the northeast, heavier rains, ranging from 16 to 23 inches annually, make it possible to grow crops without irrigation. The mountains of Kurdistan receive about 39 inches of rain annually. Heavy snows fall in the high mountains during the winter.

Economy

Iraq’s economy shrank by more than 14% in 2002 and by 35% in 2003, the year of the U.S. occupation. The economy rebounded in 2004, then settled down to a more normal rate in 2005, although there is considerable inflation, reaching about 30% for most consumer items in 2006. Per capita income is about $1,190. According to a recent poll, more than 60% of Iraqis complain that basic household goods are unavailable.

Iraq’s economy is dominated by oil production, and in recent years oil resources have accounted for more than half of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP). Oil output peaked at 3.6 million barrels per day in the early 1980s but fell as a result of the 1980–1988 Iran–Iraq war and the 1991 Gulf War. The economic sanctions from 1991 to 2003 prevented reconstruction.
Since 2003, Iraq's oil production has settled to about 2 million barrels per day. As a result of the insurgency and sabotage, efforts to increase production have largely failed. Lack of security has hindered reconstruction efforts and scared off foreign investors.

Iraq is believed to have the world's third largest petroleum reserves, amounting to about 116 billion barrels. One recent estimate gives Iraq another 100 billion barrels of reserves in the largely unexplored Sunni-inhabited region west of Baghdad. If accurate, this estimate would dramatically alter the calculations of politicians, because Iraq's main oil wealth currently comes from the Shi'i-dominated south.

The second largest developed oil fields in Iraq, after the Shi'i areas in the south, are in Kurdish areas. The Iraqi cabinet is currently considering a law that would place all oil fields under the control of the central government. The Kurdistan Regional Government is resisting this and has been concluding separate oil deals on its own. Recent months have also seen tensions between the Kurds and Iraqi Arabs over the future of oil-rich Kirkuk, which is claimed by both groups.

**History**

**Early History**

Iraq has played a long and unique role in human history. The area witnessed the birth and evolution of the world's oldest human civilization. Its peoples developed a sophisticated irrigation system; invented the wheel; began the study of astronomy, mathematics, law, literature, music, and art; and developed a writing system that is the source of the roman alphabet.

**The Islamic Empire**

Before its conquest by Muslim Arabs, the Arab kingdom of Hira, a vassal of the Sasanian (Persian) Empire, was established as a center of trade and culture in Iraq in the 3rd century C.E. In 637 C.E., soon after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslim Arabs invaded Iraq and defeated the Sasanian forces. By 750 C.E., Iraq had become the center of a new empire that would eventually extend from Spain across central Asia to parts of India.

The ruling Abbasid caliphs—that is, caliphs claiming descent from Abbas, uncle of the Prophet Muhammad—established Baghdad as their capital. It became one of the largest cities in the world, a center of arts and sciences and the birthplace of religious and revolutionary movements that shaped Islamic history.

Over the next few centuries, however, the centralized power of the caliphate gradually waned, and the empire fragmented into autonomous regions called emirates. In 1258, the Mongols invaded Iraq, demolishing the Abbasid caliphate and destroying what had taken five centuries to build. Iraq became a neglected frontier province where power rested in the hands of tribal sheikhs.

**Ottoman Rule**

In 1508, the Safavids of Iran seized control of Iraq but a few years later were forced out by the Sunni Ottoman Turks. Ottoman rule encountered continual difficulties in Iraq, including tribal uprisings, confrontations with Persia, and—after the conversions of many of Iraq's Sunni tribesmen to Shi'ism in the 19th century—hostility from Iraqi Shi'is, who resented the rule of a Sunni government imposed from afar. Gradually the Ottomans gave up power to local leaders.
The final days of the Ottoman Empire drew Iraq into international politics. Britain grew increasingly interested in the country because of growing international imperial rivalries. The growing need for oil in the West and its discovery in Iran immediately before World War I also had important repercussions.

During World War I, the Ottoman Turks sided with Germany against Britain, France, the United States, and their allies. After Germany’s defeat, the Ottoman Empire was dismantled. As a result of the 1919 Paris Peace Conference and the creation of the League of Nations, the former Arab provinces of the Empire were divided between France and Britain in the form of mandates of the League. Britain was given the mandate over the area that is now roughly Iraq, Israel, Jordan, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip, while France was given the mandate over the area that is now Lebanon and Syria.

Creation of the Modern State of Iraq and the Monarchy

In 1920, Iraqi national and religious agitation triggered a major revolt against British rule in Iraq. After putting down the rebellion, Britain marginalized the Shi'i clerics and some Sunni tribal leaders, and appointed mostly Sunnis to the bureaucracy and army while buying the loyalty of Shi'i and other tribal leaders by granting them large estates. King Faysal, who had fought with Britain in the Arab Revolt against the Ottomans, was made king of Iraq in 1921.

Britain’s mandate gave it control over Iraq’s foreign and defense policies and the rights to several military bases. In 1925, the Iraqi government granted a concession to a British-dominated oil company. Two years later, the first major oil discoveries were made near Kirkuk.

In 1932, Iraq earned nominal independence, becoming a full member of the League of Nations. Skirmishes between a group of Assyrians and the Iraqi army triggered a brutal government crackdown. In 1935, Shi'i clerics and tribal leaders led a rebellion against the government, demanding greater representation. In the mid-1940s, the government crushed a Kurdish uprising led by the newly formed Kurdish Democratic Party.

The mid-1950s saw the formation of the Baghdad Pact, an alliance by Britain, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey to strengthen regional defense and contain the Soviet Union. After the British, French, and Israeli invasion of Egypt in 1956, riots broke out in Iraq in support of Egypt and against the Baghdad Pact, Britain, and the Iraqi regime.

Two Brief Republics

In mid-1958, General Abd al-Karim Qasim and a group of officers overthrew the Iraqi monarchy and the pro-British regime that supported it. The new government formed a republic and withdrew Iraq from the Baghdad Pact. In 1963, Qasim was himself overthrown by a coup led by the Ba'th party and the army. After the coup, Ba'thists were excluded from power, army influence in Iraqi politics greatly increased, and the new regime espoused an Arab nationalist ideology. In 1966, the Kurds accepted a plan giving them greater political and cultural rights, but this soon fell by the wayside.

The Ba’th Regime

In 1968, a second Ba’th coup established the regime that would stay in power until 2003. Initially, the Ba’th regime launched an intensive development effort to improve Iraq’s standards of living and technical capabilities. In 1972, Iraq nationalized the Iraq Petroleum Company.

A Kurdish rebellion, with Iranian support, broke out in the Kurdish areas in 1974. After border clashes, Iran and Iraq settled their differences in Algiers in March 1975, and the Kurdish uprising collapsed.

In 1979, Saddam Hussein, who was then vice president, appointed himself president of Iraq. That year, the Ayatollah Khomeini established an Islamic Republic in Iran, setting the stage for a confrontation between
Baghdad's secular Arab nationalist regime and Tehran's Islamic regime. Tehran encouraged sabotage operations in Iraq and provoked clashes along the border. Probably calculating that war was unavoidable, Saddam Hussein took the offensive and initiated a war that lasted eight years. Iraq scored some initial successes, but Iran turned the tide and occupied the Fao Peninsula and devastated Basra, damaging Iraq's oil installations.

The Kurds took advantage of the war to carve out a largely independent area in the north, aiding Iranian forces in the process. As the war with Iran ended, Saddam launched an assault on the Kurdish guerrillas, destroying Kurdish towns and border villages. According to some estimates, as many as 200,000 Kurds were killed.

Because the war seriously damaged Iraq's capacity to produce and export oil, Saddam obtained financing for the war through loans and grants from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. When the war ended, Kuwait demanded repayment of the loans. Unable to reach agreement with Kuwait or to get new loans from foreign banks, and perhaps misreading signals from Washington, Saddam Hussein invaded and annexed Kuwait in late 1990.

**The First Gulf War**

The United States demanded that Iraq withdraw from Kuwait unconditionally, while the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) imposed an arms embargo and economic sanctions on Iraq. Early in 1991, the United States and its allies launched Operation Desert Storm, liberating Kuwait and devastating Iraq's civilian and military infrastructure.

A UNSC mandate called for the destruction of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and imposed a UN arms inspection regime. Encouraged by messages of support from U.S. President George H. W. Bush, Shi'is in southern Iraq led an uprising against the hated Ba'thist regime. Supported by deserters from the defeated Iraqi army, the rebels launched a rampage against Ba'th officials and their families. The government retaliated brutally, killing thousands.

In the north, a Kurdish rebellion was defeated, causing nearly two million Kurds to flee toward the Turkish and Iranian borders. The UNSC created a UN safe haven for the Kurds in the north, and in 1992, the Kurdistan Regional Government, made up of two parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, was created. Fighting between the Kurdish parties soon broke out and continued sporadically until 1998.

When the Gulf War ended, the UNSC maintained the arms embargo and economic sanctions against Iraq. U.S. aircraft enforced no-fly zones over the Kurdish area in the north and Shi'i areas in the south, while UN inspections continued. A 1999 survey by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) found that half a million children under the age of five had died in the south since the war, due to the destruction of public health facilities and to malnutrition and shortages of medicines related to the sanctions.

In 1998, Iraq ended its cooperation with the UN inspectors. In retaliation, the U.S. Congress passed the Iraq Liberation Act, providing funding for pro-democracy groups in or outside Iraq opposed to the Baghdad regime. Meanwhile, the Clinton Administration's Iraq policy was evolving from containment to regime change, and in December 1998, U.S. and U.K. forces launched Operation Desert Fox, an aerial bombardment campaign to degrade Iraq's air defenses further and weaken Saddam Hussein's regime.

**The 2003 Invasion of Iraq and the New Iraq**

The evolution of U.S policy toward regime change in Iraq accelerated after George W. Bush became president. The Republican Party platform in the 2000 elections had advocated the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, but it took the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, to galvanize the White House into action. On September 20, President Bush announced the start of the War on Terrorism, and in his State of the Union address in January 2002 he declared Iraq to be part of an “axis of evil.” The Bush administration appeared convinced that a regime change in Baghdad was necessary.
On September 12, 2002, President Bush presented the UNSC with the U.S. case for invading Iraq, but after bitter debate, the Council merely authorized the resumption of inspections, threatening “serious consequences” for Iraq's recalcitrance. President Bush met with better luck at home, as the U.S. Congress passed the Joint Resolution to Authorize the Use of United States Armed Forces Against Iraq. The invasion of Iraq began on March 20, 2003, with the United States and Britain in the lead and with the participation of a “Coalition of the Willing” that included Australia, Denmark, Poland, and Spain. The United States supplied most of the forces. Unlike the 1990–1991 Gulf War, the 2003 invasion did not enjoy the support of the UN or of major European allies such as France and Germany.

After Baghdad fell on April 12, 2003, a wave of looting and vandalism led to the plunder of the National Library and National Museum. Coalition forces in Iraq found neither weapons of mass destruction nor any evidence linking Saddam to the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Shortly after the invasion, the coalition created the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) as a transitional government. Informal power structures parallel to those of the CPA emerged in the cities in southern Iraq and in the impoverished Sadr City in East Baghdad. Clashes occurred between these indigenous leaders and CPA-appointed Iraqi officials. In the north, the coalition left intact the structure of the Kurdistan Regional Government. Seeing an opportunity to maximize their gains, the Kurds tried to extend their control and authority.

Under presidential envoy and CPA administrator Paul Bremer, the CPA formed a Governing Council to prepare for parliamentary elections and the drafting of a new constitution. The Shi'i leadership (and the Americans) sought to ensure that the majority Shi'is would rule Iraq, ending the era of Sunni domination. Bremer dissolved the Iraqi army, banned the Ba'th Party from participating in Iraq's government, and moved to privatize the economy. Alienated Sunnis mounted an insurgency led by former Ba'th leaders and disgruntled former Iraqi army and intelligence officers. The international terrorist network al-Qa'ida, which did not exist in Iraq before 2003, emerged to launch a brutal terrorist campaign against its U.S. and Iraqi opponents. Shi'i and Sunni political leaders sought to manipulate the anxieties of the population into support for one side or the other.

In mid-2003, after the Governing Council agreed to an interim constitution, a UNSC resolution transferred sovereignty to an Iraqi government. An interim National Assembly was formed, and National Assembly elections, largely boycotted by the Sunnis, were held in January 2004.

In May 2005, the Iraqi Transitional Government was formed in line with the results of the January elections, with a Shi'i prime minister, a Kurdish president, and one Shi'i and one Sunni vice president. A constitution was approved by referendum the following October.

December 2005 saw a second round of elections. Turnout was high, even among Sunnis. The main winners were the Shi'i-dominated United Iraqi Alliance and the two main Kurdish parties, although the Iraqi Accord Front, which is the main Sunni Arab Islamist party, also won a substantial number of seats. In May 2006, a new cabinet headed by Nuri al-Maliki, a Shi'i leader, was formed.

Iraq has been plagued by the absence of law and order since the U.S. invasion in 2003. Al-Qa'ida was joined in its fight by Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, a terrorist leader from Jordan. Whose campaign included suicide bombings and attacks on civilians. Shi'i militias infiltrated the newly created police and security forces and formed death squads that assassinated leaders of the Sunni insurgency as well as many innocent civilians. The insurgents' sabotage of oil exports kept oil production to between half a million and one million barrels a day below the pre-war average.

Initially Sunni and Shi'i leaders preached national cohesion and played down ethnic and sectarian differences, but the cycle of sectarian killings and revenge took its toll. In 2006, the bombing of the Imam al-'Askari Shrine, a historic Shi'i mosque, opened the floodgates to sectarian killing. Both Sunni and Shi'i
militias engaged in widespread ethnic cleansing in Baghdad and elsewhere. Neighborhoods that had always had a mixed population became homogeneous.

In an effort to establish security, the United States increased its troops in Iraq to clear areas of Baghdad from insurgents and Shi’i militias. This strategy became known as “the surge.” The effort restored stability to certain areas of the capital. U.S. forces also formed alliances with Sunni Bedouin chiefs in what seemed an effective alliance against al-Qa’ida, although critics questioned the wisdom of a policy of arming Sunni tribesmen.

Politically, the situation remains uncertain. In early February 2008, after weeks of bitter debate, the Iraqi parliament took an important step toward political reconciliation when it passed three sensitive measures: the 2008 budget, a law outlining the scope of provincial powers, and an amnesty that would apply to thousands of the detainees held in Iraqi jails. While praising the passage of the laws—something that could not have happened a year before when sectarian violence raged—analysts noted potential hurdles in their implementation. Other thorny political issues facing the country include Sunni demands to share more power and government efforts to convince armed groups to maintain their ceasefires. As this publication goes to press in October 2008, the major question facing the leaders of Iraq is whether they will be able to work together to pave the way to sectarian reconciliation.

Meanwhile, war and general lawlessness in Iraq continue to cause Iraqis to flee their homes. Today, an estimated two million Iraqis have taken refuge in neighboring countries, mostly in Syria and Jordan. For a discussion of life in the asylum countries, see page 29 of this publication.

Ethnic and Religious Communities in Iraq

After the creation of the Iraqi state, Iraqis began to develop a common identity. Over the last two decades, as the result of recent events—the Iran–Iraq War, the Gulf War, and the 2003 war and its aftermath—sectarian, tribal, and ethnic identities have become increasingly central to a person’s social identity. As a result, ties to a broader social unit are becoming harder to forge. In the recent past, many Iraqis intermarried across sects and ethnicities. Today, intermarriage is less common.

In this section, we look at Iraq’s different ethnic and religious communities. We devote more attention to Iraqi Christians than their relatively small numbers in Iraq would seem to justify because they represent a substantial proportion of the refugees currently being resettled in the United States.

Iraqi Arabs

Everyday behavior among Iraqi Arabs often reflects Islamic belief and custom. While one finds great differences in individual behavior depending on educational background and exposure to the West, some generalizations are valid for most Iraqi Arabs, if not for most Arabs.

Religion

Most Iraqi Arabs, Kurds, and Turkomen are Muslims, making Islam the religion of about 95% of the country’s population. Although an individual Iraqi might not adhere strictly to all of its beliefs and practices, Islam is and has always been a very powerful social force in the country. Iraqis are torn between tradition and modernity, and in response to political events, more and more have been turning to religion, although Iraq’s urban society used to be highly secular.

Islam is the most recent of the world religions to have arisen in the Middle East. It was founded by the Prophet Muhammad, who was born in Mecca in the 6th century C.E. and is believed to have received his
first revelations from God in about 610. His flight from Mecca to Medina in 622 to escape persecution marks
the beginning of the Islamic calendar. This calendar is a lunar calendar rather than a solar one; as a result,
the Islamic year is eleven days shorter than the Western year.

Muhammad’s divine revelations have been collected in the Koran, and this, along with his sayings and
records of his personal conduct—the Hadith—form the basis for a code of behavior that is relatively
standard across the Muslim world, despite local variations. In addition to the Koran and Hadith, Islam
recognizes the Pentateuch and Psalms from the Old Testament and the Christian Gospels from the New
Testament, although they are considered to have been altered by man and not to represent exactly the
words of God.

Traditional Islamic belief considers religion to be inseparable from law, commerce, and social policies.
Today, however, almost all Muslim countries (Saudi Arabia and Iran are notable exceptions) have adapted
Western legal codes, although matters of family law are usually still handled in Islamic courts of law. Un-
der Saddam Hussein, the Ba‘th government of Iraq was a resolutely secular one, and as such was at odds
with traditional Islamic tenets. Since the outbreak of violence between Sunnis and Shi‘is, adherents of the
two sects have tended to become more outwardly religious.

The everyday behavior of Muslims reflects the five basic teachings of Islam, commonly referred to as the
Five Pillars of Islam. These teachings are observed throughout the Muslim world.

The first pillar is the declaration of faith, encapsulated in the phrase, “There is no god but God, and Mu-
hammad is the prophet of God.” This is the basic affirmation of Islamic belief: Saying and firmly believing
it qualifies one as a Muslim.

The second pillar is prayer. Several times a day (five times a day for Sunnis and three times for Shi‘is),
Muslims are required to pray, facing Mecca, in a series of prayers said first from a standing and then from
a kneeling position. People are encouraged to pray in the mosque, and the bigger mosques have special
areas for women. In Islam, Friday is somewhat parallel to the Christian Sunday: On this day, Arabs are
expected to go to the mosque to pray and hear a sermon. Prayer times are announced by muezzins who
chant from the minarets of mosques at the appropriate times each day (although today most of the calls
to prayer are recorded). The common sight of a simple laborer praying by himself in the middle of a city,
oblivious to the traffic and bustle around him, is a reminder that one is in an Islamic country. Another re-

The third pillar is fasting. The 9th month of the Islamic year is Ramadan, and Muslims are expected
throughout the month to refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, and “other worldly pleasures” all day
long. Certain exceptions—soldiers, travelers, children, the sick, the elderly, pregnant and menstruating
women—are allowed. Traditionally, the day is carefully measured: It begins when there is enough light
to distinguish a black thread from a white thread, and ends when the last light has left the sky. The main
meal of the day is after sunset, and special care is taken that poor people are adequately fed.

Because the Islamic calendar is lunar, Ramadan rotates through the year, occurring eleven days earlier
each year. Work slows down considerably during Ramadan. Westerners who work in Islamic countries
learn not to expect to get much done during the month.

The extent to which Ramadan is observed varies from individual to individual and from society to society.
In recent years, with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, more Muslims are fasting. There have always
been many Muslim individuals and communities in the United States who observe Ramadan.

The fourth pillar is the giving of alms. Traditionally, Muslims were expected to give one fortieth of their
income to those in need. Today, the exact contribution is left up to the individual conscience. Many peo-
ple contribute 2.5% (i.e., one fortieth) of their net income after basic family expenses are met.
The fifth pillar is the pilgrimage to Mecca, called the Hajj, the high point of a devout Muslim's religious experience. The trip is not required of people too poor to pay their own way, but many villagers will scrimp and save their whole lives to make the journey. There are restrictions on one's behavior while on the pilgrimage, including what one wears and what one does on reaching Mecca.

In addition to satisfying the requirements of the five pillars, a Muslim is expected to live a virtuous life and do good deeds. Central to this is the concept of jihad. Jihad has been classified either as al-jihād al-akbar ("greater jihad") or al-jihād al-asghar ("lesser jihad"). The greater jihad is the struggle to do good works and avoid evil thoughts, words, and deeds and to live every day in the way that God has prescribed, while the lesser jihad is the effort to protect Islamic lands, beliefs, and institutions. In recent years, the term jihad has become politicized and is frequently used now to refer to war in the name of Islam.

It should be emphasized that, just as religious customs and fashions vary and come and go in the Western world, so they do in the Islamic world as well. In recent years, Islamic fundamentalism has been on the rise throughout the Islamic world, even in such secular countries as Turkey. Many young Muslims are more devout than their parents. Female university students in many Islamic countries have returned to the practice of covering their hair in public, and many areas that had liberalized Islamic strictures that are at odds with Western practice—for example the availability of alcohol—have tightened up again.

**Family Life**

Among Iraqi Arabs, the family is the center of life, and an individual's social status tends to be determined by his or her family. Personal preferences normally take a secondary place to family loyalty and duty, and individual behavior is constrained by the desire not to bring shame on one's family. However, with modernization, individual achievement has gradually acquired a more important role.

Iraq, like other Arab societies, is patriarchal. The father has ultimate responsibility and authority and is rarely questioned. Male siblings tend to have more say in the life of the family than females, and they enjoy a bigger share of and greater control over family resources.

Traditional Arab homes are very private by Western standards. Older individual houses are behind high walls, totally sheltered from the street and from passers-by. Even in urban apartment buildings, family privacy is maintained. Inside a traditional home, there is usually a room, a kind of formal parlor, where the men of the family can receive male visitors without them seeing or having contact with the women of the family.

The traditional household of a typical man in his forties consists of himself, his wife, their unmarried sons and daughters, their married sons with their wives and children, the man's mother if she is still alive, and frequently his unmarried sisters. The most powerful force in the household is often the man's mother, revered by her sons and obeyed by her daughter-in-law. In recent decades, however, the trend among less traditional Iraqis has been to live in nuclear rather than extended families.

In Iraqi families, young children are adored and indulged. Older boys are allowed to attend the gatherings of the men, and by listening absorb many of the cultural values and attitudes that will shape their public behavior. Older girls are very carefully protected, sometimes to their own chagrin. They learn the domestic skills through participation.

**Treatment of Women**

Much has been written in the Western press about Arab women, who from a Western point of view often appear dominated and repressed. The status of women is a controversial issue in Arab society today—in part because it has gotten so much negative press in the West—and there are movements among educated Arab women for equal rights. In the more progressive countries, including Iraq since the days of the monarchy, women from upper-class families have always had access to education and have been able to
Refugees from Iraq

combine career and family. Under the various governments that followed the 1958 downfall of the monarchy, women gained important rights, including the right to vote in 1980. In recent years, Iraqi women have attempted to extend their rights to all Arab women.

At the heart of the treatment of women is the belief in a man’s honor and the honor of his family. Protection of women is a central tenet of Islamic society, and both men and women believe it to be necessary. Behavior that looks like repression to Westerners is often viewed by Arab women as evidence that they are loved and valued. Western female freedom is often interpreted by Arab women as evidence of neglect and immorality. Furthermore, men and women are believed to be different in their very natures, with women’s role properly centered around the home and family.

That said, women in many Arab countries play a more central role in public life than is immediately apparent. Before the Gulf War and the 2003 invasion and occupation, Iraqi women were generally among the most liberated in the Arab world and were better integrated into the workforce than in most other Arab countries. In 1959, the Code of Legal Status granted women political and economic rights. That year, Iraq became the first country in the Arab world to have a woman cabinet member, and many women in Iraq are scientists, doctors, judges, and teachers. Interaction between men and women in the workplace is expected, although there are extensive controls over social interaction between the sexes.

Iraq’s recent wars and economic sanctions have taken a heavy toll on the status of women. More restrictive behavior and more conservative clothes, including the covering of the hair and the body, have reappeared on a wide scale, largely due to the emergence of fundamentalist groups in society. Recent years have also seen an increase in honor killings, the killing by a family of a female relative believed to have shamed the family in some way.

**Marriage**

Among Iraqi Arabs, everyone is expected to marry. Many marriages are still arranged, although young men and women can often find opportunities to meet one another. A girl and boy might be attracted to each other at one of these meetings, and after a clandestine telephone courtship, they might confide their attachment to their respective families, which then follow up with the traditional arrangements—if the families approve of the match. In less indulgent families, marriage arrangements are entirely in the hands of the parents—often just the mothers—who match eligible boys and girls after thoroughly checking the potential mate and family. Many people believe that since marriage has social and economic dimensions, these concerns are more important than emotions.

Women do not join their husband’s family—unless they are already in it (in the past, marriage among first cousins was quite common). Children belong to their father’s family, and in the case of divorce the father is automatically awarded custody of older children.

In the West, much is made of the right of an Arab man to divorce his wife simply by saying “I divorce you” three times. Mention, however, is rarely made of the fact that in doing so he must then contend with his wife’s family and sometimes his own family as well. Divorce is, in fact, a last resort and a source of sadness and regret for both families involved.

Polygamy is allowed in Islam (up to four wives are permitted), but it has long been dying out in the Arab world, to the point that these days most educated middle- and upper-class Arabs find the subject somewhat embarrassing, and most of the Arab countries have laws outlawing polygamy from a secular perspective. In any event, it has always been an option available only to the wealthier members of society. There are advantages to having more than one wife: It expands the numbers of families one can count on for support, and provides a man with many children. But there are hardships as well, the greatest of which is economic: Islamic law is clear that each wife must be treated absolutely equally.
Beliefs and Values

Hospitality is a cherished Islamic tradition, and anyone who has lived in a Muslim country has a store of personal experiences of hospitality extended freely without any expectation of return. The belief in fate or predetermination also has considerable influence in Iraqi life. There is an almost universal belief that everything depends on the will of God, a belief that contrasts sharply with the American notion that people are masters of their own destiny. Dignity, honor, and reputation are also values highly esteemed by Iraqis.

In Muslim society, there is a much greater difference between public and private behavior than in Western societies. In traditional families, it is an invasion of privacy, for example, for a man to ask another man how his wife is; one asks instead how his family in general is, or how his children are. Arab men and women do not express affection of any sort in public, including holding hands, although affection is often publicly expressed among friends of the same sex, including hugs and repeated kisses. Arab women are usually deferential to their fathers, brothers, or husbands in public. The friendships that commonly exist between men and women in the West are rare in the Arab world.

Festivals

Ramadan, the holiest month in the Islamic year, is an occasion for fasting from daybreak to sunset, prayer, and meditation. 'Id al-Fitr is a three-day holiday at the end of Ramadan that is celebrated by visits to family elders, notables, and friends. Children get new clothes, and an air of festivity marks the feast. In many cities, a Ferris wheel and games offer entertainment to children in a carnival-like atmosphere.

The hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, is a duty all Muslims must perform at least once. 'Id al-Adha is celebrated after the hajj, and lambs or other animals are sacrificed in commemoration of Abraham. The feast lasts for 3 days.

Shi'is celebrates Muharram, the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. Mourning lasts 40 days, and some Shi'is flagellate themselves as a form of atonement. The occasion is also used to highlight social injustices and grievances. Ceremonies culminate in a pilgrimage to the mosque where Hussein is buried in Karbala. Sunnis do not participate in this ritual.

Food and Alcohol

With a preponderance of lamb and a heavy use of oil and spices, Arab food is pleasantly spicy without being hot, and has much in common with Greek, Persian, and Turkish food. Rice combined with vegetables and meat is common. Muslims, like their fellow Semites the Jews, do not eat pork. Resettled refugees should be warned that hot dogs might contain pork and that some of the options available at fast food places might contain bacon.

Many Arabs prefer to buy meat from halal butchers—that is, butchers who sell meat only from animals that have been slaughtered according to Koranic ritual. Any area with a Muslim community is likely to have at least one halal butcher. Kosher meat is also acceptable to some Muslims, as it is slaughtered in approximately the same way.

Alcohol is forbidden by Islam, although a good many Arabs drink. In some Arab countries, the possession of alcohol is strictly forbidden to everyone. In other countries, like Iraq, it is legal and available to foreigners. Devout Muslims shun alcohol.

Dress

The Arab concept of honor explains, in part, a woman’s covering up in public, which can be seen as a means of shielding her from the view and attentions of strange men. Iraqi women have always been somewhat
freer than women in the Arabian peninsula, but there are still many Iraqi women who cover their hair in public. The hair covering can range from a gauzy veil draped around the head and neck to a thick kerchief folded so that the front lies low on the forehead and the rest of the head is securely swathed. There are also women who wear the 'abaya (a long-sleeved, long cloak or coat-like overgarment that covers the body from neck to ankles) whenever they go out. This is most common in rural areas and among older, less educated women, although more women are now covering up as a result of the fundamentalist movement. Underneath the 'abaya and veil, Arab women in general dress more conservatively than Western women, although under the Ba'ath governments middle-class women wore Western-style clothes, and many upper-class women were very aware and appreciative of Western fashions.

Iraqi men generally wear Western clothes. Rural and tribal peoples, however, wear the kaffiya, or ghutra, a square piece of cloth kept in place by the agal, a rope that is used to keep the ghutra on the head.

Names

Arabs traditionally do not have last names parallel to Western family names. Each extended family has a name, of course, and in recent times that name has come to be used as a last name, especially in Western circles where last names are a requirement.

An Arab woman does not take her husband’s family name, but in formal situations gives her own and her father’s names. Nawal, married to Hussein, is formally Nawal Ali Nasser (“Nawal, the daughter of Ali of the Nasser family”). For Western purposes, Hussein uses the name Hussein al-Jamil (“Hussein of the al-Jamil family”). Their son Nizar is Nizar Hussein al-Jamil, and their daughter Amira is Amira Hussein al-Jamil.

Many Arab names are taken from the Old Testament and have parallels to Old Testament names in English. For example, Ibrahim is Abraham in English, Yahya is John, Dawud is David, and Yusuf is Joseph. Issa or Eisa is parallel to Jesus, and is a very common name among Muslim men. Miriam, or Maryam, is parallel to Mary.

A common way to name a boy is to call him “servant of” followed by one of the many hundred names for God. The Arabic word for servant is ‘abd. That word plus al or el—meaning “the”—plus whatever word for God is chosen constitutes the full name. (Our rendition of an Arab name as Abdul or Abdel is actually the word for servant plus the definite article, but minus the rest of the phrase.)

Here are some examples:

\[
\text{['abdil-'aziiz]} \\
\text{Abdel-Aziz (Servant of the Almighty')}
\]

\[
\text{['abdil-Hakiim]} \\
\text{Abdel-Hakim (Servant of the Wise')}
\]

\[
\text{['abdil-kariim]} \\
\text{Abdel-Karim (Servant of the Generous')}
\]

\[
\text{['abdil-raHmaan]} \\
\text{Abdel-Rahman (Servant of the Merciful')}
\]

\[
\text{['abdullaah]} \\
\text{Abdullah (Servant of God')}
\]
Arts

Iraqis are noted for their achievement in the arts, having produced many of the most acclaimed poets, musicians, painters, and sculptors in the Arab world. Arabic calligraphy is an art form that is particularly developed in Iraq. Iraqis have contributed significantly to the cultural life of the countries in which they have sought refuge, such as Jordan.

Iraqi Christians

There are three main Christian groups in Iraq: the Assyrians, the Chaldeans, and the Jacobites. Before the 2003 war in Iraq, Assyrians and other Christians numbered a little more than 1 million, comprising between 4% to 5% of the Iraqi population. Of the 450,000-500,000 Iraqi refugees in Jordan, between 100,000 and 150,000 are Christians. In Syria, Christians are believed to make up 200,000 to 300,000 of the 1.2 million Iraqi refugees.

The three Iraqi Christian communities are culturally similar, sharing many of the same traditions and beliefs. All three see themselves as the original people of Iraq with linguistic and geographic roots that go back thousands of years. In ancient times, they spoke Aramaic, the language that once dominated the region. After the coming of Islam, Aramaic was spoken largely in rural areas, and today it exists in Iraq mostly as the liturgical language of the Christian communities, although some Iraqi Christians speak modern Syriac, an Aramaic language. The communities usually speak Arabic and Kurdish along with their own languages. For the urbanized groups, Arabic is the daily spoken language.

While the Chaldean and Jacobite Christian communities have stayed out of the struggles between the Arabs, the Kurds, and the British, the Assyrians have a long history of clashes, first with the Ottoman Turks and then with the Iraqi government. In recent years, some Assyrians have supported the Kurdish nationalist movement.

As with other Middle Eastern communities, Iraqi Christian life revolves around the family and extended family. Families are headed by men and are generally patriarchal. Women are in charge of the household and are expected to be nurturing and understanding, while children are taught to respect and revere their elders. The extended family plays a significant role in family affairs, with members often visiting and helping one another. Strong extended family ties remain a valued ideal, even among immigrant communities in the West. Traditionally arranged by parents, marriage is an important event that usually takes place between individuals from the same region or the same villages. Dating does not occur, divorce is mostly unknown, and widows usually do not remarry.

Historically, Iraqi Christians have worked as farmers, builders, artisans, craftsmen, businessmen, and social service providers. Christian women enjoy more freedom than many of their Arab neighbors, and before the war they entered professions such as teaching, education, and architecture. Men have tended to enter professions and business, especially in recent years. Iraq’s Christian communities are known for their entrepreneurial spirit and strong work ethic and the high value they place on education.

Like others in the Middle East, Iraqi Christians value hospitality and believe that if guests come to visit they should be invited to eat. Their food is generally similar to that of their neighbors; a typical meal consists of vegetables, lamb, beef, and grain. Although some older women in the rural areas wear darker, more traditional clothing, most Iraqi Christians today wear Western clothes.

Christians celebrate Christmas and Easter, although Eastern Christians, such as Armenians, Assyrians, and Jacobites, celebrate at different times than Christians in the West. Chaldean Christians, who practice a form of Catholicism, celebrate their holidays at the same time as Catholics in the West.
**Assyrians**

The Assyrians, also known as Nestorians, are a Christian community in the mountainous region of the Mesopotamian plain between Lake Van and Lake Urmia, a region shared by Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. They are indigenous to the region, having lived there since 5,000 B.C.E.

Assyrians first converted to Christianity in the 1st century C.E. when the Apostle Thomas is said to have preached in Mesopotamia. With the coming of Islam in the 7th century, the Assyrians found that they were generally tolerated by the early caliphs and thrived in the new empire. They supported the Muslim Arab armies against the Persians, who had previously persecuted them, and contributed to Islamic intellectual, scientific, and administrative life, producing great scientists, translators, and physicians.

The Assyrians were soon subjected to periods of religious persecution, however, first under the caliphs and later under the Mongols, Ottomans, Kurds, British, and others. The Assyrians were nearly eradicated by the Mongol massacres and invasions of the 13th and 14th centuries, and attacks by Kurds and Ottoman soldiers led them to become fierce and courageous fighters. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the increased activity of British and American Protestant missionaries contributed to the belief among many Assyrians that they were a separate nation. Most of the Assyrians now in Iraq are the descendants of those who fled southward from the Ottomans and the Kurds during the First World War. Attempts to establish a homeland triggered reprisals, first by Kurdish and Turkish forces and later by the Iraqi army. Clashes with the Iraqi army in 1933 led to a huge Assyrian exodus that dispersed many of them into Lebanon, Syria, Sweden, and the United States.

Under Saddam Hussein, the Assyrians were fairly well integrated into Iraqi life, and today many are educated professionals who have migrated from smaller towns to larger cities in search of better opportunities. Their relations with the Turkomen, Yazidis, and other minorities have been good. The Gulf War and the sanctions that followed, however, had devastating effects on Assyrian life in Iraq. Many suffered from discrimination; some were attacked and killed or forced to leave their homes. Today, the Assyrian population in Iraq is estimated at 200,000. In the United States, Assyrian communities are found principally in Chicago, where an estimated 100,000 live, and in southern and northern California.

**Chaldeans**

Originally part of the Nestorian and Assyrian communities, the Chaldeans became a distinct group when they began to identify with the Roman Catholic Church in the 17th century. Today they are the largest Christian sect in Iraq. Although they suffered persecution from their governments and neighbors in the early part of the 19th century, in the aftermath of World War I the Chaldeans did not suffer as much as other minority groups that sought to establish autonomous states. Unlike the Assyrians, they had a “live and let live” approach to the central government. With few exceptions, such as Tariq Aziz, Saddam Hussein’s foreign minister, the Chaldeans have generally not been involved in politics.

Today nearly 800,000 Chaldeans are believed to live in Iraq. While the Chaldean community was well integrated into Iraq under Saddam Hussein’s regime, politically charged conditions today have led to their persecution along with many other Christian groups. Nevertheless, the Chaldeans, like the Assyrians, have been constitutionally recognized by Iraq’s new government and continue to take part in it.

Outside of Iraq, Chaldean communities can be found in Iran, Lebanon, Syria, and the United States. An estimated 200,000 live in the United States, with Detroit and San Diego hosting the largest communities.
**Jacobites**

A small Christian community in Iraq, the Jacobites derive their name from Jacob Baradai, who founded their faction in the 5th century C.E. Today, the Jacobites in Iraq number between 70,000 and 100,000.

In the 7th century, the Jacobites were liberated from Persian persecution by the Muslim Arabs. Later, they flourished under the caliphs, where they achieved high positions as scholars, physicians, and court administrators. Internal splits, the Mongol invasions, and subsequent religious fanaticism and massacres, however, greatly weakened the Jacobite church by the 17th century.

Before the 19th century, the Jacobites lived mostly in India, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. But those who fled the persecution and massacres in Anatolia in the 19th century and during World War I sought refuge in other countries as well, including Armenia, Lebanon, and Sweden. Since the 2003 war and occupation, Jacobites have joined the ranks of refugees fleeing Iraq.

In the United States, small Jacobite communities exist in California, Michigan, Rhode Island, and elsewhere. These communities have tried to help members of their families in Iraq who have fled their homes for safety elsewhere.

**Other Iraqi Populations**

**Turkomen**

The Turkomen are an ancient Turkic community in Iraq dating back to the caliphs. They are found mostly in Arbil and Diyala provinces, Kirkuk, and Baghdad. Today, the Turkomen number approximately one million, although they claim to be about two to three times that size.

Turkomen speak a dialect of Turkish that is very close to Azeri, and they are one of the few recognized minorities in Iraq allowed to use their own language. Most Turkomen also speak either Arabic or Kurdish.

Turkomen are almost all Sunni or Shi’i Muslims. They have generally identified themselves as Iraqis and have not been involved in antigovernment activities. During the Ottoman Empire, many Sunni Turkomen served in government positions.

The culture and customs of the Turkomen have been influenced by Islam as well as by Ottoman and Turkish traditions. Turkomen families are generally patriarchal. Most Turkomen, including women, wear Western clothes, although since the 2003 war more and more Turkomen women can be seen wearing their traditional long colorful dresses. Conservative clothing accompanied by the veil has also become more common. Their food, like that of most other Iraqis, includes vegetables, bread, dairy products, chicken, and lamb.

The Turkomen value education, and in modern Iraq they have prospered as businessmen and professionals. Many have held high government posts and have worked in the oil sector. In recent decades, the Turkomen have experienced some tension with the Kurds in Iraq. Both have laid claim to oil-rich Kirkuk, and politicized Turkomen have condemned what they see as the Kurdification of Kirkuk. In this dispute, the Turkomen have been supported by Turkey, which worries about the implications of an autonomous or independent Kurdish entity for its own Kurdish population, and uses the issue to interfere in the Iraqi political situation.

The Turkomen have been affected like other Iraqis by the war. Some have been displaced internally; others have fled abroad. A small number of Turkomen families live in the United States, where they have integrated into U.S.-Arab communities.
**Yazidis**

The Yazidis are a religious sect in northern Iraq. They are also found in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Syria, and Turkey. Today, the Yazidis in Iraq number between 500,000 and 700,000. They are of mainly Kurdish origin and speak a Kurdish dialect, but some trace their origins to southern Iraq and the lower Euphrates.

There is great controversy about the origins of their religion. What is certain is that they have integrated elements from different religions in the region, including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and ancient Mesopotamian religions. Wrongly depicted as devil worshipers, the Yazidis are angel worshippers who view the devil as a lord of power and not, as in Semitic religions, as the author of evil. The Yazidis believe they are descended from Adam but not from Eve; they also believe in the transmigration of souls. Their practices include the baptizing of children by total immersion, fasting, not eating cabbage or lettuce, and not wearing shirts open at the collar or the color blue. Because of their beliefs and practices, the Yazidis were severely persecuted and nearly eliminated by their Ottoman and Kurdish neighbors in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Most Yazidis are farmers and herdsmen, although semi-nomadic tribes do exist. Apart from their religious beliefs, their culture is similar to that of other Middle Eastern communities. Traditionally, they have enjoyed good relations with neighboring Christians; they often live in the same communities. The Yazidis have given refuge to Assyrians fleeing persecution.

Under Saddam Hussein, both the government and the Kurds applied pressure on the Yazidis to join one side against the other. As a result, the Yazidis became divided, with some joining the Iraqi government and others joining the Kurds. Since the 2003 war and the rise of fundamentalist values among some of their Arab and Kurdish neighbors, the Yazidis have been the target of attacks by religious extremists. In one of the worst attacks on civilians in Iraq, hundreds of Yazidis were killed. For reasons of religion and security, Yazidi are attached to their traditional areas, but some have been forced by recent events to flee their ancestral lands. A very small number of Yazidis live in the United States.

**Sabeans**

The Sabeans, also known as Mandeans or Subba, are members of an ancient monotheistic religion living mostly in southern Iraq and in Iran, with deep roots in ancient Mesopotamia and possibly Palestine. They had protected status in Islam as “People of the Book” (i.e., those, such as Jews and Christians, who received scriptures revealed to them by God before the time of Muhammad) and became great scholars and scientists under the caliphs, further substantiating their name Mandea, which means “knowledge” in Aramaic.

Until the 2003 war and its aftermath, the Sabeans numbered between 150,000 and 175,000 in Iraq. The Sabeans’ beliefs incorporate elements of ancient Babylonian and Mesopotamian religions, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, ancient Chaldean customs, star worship, and astrology. They have 12 saviors and wear white clothes as an indication of spiritual and physical purity. They do not eat meat from pigs, dogs, pigeons, or birds of prey. In accordance with their other name, Subba, which means “immersion in water” in Aramaic, baptism is a fundamental religious tenet. The Sabeans have traditionally lived near running water and revere St. John the Baptist as their major prophet.

The Sabeans do not practice polygamy or circumcision, and divorce is forbidden except with special permission from their judges. The Sabeans are believed to have influenced Yazidi beliefs. Their religious texts are in Aramaic.

The Sabeans are known for telling fortunes and are master craftspeople and silversmiths. They value education, and the younger generations have gone into business and the professions. A few have become well-known poets and writers. In modern times, a small number joined the Iraqi Communist Party and the Ba’th Party. In recent years, as the result of the war and the rise of fundamentalism in Iraq, Sabeans
have suffered discrimination and persecution, and some have fled Iraq or moved to safer areas of the country. In the United States, a small number of Sabeans can be found in Detroit, San Diego, and other Iraqi-American communities.

**Kurds**

The Kurds are an Indo-European ethnic group who for centuries have inhabited an area that stretches from Syria and Turkey through Iraq and Iran. More than 4 million Kurds, about 18% of the population of Iraq, live in northeast Iraq. Arbil and Sulaymaniyah, the fourth and fifth largest cities in Iraq, are entirely Kurdish. The Kurds claim the province of Kirkuk, which contains the second-largest developed oil fields in Iraq, the largest being in the south of the country.

The culture of the Kurds is close to that of their Iranian, Iraqi, and Turkish neighbors. The Kurds have their own Indo-European languages, most closely related to Pashto and Baluchi, spoken in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and less closely related to Iranian Persian. The Kurdish languages have been influenced by Arabic and Persian, and to a lesser extent by Turkish, Armenian, and Aramaic. Today, most Iraqi Kurds also speak Arabic, although few Kurds born in Iraq in the last two decades speak Arabic fluently.

Most Kurds are Muslim. Kurdish women have faced fewer restrictions than other Muslim women in dress or work outside the home. Kurdish identity has become increasingly important to Kurds in recent decades, particularly since the Kurdish rebellions in Iraq and the subsequent repression by the central government.

In recent years, the Kurds have taken important strides toward autonomy. Under the new Iraqi constitution, the Kurds were granted a federal Kurdish region with wide executive and legislative powers. Kurdish experience in running governmental agencies has added to their influence. Iraq’s president is a Kurd, as are the deputy prime minister, the foreign minister, the deputy chief of staff of the army, and several other senior officials.

Economically, the Kurds are enjoying one of the most promising developments in their recent history. Having largely escaped the sectarian violence that wracked the rest of the country, the Kurdish region has become Iraq’s most stable and prosperous area. It has attracted foreign investors, and while unemployment remains high, government and foreign and domestic companies have hired large numbers of people. Many villages destroyed during the 1975 Kurdish revolt have been rebuilt, and roads, hospitals, schools, and universities have been constructed or expanded. This generally optimistic picture has been marred in recent months by rising tensions among the Kurds, the Turkomen, and the Iraqi Arabs over the future of oil-rich Kirkuk, claimed by both Kurds and other Iraqi Arabs. In addition, the Kurds’ claim that they have the constitutional right to sign their own deals with foreign companies has strained their relations with the central government. The area has also witnessed increasing attacks by the Turkish military and, to a lesser extent, the Iranian military against Turkish and Iranian Kurdish rebels operating in the mountainous border regions between Turkey and Iran.

Many Kurds have fled the violence in Baghdad, Mosul, and other areas to the relatively safe Kurdish regions. Others have fled Iraq to neighboring countries, particularly Jordan and Syria. An estimated 30,000 to 35,000 Iraqi Kurds live in the United States, with Nashville, Tennessee, hosting the largest community. Most of the Iraqi Kurds in the United States were resettled here after the collapse of the 1974–1975 revolt against the Iraqi government.

**Ma’dan**

A distinct subgroup of Iraqi Arabs, the Ma’dan, or Marsh Arabs, inhabit 6,000 square miles of marshy area just above the point at which the Tigris and Euphrates flow together, in a rough triangle formed by Amara, Nasiriya, and Basra. At high water, much of the marshland is submerged.
Sunnis and Shi‘is

What is the difference between Sunnis and Shi‘is, and what is the source of the conflict between them?

Both Sunnis and Shi‘is follow the fundamental precepts of Islam. The two sects differ on one central point, however. Sunnis maintain that the successors to the Prophet Muhammad (khalīfs) should be chosen by the leaders of the Islamic community on the basis of merit, and need not be descendants of the prophet. Shi‘is, in contrast, believe that only the descendants of Muhammad, through his daughter Fatima and his son-in-law and cousin Ali, can be the legitimate heirs of the prophet. In fact, the name Shi‘i derives from Sh‘at Ali ("followers or partisans of Ali"). Shi‘is believe that the leadership of the Islamic community, since Ali’s assassination, has been usurped. The main shrines of Shi‘ism are located in Iraq.

Another important difference between Sunnis and Shi‘is is the relative position of the clergy in the two sects. Since the mid–19th century, the Ottoman Empire and its successor Arab states (e.g., Iraq, Lebanon, Syria) have appointed the Sunni clergy, who are thus state functionaries. Shi‘is, in contrast, have traditionally been independent of the state and are supported financially by the offerings of the faithful. This clerical independence was one of the factors that enabled Ayatollah Khomeini to emerge as the leader of the Iranian revolution against the Shah in 1978-1979 and to found the Islamic Republic of Iran.

There are more Sunnis in the Islamic world than Shi‘is. In Iraq, however, the Sunnis (both Arabs and Kurds) are a minority, constituting about 40% to 42% of the population. The Sunnis are concentrated in parts of Baghdad and the Sunni Triangle to the northwest of the capital; there are also some large Sunni pockets in the south. The Shi‘is form between 55% and 58% of Iraq’s population and are concentrated in areas of Baghdad, the central Euphrates, and the southern provinces. They also form the overwhelming majority of the population in Iraq’s eastern neighbor, Iran.

Since the foundation of Iraq in 1921, there has been a history of struggle for political power between the two sects. The Sunnis were initially favored by the British and as a result they were overrepresented in the government and military. Since the time of the Ottomans and the British, Shi‘is have been underrepresented in government, and at least until the 1930s, there were Shi‘i rebellions and uprisings against the Sunni-dominated government. The Coalition Provisional Authority’s de-Ba‘thification project effectively served to exclude large numbers of Sunnis (in addition to some Shi‘i Ba‘thists) from public office. Today, Shi‘is dominate the Iraqi government.

Despite the tensions and conflicts between Sunnis and Shi‘is, the divide between the two is by no means absolute and unbridgeable. In fact, intermarriage between the two groups is quite common among the urban middle class. Some large and influential Iraqi tribes have both Sunni and Shi‘i branches. And Iraqi nationalism is very important to both groups. In two telling examples of this, Sunnis and Shi‘is fought side-by-side against the British colonizers and in the war against Iran.
The Ma'dan have a very different life from other Iraqis. They do very little farming, depending instead on fishing and the raising of water buffalo. Their quonset-hut-shaped houses, built of reeds resting on piles to keep them above water, are architecturally unique. The Ma’dan get around in canoe-like boats when the water levels are high, and in other ways enjoy a unique lifestyle in the area. This lifestyle was put in grave danger under Saddam Hussein, after the government diverted the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers from the marshes for security and irrigation purposes, forcing many families to leave. In recent years, some water has been diverted back to the marshes, and some families have returned. Like other Iraqis, the Ma’dan have been affected by economic sanctions, the war, and sectarian conflicts, but more Ma’dan are believed to have returned to the region than have left it.

Health Care

By Middle East standards, Iraq used to have very good health care facilities. During the 1970s and early 1980s, it provided some of the best medical care and produced some of the best doctors in the region.

Both the Iran–Iraq war and the Gulf War devastated Iraq's health care infrastructure, and the economic sanctions imposed by the UNSC prevented the country from rebuilding. After the 2003 war, the situation deteriorated further.

Today, despite massive development assistance, the health care situation is in crisis. Noting a shortage of doctors and nurses and the lack of a basic medical infrastructure, a 2003 report by Voices in the Wilderness, a human rights group, estimated that only 10% to 20% of Iraq's medical needs were being met. Doctors at Baghdad's Yarmouk Hospital estimate that 1,800 patients each year are dying from treatable medical problems in their hospital due to the lack of equipment and medication.

Deteriorating security in Iraq has taken its toll on health care, with some patients afraid to go to hospitals and doctors being intimidated. In an April 2007 article describing Iraq's health status as “disastrous,” the Cairo-based, English-language al-Ahram Weekly reported that 2,000 physicians had been killed, largely by unidentified groups, since the U.S. invasion and occupation. Health professionals are also subject to kidnaping. In 2006, Medact, a British nongovernmental organization (NGO), estimated that 18,000 doctors, almost half of Iraq's physicians, had fled the country.

Increasing poverty has contributed to Iraq's health care crisis. According to a recent study by the United Nations Development Program, one third of Iraq's population lives in poverty. Iraq's ministry of health has estimated that half of Iraq's children are suffering from some form of malnutrition. The mental health of Iraq's population has also suffered: Al-Ahram Weekly noted that in a survey of the psychological effects of war on Iraqis conducted by the Association of Iraqi Psychologists, 60% of respondents claimed to have suffered panic attacks that prevented them from leaving their homes.

Education and Literacy

According to UNESCO, Iraq had one of the best educational systems in the Middle East before the 1991 Gulf War, with high levels of literacy for both men and women. Institutions of higher education were of an international standard, particularly in science and technology.

The Iran–Iraq War, the Gulf War, and the economic sanctions took their toll on Iraq's educational system. Enrollment fell, and the school system began to collapse. Since the 2003 invasion, more than one third of Baghdad's schools have been damaged by bombing. Many others have been burned and looted.
There are no up-to-date studies on the status of education in Iraq today. A 2004 UN survey indicated that only 55% of young people between the ages of 6 and 24 were enrolled in school. The study found a literacy rate of 74% for youth between the ages of 15 and 24, with a higher literacy rate for the 25 to 34 age group. Female literacy appears to have dropped dramatically. In a 2004 UNICEF article about the survey, UNICEF’s representative in Iraq said that the school system was “effectively denying children a decent education.”

According to the United States Agency for International Development, almost 3,000 Iraqi schools have been “rehabilitated in full or part” since 2003, 20 million new textbooks have been supplied, and tens of thousands of teachers have received technical assistance. However, security concerns continue to hamper efforts to develop the country’s educational system, especially in Baghdad, where the lack of security has closed down most schools. Elsewhere the situation varies greatly. In the Kurdish north, where security is relatively good, the educational system is functioning the best.

The Arabic Language in Iraq

Approximately 77% of Iraqis speak Arabic as their first language. Most Iraqis with a different mother tongue speak Arabic with some level of proficiency. Arabic thus serves as a common language among Iraqis.

Basic Characteristics

Arabic is a Semitic language that is spoken by about 200 million people in a wide geographical area from Morocco in the west to the Persian Gulf in the east. The Arabic language originated in the Arabian Peninsula (now Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states) and was spread throughout the area as a result of conquests by Islamic armies.

There are more than 15 dialects of spoken Arabic, defined by geographical areas and rural–urban differences, and they have varying degrees of mutual intelligibility. Arabic speakers can understand people in neighboring countries, and the fact that most cinema and television films are made in Egypt has ensured that Egyptian Arabic is pretty well understood by all Arabic speakers. Dialects spoken by those in the far west and the far east of the Arab world, however, are no longer mutually intelligible. In hiring interpreters, service providers should be aware that the interpreter might not always understand the particular Arabic of their Arabic-speaking clients.

For basic information on the grammar of spoken Iraqi Arabic, see The Iraqis: Their History and Culture by the Center for Applied Linguistics, available online at www.cal.org/co/iraqi/index.html.

The Arabic Alphabet

The Arabic alphabet is not as difficult as it looks at first. Although it might seem like an endless list of characters, in fact it has just 28 letters, with each one standing for a single sound. Once you learn these, you can sound out and begin to write words. There are no capital letters, but there is some difference between printing and handwriting, as there is in English. Short vowels are usually not written. Thus, the name Muhammad is spelled, in Arabic,

محمد

or m-h-m-d reading from right to left. Otherwise, words are spelled very close to the way they are pronounced.
Here is a list of all 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet, with their sounds (also called transcriptions) in square brackets and their Arabic names in italics. Ask an Iraqi to say the alphabet for you, and read along.

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<td>ذ</td>
<td>[dh]</td>
<td>dhaal</td>
<td>[l]</td>
<td>laam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ر</td>
<td>[r]</td>
<td>ra</td>
<td>[m]</td>
<td>miim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ز</td>
<td>[z]</td>
<td>zaay or zayn</td>
<td>[n]</td>
<td>nuun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>س</td>
<td>[s]</td>
<td>siin</td>
<td>[h]</td>
<td>haa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ش</td>
<td>[sh]</td>
<td>shiin</td>
<td>[w]</td>
<td>waaw</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ص</td>
<td>[S]</td>
<td>Saad</td>
<td>[y]</td>
<td>ya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides the shapes of the letters, the most important difference between the Arabic alphabet and the Roman alphabet, in which English is written, is that the letters and words are written or printed from right to left.

A less noticeable feature of the alphabet is that when the letters are combined into words, their shapes change slightly when they are connected to other letters. To illustrate the last point, the letter ب baa has the following shapes:

- when it appears independently (as in the line just above this one), or at the end of a word after a “non-connecting” letter, e.g., باب
- when it appears at the beginning of a word, e.g., باب
- when it appears after a “connecting” letter, e.g., عبد
- when it appears at the end of a word after a “connecting” letter, e.g., كتاب
Some Iraqi Arabic Expressions

Here we provide a short list of useful Iraqi Arab words and expressions. But first, so that you can learn to pronounce the words with some accuracy, we provide a guide to pronunciation.

Pronunciation Guide

The most notable feature of Arabic pronunciation is the presence of what are sometimes called back and heavy consonants. There are not many of these consonants, but they occur frequently. They have no equivalent in English.

Below we list the back and heavy consonants. If you want to know exactly how they sound, ask an Iraqi to pronounce the letters for you.

**Back Consonants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>خ</td>
<td>[kh]</td>
<td>a scrape made with the back of the tongue and the soft palate; same sound as in German Bach or Scottish loch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>غ</td>
<td>[gh]</td>
<td>like [Kh] but with the vocal cords vibrating; much like a French r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ق</td>
<td>[q]</td>
<td>like [k], but pronounced at the very back of the mouth; in Iraq, it is often pronounced like [g] as in go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ح</td>
<td>[H]</td>
<td>a harsh [h], pronounced by constricting the throat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>د</td>
<td>[']</td>
<td>no close equivalent in English pronounced in the pharynx like [H], but with voicing; sounds like strangling!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Heavy Consonants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ص</td>
<td>[S]</td>
<td>like [s], but with tongue raised at the back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ض</td>
<td>[D]</td>
<td>like [d], but with tongue raised at the back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ط</td>
<td>[T]</td>
<td>like [t], but with tongue raised at the back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ض</td>
<td>[TH]</td>
<td>like the [th] in this, but with tongue raised at the back</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The other consonants are close enough to English to be easily recognized. Note, however, that consonants can be doubled (or lengthened), an important feature because consonant length affects meaning.

Iraqi Arabic has fewer vowels than English, but they can be short or long (i.e., held for a shorter or longer time). In our word and phrase list on page 28, we represent a long vowel in English by giving the letter twice.
Some Words and Expressions

Greetings and Blessings

Greetings and blessings are extremely important in Arab culture. Ask an Iraqi friend to read the following phrases for you so that you will recognize them when you hear them used. Maybe you will even learn to use them yourself.

Formal greeting:
‘Peace be upon you.’
[is-salaamu ‘aleekum]

Response:
‘And upon you peace.’
[wa ‘aleekum is-salaam]

Informal greeting:
‘Hello,’ ‘Hi.’
[marHaba]

Morning greeting:
‘Good morning’
[SabaaH il-kheer]

Response:
‘Good morning’
[SabaaH in-nuur]

How-are-you’s:
‘How are you’ (to a man)                                                                                     [shloonak?
‘How are you’ (to a woman)                                                                                   [shloonitsh?

Responses:
‘Fine, thank God.’ (from a man)                                                                                 [zeen, il-Hamdillaah
‘Fine, thank God.’ (from a woman)                                                                             [zeena, il-Hamdillaah
‘Thank God.’ (from either)                                                                                     [il-Hamdillaah

Goodbye:
‘With safety’
[ma’a s-salaama]

Responses:
‘God make you safe.’ (to a man)                                                                                [allaah ysallmak
‘God make you safe.’ (to a woman)                                                                               [allaah ysallmitsh

General phrases:
‘Wonderful’ (literally ‘What God has willed’)                                                                    [maa shaalla
‘In the name of God.’                                                                                           [bismillah
‘God willing.’                                                                                                   [inshaalla

Refugees from Iraq
**Everyday Words and Phrases**

Thank you  
[shukran]  

I am sorry  
[asif] (m.)  
[asif] (f.)

Do you understand?  
[da-tifham] (m.)
[da-tifhamein] (f.)

Yes.  
[na'am]

No.  
[laa]

What is your name?  
[sh-ismak] (m.)
[sho-ismak] (m.)
[shino-ismak] (f.)

I am happy to meet you  
[tsharrafna]

Are you hungry?  
[juu'aan] (m.)
[juu'aana] (f.)
[juu'aaniin] (m.pl.)
[juu'aanaat] (f.pl.)

Do you feel well?  
[Inta zein] (m.)
[inti zeina] (f.)
[into zeiniin] (m.pl.)
[into zeinnat] (f.pl.)

**Relationship Terms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father</th>
<th>[ab] اب / [walid] والد</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>[umm] ام / [waalda] والدة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>[ibin] ابن</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>[ibna] ابنة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>[akh] اخ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>[ukhut] اخت</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandfather</td>
<td>[jidd] جد</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>[jidda] جدة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncle</td>
<td>[khaal] خال</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt</td>
<td>['mma] عمة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>[sadiiq] (m.) صديق / [sadiiqa] (f.) صديقة</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Numbers**

| 1 | [waahid] (m.) واحد / [whida] (f.) واحد |
| 2 | [thnein] (m.) ثنين / [thintein] (f.) ثنين |
| 3 | [tmatha] ثلاثة |
| 4 | [arba'a] أربعة |
| 5 | [khamsa] خمسة |
| 6 | [sitta] سبعة |
| 7 | [sab'a] سابعة |
| 8 | [thmaanya] ثمانية |
| 9 | [tis'a] تسعة |
| 10 | ['shra] عشرة |

**Abbreviations:** f.=feminine; f.pl.=feminine plural; m.=masculine; m.pl.=masculine plural
Iraqi Arabs as English Language Learners

Because of Iraq’s historical connections with Britain, English has generally been the Western language of choice among Iraqis. Most educated Iraqis have at least some ability to speak English, although they might read more English than they speak.

Speakers of Iraqi Arabic will face most of the same challenges in learning English that all Arabs do. The following describes some of the common challenges.

Pronunciation

Arabs tend to have difficulty with many of the English vowel sounds, largely because there are relatively few vowels in Arabic and relatively many in English. Arabs will probably have difficulty hearing and pronouncing the different vowels of sit and seat, bet and bat, shut and shot, boat and boot, and bait and beet.

Arabs typically pronounce the English r as they do in their own language: The Arabic r is made with the tip of the tongue, and the double rr is a strong trill, as in Spanish or Italian. The effect in English may be striking, although it probably will not impede understanding.

The confusion of p and b is a common problem for most Arabs but not for Iraqis, who have a p in their dialect.

Grammar

Questions in English will cause problems (as they do for many English language learners), because they involve changes in word order—for example, “He is studying” versus “Is he studying?” In Arabic, the difference between a sentence and its parallel question is carried only by the tone of voice, as it is in English with “He’s studying?”

Another potential problem is the words should and would. Arabic sentences that express the ideas conveyed by should and would have very different structures.

The verb to be in present-tense sentences also presents challenges. In Arabic, there are no parallels to is and are, so the Arab learner of English is likely to say, “I Iraqi” or “What your name?” instead of “I am Iraqi” or “What is your name?”

Writing

Legible handwriting is usually a challenge for Arabic speakers learning English. In Arabic handwriting, it is not necessary for the letters to be written on the line, as English letters are. Arab learners therefore need a lot of practice in writing so that their letters are all the same size and written more or less on the line. Arabs also have difficulty with capitalization and punctuation, a predictable result of the lack of capitalization in the Arabic alphabet and the very different punctuation conventions.

Iraqi Refugees in Asylum Countries

Most of the two million Iraqis who have fled Iraq for neighboring countries have gone to Syria, which hosts an estimated 1.4 million Iraqis, and to Jordan, which hosts 450,000-500,000. Smaller Iraqi refugee populations are found in Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, and Turkey. Here we discuss the causes of the refugee problem, explain the need for third-country resettlement, and describe the living conditions and background characteristics of the refugee population.¹

¹Information in this section has been provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and by the Overseas Processing Entities in Egypt and Turkey.
Reasons for Flight

People flee Iraq for different reasons. For Muslims, Sunni–Shi'i violence is the most common reason for flight. Members of non-Muslim minorities, including Baha'is, Christians, Jews, Sabaeo-Mandaeans, and Yazidis, have increasingly become targeted for religious reasons or because of their ethnicity.

Still other Iraqis have suffered persecution for political reasons. They are supporters, or perceived to be supporters, of the former regime, the insurgency, the current Iraqi government, or the multinational forces. People who are accused of un-Islamic behavior, as well as members of certain professions, such as doctors, journalists, actors, and artists, have also been targeted. Women in Iraq, particularly female heads of households or single women without male protection, form a vulnerable target for militias, insurgents, Islamic extremists, and family members seeking to commit honor killings (the growing practice in Iraq of killing a woman believed to have shamed the family in some way).

While every community in Iraq is now potentially a target for another group, the Assyrian and Chaldean communities are at special risk, observers say. There are several reasons for this: Unlike other groups, the Assyrian and Chaldean communities have no militia to protect them; they are accused by widely disseminated propaganda of supporting the multinational forces; they have traditionally run businesses (such as selling alcohol) that extremist groups deem unacceptable; and they are considered a good target for kidnappers because they are believed to be wealthy.

Need for Resettlement

Iraqis are being considered for resettlement in the United States because the two other durable solutions to the refugee crisis—voluntary repatriation to Iraq and local integration in a country of asylum—are not currently available to most Iraqi refugees. According to UNHCR, the country’s volatile security situation, widespread breaches of human rights, and general inability to protect its citizens rule out voluntary repatriation as a humane solution. Local integration in the countries of asylum also has little or no chance for success. None of the asylum countries is offering integration to the refugees; their own difficult economic, political, and social situations do not favor local absorption.

Conditions in Asylum Countries

Living Conditions

Unlike refugees in other parts of the world, Iraqi refugees do not live in camps isolated from the host country population. Rather, they live in local neighborhoods, typically in and around the capital city, and in conditions that are similar to those of their non-Iraqi neighbors. While some Iraqis came with considerable wealth, and others have been living and doing business in the region for many years, most recent arrivals (especially post-February 2006) have limited resources.

Health Care

The large number of people who have arrived in the asylum countries, especially since 2006, has strained the already overstretched public services in those countries and poses major challenges to the host governments and local and international humanitarian organizations. Even when the treatment needed is available, it is generally not affordable to refugees, who in many cases sold all their belongings in Iraq to finance their flight.

In Syria, hospital care is limited; the UNHCR office in Damascus is approached on a weekly basis by refugees whose children or other family members are suffering from life-threatening diseases. Lebanon’s health care services are likewise very limited, even for nationals.
The situation is better in Jordan, where refugees are provided with primary health care services equivalent to those enjoyed by Jordanian citizens. In August 2007, Jordan agreed to ensure “access for displaced Iraqis to the most essential health services,” UNHCR reports.

**Employment**

The single biggest problem facing Iraqis in asylum countries is the lack of legal, gainful employment. Many Iraqis work, but they do so illegally, generally in low-wage, unskilled or semi-skilled jobs as laborers, cooks, waiters, and drivers. The Overseas Processing Entity (OPE) in Cairo estimates that among the refugees it has processed, the average monthly income is about $100. Increasingly, refugees are unable to afford educational or medical expenses, and food shortages have become such a problem in Syria that the World Food Programme has issued an emergency appeal for food distributions.

**Education**

Educational opportunities for children in the three main asylum countries of Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria have recently improved. In September 2007, the number of Iraqi children in Syrian schools increased greatly after the Syrian Ministry of Education launched an effort to raise the number of Iraqi students to 100,000. In Jordan, thousands of young Iraqis enrolled in schools after the government decided to permit all Iraqi refugee children in the country to attend public schools, regardless of whether their parents have residence permits. In Lebanon, Iraqi children have the right to a free public education, but places are limited and Lebanese children have priority. In response, UNHCR, through its implementing partners, provides children with education grants and offers vocational training for those who need it. UNHCR also provides grants to university students.

**Characteristics of the Population**

**Physical and Mental Health**

According to UNHCR, the rate of serious disease for Iraqi refugees falls mostly within the normal range. There are, however, several significant areas of exception and concern:

- The low vaccination rate for children (Measles: 65% and Polio/OPV3: 75%)
- The high rate of diarrhea for children under 5 (19% during a recent two-week period)
- The increasing number of cancer-related deaths among both adults and children, linked by specialists to the use of unsafe products in agriculture and the long-term effects of war on the population’s resistance to disease
- The numerous cases of applicants with war-related injuries, such as amputated limbs

Psychological distress among Iraqi refugees is also cause for concern. Many Iraqi refugees have been subjected to traumatizing events in Iraq. These include various forms of violence (including rape and other forms of gender-based violence), torture, kidnapping, blackmail, and intimidation and harassment by militias and neighbors. In the countries of asylum, refugees have experienced threats of detention and deportation, limited work opportunities, inhumane work conditions, local hostility, economic hardship, and threats from Iraqi militias.

All these factors have affected the psychological well-being of Iraqi refugees. According to figures released in January 2008 by the UNHCR, Iraqi refugees in Syria are suffering from levels of trauma that are far higher than normal for refugee populations. The figures, based on interviews with 754 refugees and analyzed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, reveal that 89.5% are suffering from depression, 81.6% from anxiety, and 67.6% from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). According to the survey, 77% of respondents had
experienced air bombardments, shelling, or rocket attacks; 80% had witnessed a shooting; 68% had undergone interrogation or harassment by militias; and 75% knew someone close to them who had been killed.

**Occupational Backgrounds**

The Iraqi refugee population includes highly trained professionals as well as shop owners, traders, and skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Most refugees with professional backgrounds have not been able to practice their professions in the asylum countries. UNHCR notes that many refugees claim to have worked with foreign professionals, such as business people, medical professionals, NGO workers, and journalists.

**Exposure to Western Life**

Familiarity with modern Western life differs by educational background, place of residence in Iraq, and social background. Those with the greatest exposure to Western life are Iraqis who studied in the West before the fall of Saddam Hussein or who traveled abroad as tourists. At the other extreme are Iraqis with little exposure to foreign cultures; these include people from poor rural areas. In between these two extremes are Iraqis who have gained second-hand knowledge of Western life from relatives in the West, and Iraqis who worked and mingled with Western nationals in post-Saddam Iraq.

It should be noted that Iraqi women generally enjoyed greater freedom than women elsewhere in the Middle East: They have had jobs, enjoyed unlimited educational opportunities, occupied high public office, and traveled unveiled. While there is nothing in the new Iraqi constitution that prevents women from enjoying these freedoms and opportunities today, many neighborhoods are now controlled by religious militias or jihadi groups who demand that women confine themselves to their homes.

**Educational Levels and Literacy**

Before 2003, education in Iraq was mandatory through Grade 6. As a result, most Iraqis adults have acquired at least basic reading and writing skills. The elderly, laborers, farmers, and vendors typically have fewer literacy skills.

**English Proficiency**

English proficiency among Iraqi refugees varies widely. A minority, usually the highly educated, speak English well. Others speak no English at all. Most have at least a basic proficiency.

**Iraqi Resettlement: Strengths and Challenges**

Iraqi refugees, and Iraqi immigrants who enter the United States on Special Immigrant Visas and who are eligible for the same programs and services as refugees, are already arriving in communities across the United States. More than 1,600 arrived in Fiscal Year 2007; more than 8,100 will have arrived by the end of 2008. Iraqis are being resettled in every region of the the United States, with communities in Arizona, California, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, and Texas receiving the largest numbers of new arrivals.

How will these refugees fare in their new communities? What strengths and skills will they bring with them? What challenges will they face? Because it is too soon to give definite answers to these questions, here we offer a brief and preliminary look at Iraqi resettlement in the United States. Our comments are based on the experiences of resettlement agency staff working with both current Iraqi arrivals and with groups that arrived in the early and middle 1990s.²

²Information for this section was provided by U.S. resettlement agencies and by mental health professionals at the Office of Refugee Resettlement.
Strengths and Resources

Iraqi refugees bring with them considerable strengths and resources. Resettlement agency staff describe the newcomers as generally knowledgeable about Western life, open-minded in their attitudes toward cultural differences, and resourceful. As a group, they often have more formal education, professional work experience, and English language skills than other refugee groups. Those who have joined the workforce have generally proven to be diligent and well-regarded employees. And while Iraqis may find some American beliefs and behaviors confusing and even offensive, they generally respond positively to other aspects of American life. For the most part, Iraqis admire American values of achievement, scientific progress, and freedom and equality.

Many Iraqi refugees have relatives and friends in the United States who are eager and able to help them. Iraqis resettled in or near established Iraqi communities will generally find a supportive host community, culturally suitable social services, and familiar food items in grocery stores. It should be noted, however, that the cultural and religious backgrounds of new Iraqi arrivals might not always match those of the Iraqi host community. In these cases, there may be less community support for the newcomers.

Resettlement Challenges

While the presence of established Iraqi-American communities has eased adjustment for the new arrivals, there has been some concern that recent sectarian divisions in Iraq might undermine community cohesion in the United States. This appears to have happened in at least one U.S.-Iraqi community, according to an Iraqi-American with a long background in refugee and immigrant education. Resettlement agencies in other communities, however, have noticed no serious sectarian tensions and describe relations among the various groups as generally good. A resettlement agency in one Michigan community reports that Sunni and Shi'ite newcomers are even sharing apartments.

Early Adjustment Issues

Resettlement agency staff identify three early adjustment challenges for newly arrived Iraqis. The challenges relate to resettlement expectations, mental health, and English language needs.

- Early evidence suggests that Iraqi refugees may be arriving with unrealistic expectations regarding housing, resettlement agency services, and employment opportunities. Refugees have expected better housing and furnishings, more support than agencies typically provide, and higher level jobs than they are usually offered. Better-educated Iraqis, in particular, are reluctant to take entry-level jobs, preferring to put off employment in hopes of landing jobs commensurate with their work experience and education. Resettlement agencies have found that Iraqis who worked for the U.S. government in Iraq can be especially disappointed by their employment prospects in the United States.

- Resettlement agency staff have observed symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among the refugees. According to one agency, these symptoms include "headaches, inability to sleep, nightmares, some depression, and high levels of concern and worry." One resettlement agency reports that war-related physical problems "have largely overshadowed the more subtle signs of PTSD."

- Many Iraqi refugees have a higher proficiency in English than other newcomer groups but still need or want classes to improve their skills. Classes that meet these refugees' needs may be difficult to find because language classes for new refugee arrivals are often geared toward those with little or no English. In addition, it may be difficult to persuade refugees who want to improve their English to take a job first and study after hours, like many Americans who simultaneously work and go to school.
Cross-Cultural Issues

While resettlement agencies describe Iraqi newcomers as generally tolerant of cultural differences, refugee service providers who have worked with this population in the past note several possible areas of cross-cultural misunderstanding and conflict:

• Because religion plays such an important part in the lives of Iraqi Arabs, some resettled refugees—particularly those from rural areas—might be confused by the number of Americans who do not follow a religion and are vocal about not believing in God, yet are well-behaved, accepted members of society.

• Resettled Iraqi refugees might be puzzled at the American need for invitations and advance notice before a visit. An Iraqi family might issue a general invitation, not realizing that they must pin down a specific time and place, then sit at home socially isolated and lonely, wondering why Americans are so unsociable. Iraqis might also insist on paying in restaurants and on other occasions, to the point of spending more than they can afford.

• Friendships between men and women in the West can be a source of confusion to young Iraqi men and women. Many young Iraqi Arab men need to understand that friendliness in an American woman is not necessarily a sign of romantic or sexual interest. Cross-gender friendships in American society can be frightening to young Iraqi women, who may become very shy and hesitant to go out alone, speak up in class, or make friends.

One area of cross-cultural difference that should not present much of a problem for Iraqi Arabs is clothing styles in the United States. Most Iraqi Arabs are familiar with Western dress, although they might be shocked at the amount of flesh Americans bare in the summer.

Working With Iraqi Refugees

Resettlement agencies offer the following suggestions for dealing with refugees’ unrealistic expectations, mental health issues, and need for continuing education.

Adjust Unrealistic Expectations Early On

Resettlement agency staff underscore the importance of explaining resettlement realities carefully to new arrivals, particularly in the areas of housing, employment, and agency support. New arrivals need to understand that available housing may be in less desirable neighborhoods; that it will take time and effort to find professional-level jobs, particularly in areas with less robust economies; and that resettlement is a responsibility shared by the agency, the refugees, family, and friends.

“Early self-sufficiency should be emphasized from day one,” suggests a Texas resettlement agency staff member. Another resettlement agency reports some success in placing refugees in professional positions: “Our staff has been able to help place refugees in their field of expertise, getting them ‘in the door’ at a lower position initially. This is often what it takes for them to be able to progress in their professional careers.” A third agency reports success in placing medically trained refugees in childcare facilities, professionally trained refugees in Arab social service agencies, and unskilled women in the food service industry.

 Agencies underscore the need to stress early on that the financial capacities and responsibilities of the resettlement agencies are limited. One resettlement agency cautioned those resettling Iraqis not to say anything that might be interpreted as a promise: “Have staff and volunteers say ‘I’ll try’ when asked for something.” Be equally careful regarding time frames that could be construed as deadlines.
Provide Mental Health Support

For refugee service providers working with survivors of torture or trauma, the Office of Refugee Resettlement and others with experience in refugee mental health suggest the following:

- Refer survivors of torture or extreme trauma to a torture treatment program, if one exists in the area.
- Strive to create a trusting relationship with clients and establish a warm and accepting environment.
- For refugees undergoing therapy, consider individual rather than group therapy, at least initially. There is some evidence that this population does not do as well in a group setting as a result of “severe trust issues that this population carries with them,” according to a refugee mental health provider.
- Provide guidance and cultural orientation services with special attention to possible fears of police, closed rooms, medical exams, and separation from family members.

Understand that survivors of torture or extreme trauma will have more needs and require more help than other refugees to rebuild their lives. They will likely require more time and encouragement to access the medical, legal, mental health, employment, educational, and social services they need. They may want to explore their spiritual needs, having strengthened or forsaken their faith due to the trauma.

Explore Continuing Education Options

Finding suitable classes for refugees with more proficiency in English than is the norm for new arrivals may also be a challenge. It will be important to canvas each community for English language study options in advance of arrivals so that timely referrals can be made. For better educated refugees, community colleges may offer higher level English classes at low cost.

Refugees with professional training who want to practice their profession in the United States will probably need to be re-credited, a process that can be time-consuming and expensive. For resources on the re-credentialing process, see page 37 in this publication.
Bibliography

Sources


Recommended Reading and Web Site Resources

Books


Articles, Reports, and Chapters in Books


Web Site Resources
Torture treatment programs are available in many states receiving Iraqi refugees. This Web site lists ORR-funded torture treatment programs.

http://www.cvt.org/main.php/HealingtheHurt
This Web site provides a free downloadable copy of Healing the Hurt: A Guide for Developing Services for Torture Survivors.

This Web site lists members of the National Consortium of Torture Treatment Programs.

http://www.irct.org/
This Web site for the International Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims looks at current issues in the treatment of torture survivors and provides resources.

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/resources/eta_factsheet1.htm
This Office of Refugee Resettlement Web site provides important information on the re-credentialing process.
Good Morning,

I hope you are all safe and warm during this cold snap. Please review the Somali refugee data below, starting with the brief report from WI-DHS. I recommend you bookmark the last link to EhtnoMED. This site is a comprehensive resource for many cultures.

As we continue to implement this grant, I appreciate all of your communication and questions.

https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p0/p00505d.pdf

SOMALI REFUGEE DATA SUMMARY 12/2013 –PRELIMINARY REPORT

Large numbers of Somali refugees started coming to Wisconsin in 2012, when there were 166 arrivals.


Somali Refugees - Colorado

A Guide for Health-care Workers Somali Refugees: Created By: Shelby Chapman, M.A. Anthropology

CDC | TB | Ethnographic Guides - Somali

www.cdc.gov

Ethnographic Guides Home. A Practical Guide for Tuberculosis Programs That Provide Services to Hmong Persons from Laos; A Practical Guide for Tuberculosis ...

https://ethnomed.org/culture

Cultures — EthnoMed

ethnomed.org

Other Cultures Collections of resources and information, mainly external to Ethnomed, on specific groups of refugee and immigrants.

All the Best,
The Somali Bantu
Their History and Culture

Dan Van Lehman
Omar Eno
Preface

This booklet is a basic introduction to the people, history, and cultures of the Somali Bantu. It is designed primarily for service providers and others assisting Somali Bantu refugees in their new communities in the United States.

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Introduction

In Africa, the Bantu-speaking peoples make up a major part of the population of nearly all African countries south of the Sahara. They belong to over 300 groups, each with its own language or dialect. Groups vary in size from a few hundred to several million. Among the best-known are the Kikuyu, the largest group in Kenya; the Swahili, whose language is spoken throughout eastern Africa; and the Zulu of South Africa.

The Somali Bantu can be subdivided into distinct groups. There are those who are indigenous to Somalia, those who were brought to Somalia as slaves from Bantu-speaking tribes but integrated into Somali society, and those who were brought to Somalia as slaves but maintained, to varying degrees, their ancestral culture, Bantu languages, and sense of southeast African identity. It is this last group of Bantu refugees that has particularly suffered persecution in Somalia and that is therefore in need of protection through resettlement. These Bantu originally sought resettlement to Tanzania in 1993 and 1994, and to Mozambique in 1997 and 1998, before they were considered for resettlement in the United States in 1999.

As a persecuted minority group in Somalia, the Bantu refugees had endured continual marginalization in Somalia since their arrival as slaves in the 19th century. Although they have lived in Somalia for approximately two centuries, the Bantu are, in many ways, viewed and treated as foreigners. This history, coupled with their cultural, linguistic, and physical differences, distinguishes them from other Somali refugees who have been resettled in the United States. The culture of subjugation under which most of them have lived may present special challenges to their American resettlement case workers.

Today, an estimated 300 Somali Bantu live in the United States. Of these, some have come as students, others have accompanied spouses or other family members, and a few have been resettled as refugees. The Somali Bantu, like other refugee groups, have tended to concentrate in urban areas. One of the largest concentrations is in Atlanta, Georgia, where the Bantu have established a community association, the Somali Bantu Community Organization, to assist newly resettled Somali Bantu refugees.

The total number of Somalis living in the United States is estimated at 150,000, of whom about 40,000 are Somali refugees from the dominant clans. With tens of thousands of Somalis, Minneapolis has the largest Somali community in the United States. Other metropolitan areas with large numbers of Somalis include Columbus, Ohio, New York City, Washington, D.C., Boston, San Diego, Atlanta, and Detroit. (For more information on Somalia in general, please see the Center for Applied Linguistics’ Culture Profile on Somali refugees.)

Before the U.S. resettlement offer and faced with the prospect of indefinite residency in the refugee camps, some Bantu refugee families may have felt compelled to send members back to Somalia to try and claim their former farms.
However, when asked in 1996 if Bantu refugees were still determined to resettle, a Bantu elder affirmed emphatically, “We didn’t know what freedom was; we have been let out of the cage and we don’t want to go back in.”

**Land**

Situated on the coast of east Africa, Somalia encompasses approximately 246,000 square miles, making it about the size of Texas. Only about 10% of this territory is arable and irrigable. Out of this arable land, an estimated 1,729,000 acres is cultivated, and most of this cultivated land is located in Bantu-inhabited regions. The entire southern region’s climate can be categorized as semi-arid, with an average maximum temperature ranging between 85° F to 105° F and minimum temperatures between 68° F and 85° F.

The Bantu primarily inhabit the interriverine area of southern Somalia, where most live in the vicinity of either the Shabelle or Juba Rivers. These rivers originate in the Ethiopian highlands and generally run southwards through the bottom half of Somalia. The Juba River flows out to the Indian Ocean just north of Kismayu while the Shabelle River ends in a series of swamp basins. In years of high rainfall in Ethiopia, the Shabelle River may merge with the Juba River in the far south of Somalia.

In this profile, we are concerned with the Bantu group from along the Juba River. The Bantu in the Juba River valley can be further divided between those living in the lower Juba River Valley (villages primarily south of Jilib) and those living in the middle Juba River valley (primarily villages from Jilib in the south to Buale in the north).

The Juba region is a fertile agricultural land mass stretching between the Kenyan border to the west and the Indian Ocean to the east. Unlike the Shabelle River, which usually dries up from January to March, the Juba River is permanent and is capable of irrigating about 150,000 ha (370,500 acres) of land. Land, particularly farmland, is the one of the most important possessions in the river valley and its environs. Farmland, known locally as dhooboy (muddy land), is the most arable land in Somalia.

Another source of water for farming is rainfall, which is scarce in some seasons. Most of the Juba River valley receives about 24 inches of rain per year. There are two rainy seasons in this region that correspond with the river's high points, which, combined with water from the Juba River, allows farmers to grow crops throughout the year. Most farmers in the region practice a mixed farming system, as rain-fed land mainly provides sorghum and beans. As a result, farmers tend to exploit the recession of river flooding from the adjoining dhesheeg, or depression, along the Juba River. This makes the Bantu-occupied areas of the Juba River valley extremely productive—and valuable—and thus the backbone of agricultural production for national and international markets in southern Somalia.
People

Many Bantu refugees can trace their origins back to ancestors in southeast African tribes who were enslaved in the 18th century by agents of the Sultanate of Zanzibar. These ancestral tribes include, among others, the Makua and Yao of southern Tanzania and northern Mozambique; the Ngindo of southern Tanzania; the Nyasa of southern Tanzania, northern Mozambique, and northern Malawi; and the Zaramo and Zigua of northeast Tanzania. Other southeast African tribes represented among the Bantu refugees include the Digo, Makale, Manyawa, Nyamwezi, and Nyika.

The Bantu slated for resettlement, especially those who fled the once forested Juba River valley, are politely referred to as *Wagosha* (“people of the forest”) or *jareer* (term used to describe Africans with hard or kinky hair). Derogatory terms to describe the Somali Bantu include *adoon* and *habash*, which translate as “slave.” Some Somalis also call the Bantu *ooji*, which in Italian means “today” and refers to the Somali’s perception of the Bantu as lacking the ability to think beyond the moment. The Bantu refugees generally refer to themselves simply as the Bantu. Those who trace their origins to an east African tribe refer to themselves collectively as Shanbara, Shangama, or Wagosha. Those Bantu refugees with very strong cultural and linguistic ties to southeast Africa refer to themselves as *Mushunguli* or according to their east African tribe, such as *Zigua*. In Bantu languages, such as Swahili, people from the Zigua tribe are called *Wazigua*, while a single person from that tribe is called *Mzigua*. The word Mushunguli may have evolved from the word Mzigua.

Most scholars believe that the Wazigua are the founders of Goshaland along the Juba River, a safe haven for runaway slaves. Late in the 19th century, Egypt, Zanzibar, Italy, and Britain recognized this haven as an independent entity. Although other *gama* (autonomous communities) later existed in Goshaland, the Wazigua remained as an autonomous society with a distinct political structure. That is probably why the Goshaland people are generally known by the name of their founders, the Wazigua. Until the 1920s, the Bantu people of Goshaland were divided into nine gama groups, which constituted the core of their confederation. They are Makale, Makua, Molema, Mushunguli (*Zigua*), Ngindo, Nyamwezi, Nyassa, Nyika, and Yao. Later, some of these groups were either assimilated into the indigenous Bantu/Jareer of the Shabelle River or incorporated into other Somali clans such as Biamal, Garre, Jiido, Shiqaaq, and so on.

Prior to the civil war in Somalia in the late 1980s, the Zigua (Wazigua), who have maintained their ancestral southeast African culture and language more than any other ex-slave Bantu group, were also referred to as the Mushunguli. Since many Bantu groups in pre-war Somalia wished to integrate into the dominant clan structure, identifying oneself as a Mushunguli was undesirable. Once in the refugee camps, however, being a Mushunguli became desirable as resettlement to Tanzania and Mozambique was predicated on proving a connection to an east African tribe. In this regard, some Bantu refugees with ex-slave ancestry, whether or not they maintained their ancestral language and culture, adopted...
Mushunguli identification and Swahili language use to differentiate themselves from the other Somali Bantu groups. In order to avoid confusion for refugee resettlement professionals, however, the term Bantu will be used throughout this report.

**Place in Society**

Although there are today no reliable statistical sources, the Somali population is estimated at about 7.5 million people. Of that figure, the entire Bantu population in southern Somalia is estimated at about 600,000, and those with strong east African identification estimated at a fraction of that number. The Bantu people are ethnically and culturally distinct from the Somali nomads and the coastal people, who generally disdain agriculture and value a tribal lineage system that does not include the Bantu.

Since independence in 1960, Somali governments have promoted the false notion that Somalia is a homogeneous nation, a claim reinforced by some Somali nomadic scholars and non-Somalis as well. The myth of homogeneity falsely represents Somalia’s dominant nomadic culture and tradition as the nation’s only culture and tradition. Somalia, in fact, is made up of diverse communities. Indeed, some experts estimate that up to one-third of all Somalis are minorities, representing a variety of cultures, languages, and interpretations of the dominant Sunni Islamic religion.

The Bantu people’s predominant Negroid physical features are distinct from that of the Somali nomads and give them a unique identity. Among the physical features used to differentiate the nomads from the Bantu is hair texture—jareer (kinky hair for the Bantu people) and jilec (soft hair for the non-Bantu). People with such features are subjected to a variety of discriminatory practices. They are often excluded from political, economic, and educational advancement. The Bantu, therefore, have had to settle for the lowest and most undignified occupations.

**Social Structures**

Some Bantu populations still maintain the tribal identities of their ancestral country of origin. However, unlike the nomadic Somalis, who consider clan affiliation and tribal identification sacrosanct and critical to survival, most Bantu people identify themselves by their place of residence, which, for those with strong cultural ties to Tanzania, often corresponds to their ceremonial kin grouping. The Bantu slated for resettlement in the United States, therefore, place much less emphasis on Somali clan and tribal affiliations than do the non-Bantu Somalis who have been resettled in the United States. Other Bantu who lived in the vicinity of nomadic Somali clans (particularly those residing outside of the lower Juba River valley) integrated into the Somali nomadic clan system, which provided the Bantu with protection and a sense of identity with the nomads.
Discrimination against the Bantu in Somalia largely prevented them from intermarrying with other Somali groups and thus receiving the protection those clan affiliations normally bring. As the scholar Lee Cassanelli explains,

*In Somali society, married women traditionally have served to link the clans of their fathers and brothers, to whom they always belong, with their husbands, to whom the children always belong. Most of the nomadic clans practiced some form of exogamy—marriage outside the clan—to help strengthen alliances with “outsiders.” Wives were exchanged even between clans and clan sections that were prone to fight over water and pasture. These ties helped mediate disputes between clans, since there were always families with in-laws on the other side who would have an interest in the peaceful resolution of conflicts.*

Discrimination against the Bantu was not confined to marriage alone, but engulfed every aspect of their lives. As a marginalized group, the Bantu lacked true representation in politics and access to government services, educational opportunities, and professional positions in the private sector. This exclusion also resulted in economic development policies and resource allocations that didn’t take into account Bantu wishes and priorities. The Bantu’s lineage to slavery relegated them to second-class status—or worse—in pre-war Somalia. This overt discrimination also carried over to the Kenyan refugee camps where the Bantu continued to experience discrimination from the other Somali groups.

Excluded from mainstream Somali society, many Bantu have retained ancestral social structures. For many of the Bantu from the lower Juba River valley, this means that their east African tribe of origin is the main form of social organization. For these Bantu, smaller units of social organization are broken down according to matrilineal kin groupings, which are often synonymous with ceremonial dance groupings. Bantu village and community composition normally follows the Bantu’s east African tribal and kin groupings.

Many Bantu from the middle Juba River valley lost their east African language and culture. These Bantu have attempted to integrate, usually as inferior members, into a local dominant Somali clan social structure. Like the Bantu from the lower Juba River valley, the Bantu from the middle Juba River valley also regard their village as an important form of social organization. Although Bantu with strong cultural and linguistic links to southeast Africa have been known to level sarcasm against those who attempted to assimilate into the dominant Somali clan culture and language, there is no real hostility between them. In fact, the war and refugee experience have worked to strengthen relationships between the various Bantu subgroups.

**Economy**

Economically, the Juba River valley in southern Somalia has a special status as it is one of only a few zones where irrigated agriculture is practiced and surplus production is common. Since the yields of other regions, which depend on rainwater, are rarely sufficient to satisfy local markets, it is the settlements in the Juba
River valley that supply the coastal and interior towns with agricultural products. The Bantu manned the caravans, which crossed this region in considerable numbers, in order to transship their goods to the nearby villages and cities.

In rural southern Somalia, the standard of living of the Bantu Somalis is quite low, and homes typically have no running water or electricity and few material possessions. Most Bantu farmers in the region are small holders, restricted to either low-level jobs or farming on land cultivated by family members and, occasionally, by a few hired workers. The average land area owned by each family ranges between 1 and 10 acres. This type of farming can provide subsistence and limited surpluses to the commercial market. Nevertheless, these farmers contribute the highest percentage to Somalia’s staple food stocks, which include maize, millet, sorghum, sesame, beans, cotton, rice, vegetables, and fruits. Crops grown for commercial export markets include bananas, citrus, and vegetables.

Stagnant economic development among the Bantu people in southern Somalia probably has its roots in the Italian colonial period. Colonial officials confiscated the Bantu’s arable farms, which were their only means of subsistence and economic advancement. Between 1935 and 1940, the Italian colonial authority also forcibly conscripted the Bantu into slave-like labor in order to establish large plantations to exploit the agricultural potential in the Juba River valley. This practice ended once the British Army in Somalia defeated the Italians in 1941. The 1940s until the early 1960s were predominantly peaceful years for the Bantu, who were free to farm with little interference from government authorities or hostile neighbors.

After independence, Somali authorities adopted a policy designed to prevent Bantu people from social, political, and economic development. Over the course of the late Siyaad Barre’s military regime in the 1980s, more and more Bantu farmers became landless as large government-owned agricultural enterprises and members of the political elite used unjust land registration laws to displace the smallholder Bantu from their farms. Expropriation of this valuable arable and irrigable farmland from the Bantu allowed the new “owners” to exploit the land for cash crops.

Some of the Bantu have managed to move to urban areas in order to improve their lives. The Bantu in the cities work in building trades, woodworking, vehicle repair, tailoring, and electric machine maintenance. In the refugee camps, the Bantu have engaged in construction, manual labor, tree farming and nurseries, and vegetable gardening.

**History**

Persian and Arab traders established business contacts with east Africans over 1,000 years ago. These relations, coupled with refugees who fled the turmoil in Arabia after the death of Muhammad in the 7th century, resulted in a significant number of Arab immigrants residing on the coast of east Africa. The mixing of
the coastal Bantu-speaking African peoples with these Arab immigrants led to the emergence of the Swahili people and language. The Swahili people lived and worked for the next seven centuries with the indigenous African population. During this time, the Swahili people expanded their trade and communication further inland and to the south with the other African groups, including ancestral tribes of the Somali Bantu.

**Colonial Period**

By the time the Portuguese arrived in the 15th century, there existed a modern economy and advanced society on the east coast of Africa that some claim rivaled those in Europe. Portuguese colonial rule, however, disrupted the traditional local economic networks on the east African coast, resulting in a general breakdown of the once prosperous Swahili economy.

The Portuguese were finally ousted in 1730 from the east African coast (north of Mozambique) by forces loyal to the Sultanate of Oman. Omani Arab dominion adversely affected the Swahili but was disastrous to the inland African tribes as slavery expanded to become a major economic enterprise of the Sultanate. While Somali coastal cities were included in the Sultanate, local clans there enjoyed greater freedom over their internal affairs than did the Swahili people in Kenya and Tanzania.

**Slavery**

Industrialization in the 18th century increased the demand for cheap labor around the world. Although slavery in east Africa predates the Sultanate of Zanzibar, widespread plantation and industrial slave operations in the early 19th century increased the need for labor. To take advantage of this business opportunity, the Sultan of Oman, Sayyid Said, relocated his seat of power from Oman to the east African island of Zanzibar in 1840. The Sultanate's sovereignty extended from northern Mozambique to southern Somalia. Africans from these areas were abducted into the slave trade. Tanzania, which now includes Zanzibar, was particularly terrorized by the slave trade. A majority of the Somali Bantu refugees slated for resettlement to the United States trace their ancestral origins to Tanzania.

The slave trade from Mozambique and southern Tanzania was carried out by agents of the Sultanate of Zanzibar in cooperation with some African tribes. Raids and prisoners of war were the typical sources of slaves. Written accounts from the time describe how slave traders marched African slaves 400 miles from the area around Lake Malawi in the interior to the Tanzanian coastal city of Kilwa Kivinje on the Indian Ocean. This written history corresponds exactly with the oral history of the Somali Bantu elders with origins in Mozambique. Bantu refugees with ancestral origins in northeast Tanzania, primarily the Zigua and Zaramo, similarly describe how their ancestors were transported by sea from the Tanzanian port city of Bagamoyo to southern Somalia.
Although many slaves were sold to European buyers with destinations beyond Africa, some slaves were sold to Africans to work on plantations on the continent. Some Africans slaves from Kilwa were transported to the Somali port cities of Merka and Brava where they were forced to work plantations near the Indian Ocean coast and in the Shabelle River valley.

**Social Impact of Slavery**

The introduction of the modern cash economy at about the same time, and with it the practice of slavery, contributed to the breakdown of traditional intertribal economic and social safety networks. As a result, many indigenous Africans lost their customary coping methods that had formerly protected them in times of severe drought. This was particularly true for tribes that were located near the Indian Ocean coast, such as the Zaramo and Zigua, both of which have descendants represented among the Somali Bantu refugees today. In the late 1830s, there were several years of consecutive drought in Tanzania that resulted in widespread starvation and death. In the hope of averting their families’ starvation, Africans without means to weather this terrible period were reduced to accepting Omani Arab promises of wage labor in a distant land. The Bantu claim that once their ancestors landed in Somalia, they were sold as slaves on the Benediri coast and, later, to nomadic Somalis. The African slaves from northeast Tanzania generally worked in the same southeastern Somali regions as those slaves from Mozambique.

Between 25,000 and 50,000 slaves were absorbed into the Somali riverine areas from 1800 to 1890. During this period of expanded agricultural production in the Shabelle River valley, the more remote and forested Juba River valley remained largely uninhabited. In the 1840s, the first fugitive slaves from the Shabelle valley arrived and settled along the Juba River. By the early 1900s, an estimated 35,000 ex-slaves were living in communities in the Juba River valley, in many cases settling in villages according to their east African tribe.

In the mid-19th century, an influential female Zigua leader, Wanankhucha, led many of her people out of slavery in a well-orchestrated escape aimed at returning to Tanzania. Upon arriving in the lower Juba River valley, where the fugitive slaves were eventually able to farm and protect themselves from hostile Somalis, Wanankhucha determined that a recent earthquake in the valley was a sign that they should settle rather than continue their journey.

Another factor hindering the ex-slaves return to southeast Africa was the perilous social and physical environments in eastern Kenya and southern Somalia. At the time, the indigenous tribes of east Kenya were more hostile to runaway slaves than Arab slave owners. The physical landscape of the Kenyan frontier with Somalia is one of the more inhospitable areas in east Africa. Nonnatives trying to cross this area by foot placed themselves at great physical risk.

In 1895, the first 45 slaves were freed by the Italian colonial authority under the administration of the chartered company, V. Filonardi. Massive emancipation of
slaves in Somalia only began after the antislavery activist Robecchi Bricchetti informed the Italian public about the slave trade in Somalia and the indifferent attitude of the Italian colonial government toward the trade. Slavery in southern Somalia lasted until early into the 20th century when it was abolished by the Italian colonial authority in accordance with the Belgium protocol. Some inland groups remained in slavery until the 1930s, however.

After Slavery

Fugitive slaves who settled in the lower Juba River valley with others from their east African tribes were able to retain their ancestral languages and cultures. Later Bantu arrivals, who had begun to assimilate into Somali society while living in the Shabelle River valley, found the lower Juba River valley densely populated and were therefore forced to settle farther north to the middle Juba River valley. While the Bantu of the middle Juba River valley generally lost their ancestral languages and culture, they faced discrimination similar to that levelled against the Bantu living in the lower Juba River valley. Many of these Bantu adopted dominant Somali clan attachment and names as a means of social organization and identity.

While slavery in southern Somalia was abolished in the early part of the 20th century, the same Italian authority that had abolished slavery reintroduced coerced labor laws and the conscription of the freed slaves for economic purposes in the agricultural industry in the mid-1930s. Italy had established over 100 plantations in the river valleys, and an Italian official suggested to the Italian administration that it establish villages for emancipated slaves who would be organized into labor brigades to work on the Italian plantations.

The emancipated Bantu were expected to work solely as farm laborers on plantations owned by the Italian colonial government. The Italian agricultural schemes would not have succeeded without the collaboration of individuals from non-Bantu ethnic groups who themselves were former slave owners. The Bantu were forced to abandon their own farms in order to dwell in the established villages around the Italian plantations. As a British official in east Africa noted, “The conception of these agricultural enterprises as exploitation concessions engendered under the [Italian] fascist regime a labour policy of considerable severity in theory and actual brutality in practice. It was in fact indistinguishable from slavery.”

20th Century

In spite of attacks from rogue slave traders and coercive labor practices of the Italian colonial regime, the Bantu were able to establish themselves as farmers and live in a relatively stable manner. Over time, some Bantu migrated to large Somali cities where they found jobs as manual laborers and occasionally as semi-skilled tradesman.
Bantu refugee elders recall the British occupation of Somalia between the early 1940s and 1950 as more just than either the Italian colonial regime or the independent Somali government. Bantu refugees complain that life became more difficult once Somalia became independent in 1960. Although the Somali government made declarations in the 1970s that tribalism and mention of clan differences should be abolished, overt discrimination against the Bantu continued.

From the late 1970s until the early 1980s, the Somali government forcibly conscripted Bantu into the military in its fight against Ethiopia. The Bantu made ideal soldiers because, as the scholar Catherine Besteman notes, they were visually identifiable as comrades by other government soldiers and they were more easily caught if they tried to escape in the northern countryside where they would clearly be out of place.

**Civil War**

Civil war broke out in the wake of the 1991 collapse of Siyaad Barre's regime, and clan competition for power had disastrous results for the civilian population in general and the Bantu people in particular. The Bantu were the backbone of agricultural production in southern Somalia, and consequently had large stocks of food on their property. As Somali civil society broke down in 1991 and 1992, agricultural marketing networks also began to cease normal operations. As hunger among the Somali population increased, stocks of food gained value and importance among not only the starving populace but also the bandits and rogue militias. Because the Bantu were excluded from the traditional Somali clan protection network, bandits and militias were able to attack the Bantu with impunity. In the process of stealing food stocks, the bandits also robbed, raped, and murdered Bantu farmers.

As the war progressed, control of the lower Juba River valley shifted among various warlords, with each wreaking havoc on the Bantu farming communities. In October of 1992, the Bantu began to flee southern Somalia en masse for refugee camps located approximately 40 miles from the Somali border in Kenya's arid and often hostile Northeastern Province. By January of 1994, an estimated 10,000 Bantu were living in the Dagahaley, Ifo, Liboi, and Hagadera Refugee Camps; 75% of these refugees expressed the desire to resettle in Tanzania and to not return to Somalia. Several thousand Bantu refugees also fled Somalia directly by sea to the Marafa refugee camp near Malindi, Kenya, and also to the Mkuyu refugee camp near Handeni in northern Tanzania.

**In Refugee Camps**

Refugees from southern Somalia, especially those who originated west of the Indian Ocean coastal cities, sought refuge by crossing into Kenya at the border town of Liboi (roughly located on the equator 10 miles west of the Kenya-Somalia frontier). Most refugees in Dadaab (located another 30 miles west of Liboi) today were received at Liboi, which also served as the original United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) camp in this area. As Liboi
The Somali Bantu grew to over 40,000 refugees, the UNHCR established additional camps: first Ifo, then Dagahaley, and, lastly, Hagadera, all of which are located in the Dadaab Division of Garissa District in Northeastern Province. The three camps are situated within 10 miles of the Dadaab Division town center, which is also called Dadaab. At its height, the four refugee camps in Kenya held over 160,000 refugees. With the closing of Liboi, the UNHCR estimates in 2002 that approximately 135,000 refugees remain in the three Dadaab camps.

The Dadaab camps are administered by the UNHCR with the main implementing partners, CARE International and Doctors Without Borders, providing general camp support and medical care respectively. A number of other nongovernmental agencies such as Caritas, UNICEF, and local Kenyan groups have also provided support. The Government of Kenya (GOK) established police posts in each camp and, occasionally, provides security backup through the Kenyan Army.

Dadaab is located in Kenya’s inhospitable north. The area’s flat, semi-arid, and sandy terrain supports mostly scrub brush and is home to an array of wildlife including giraffe, small antelope known as Dik Dik, various cats such as the East African Serval, hyena, the carnivorous Marabou stork, and Vulturine guinea fowl. The Somali Wild Ass is also prevalent in and around the refugee camps. Both flora and fauna in the Dadaab refugee area have suffered due to habitat destruction, mainly from the cutting and collection of firewood.

Dadaab is a small frontier town with sandy streets, some concrete buildings, and erratic water and electrical service. Along with refugees and the local Kenyan Somali inhabitants, nomads and bandits use Dadaab as a rest and resupply destination. Caution must be used when walking through town at night. Gunfire and banditry in Dadaab force aid workers to live in secure compounds.

In the refugee camps, the Bantu settled in the most distant locations (blocks or sections housing approximately 600 people each) where they, along with other refugees on the periphery of the camp, are more vulnerable to bandit attacks than refugees living near the center of the camps. Settlement of the Bantu in these camp locations was partly a result of their date of arrival in the camps and partly a result of the discrimination against them by the other Somali refugees.

Each refugee family in the Dadaab camps is issued a large canvas tent, basic cooking utensils, and a jerry can for collecting potable water from spigots located throughout the camps. Cooking of UNHCR-supplied wheat, beans, salt, sugar, and oil (which are distributed once every two weeks), along with various produce and canned food available in the refugee camp markets, is usually done over an open fire. Refugees dig their own latrines with UNHCR-supplied building materials and supervision. Doctors Without Borders runs the hospitals and many health posts that are located in each refugee camp. They, along with CARE International social workers, provide various forms of outreach to the refugees.

In order to protect themselves against nighttime bandit attacks, the Bantu have constructed fortified compounds guarded by armed sentries. Since security for

In 2002, over 12,000 Somali Bantu were moved to the Kakuma refugee camp in northwest Kenya to be interviewed by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalizations Service.
all people living in the refugee camps is inadequate, other refugees have also built protective fencing around their sections. In the first years of the camp, the Bantu suffered violent attacks at a rate that was disproportionate to their population in the wider refugee camp community.

Before a U.S.-sponsored firewood collection program was established, refugee women were particularly vulnerable to rape while collecting firewood in the surrounding bush. Rape was often committed by men from one clan against women from a different clan. In some cases, refugees who were raped claimed that their attackers first asked them what clan they belonged to.

Bantu women were especially vulnerable. Rapists could be virtually assured that they were not attacking a fellow clan member or even someone who belonged to a clan that had a security agreement with their clan. In the ensuing anger and confusion of these rapes, the Bantu accused the dominant clans of this crime. When women from the dominant clans were raped, they sometimes accused Bantu men as the attackers. With accusations being hurled against each community, hostilities occasionally broke out.

Despite this difficult environment, the Bantu have managed to carve out a niche for themselves in small-scale agriculture, operating a tree nursery at one camp and growing produce for local markets in and outside of the refugee camps. The Bantu have also been employed by nongovernmental organizations in the building trades and as laborers.

In 2002, over 12,000 Somali Bantu were moved to the Kakuma refugee camp in northwest Kenya to be interviewed by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Post-Civil War

As militia fighting in southern Somalia stabilized in the mid-1990s, the Bantu who remained in Somalia were once again able to resume farming. Since this time, however, armed dominant clan bandits have taken control of the valuable agricultural regions of southern Somalia. These bandits extort protection money from the Bantu in return for not harming them or allowing other bandits to harm them. Today, the Bantu in Somalia again exist in a state somewhere between sharecropping and slavery. Here is how Cassanelli describes the situation:

*The war is now concentrated in key resource areas of the south, which are largely, although not exclusively, inhabited by minorities. While planting and harvesting have resumed in many districts of the south, the larger economy is one based on extortion of surpluses from the unarmed to the armed. Because no social contract based on clan affiliation exists between the occupying forces and the villagers, there is no assurance that benefits in the form of relief aid will reach the villagers themselves.*
Religious Life

Ancestors of the Bantu in southeast Africa practiced indigenous ceremonies and beliefs prior to their abduction into slavery. Since Muslims are prohibited from owning Muslim slaves, some Bantu freed themselves from slavery by converting to Islam. Over time, many others also converted to Islam. A small number of Bantu who resided in the Dadaab refugee camps recently converted to Christianity. Many Bantu, whether Muslim or Christian, retain animist beliefs, including use of magic, curses, and possession dances.

Islamic influence among the escaped slaves in the Juba River valley gained momentum after the Bantu leader Nassib Bundo converted to Islam. Although the pre-Islamic traditions and ritual practices were not completely eliminated, most Bantu people in the Juba River valley had converted to Islam by the beginning of the 20th century. Unlike some politically motivated Islamic groups, the Bantu people from the Juba River valley practice Islam for solely religious purposes.

It should be noted that the lower Juba Bantu with strong linguistic and cultural ties to southeast Africa place great value on belonging to a ritual group, known as mviko. Some traditional ceremonies performed by the group are known as mviko rituals. As Francesca Declich, an authority on Bantu culture, explains,

*In the Gosha area, belonging to a dance society or other dance group is equivalent to belonging to a kin grouping: people share a network of relationships, incest rules (inter-marriage is closely controlled between members of the same dance group), and ancestors by dance group. The dances are closely related to initiation into adulthood and their performance is closely related to control and, therefore, political power.*

Mviko and other Bantu ceremonies that include playing drums and dancing are not considered appropriate Islamic behavior and are forbidden by some local Muslim sheikhs. In pre-civil war Somalia, newly resettled nomads in the Juba River valley would often disrupt Bantu dance performances. Some Bantu ceremonial dancing in the Dadaab refugee camps was also disrupted—sometimes violently through intimidation and stone throwing—by fundamentalist Muslim Somalis who objected to the perceived sexually provocative dancing. Although there is some conflict in mixing Islamic Sufi mysticism, which is acceptable to Muslim sheikhs, and the traditional Bantu ritual dances, both seem to coexist in Bantu religious life.

Conversion to Islam by the Bantu communities has served to somewhat reduce hostilities between them and the Somali pastoralists who live in the vicinity of the Juba River. The Bantu are members of the Sunni Islamic sect and members of the Ahmediya Sufi brotherhood and the Qaadiriya Sufi brotherhood, which was headed by the distinguished scholar Sheikh Awees Al-Barawi of Bantu origin. The brotherhoods are known to be the center for religious learning. At the same
time, there are Bantu who are not attached to any brotherhood group and practice Islam on a daily basis.

With regard to religious practices, the Bantu are among the more liberal Muslims in Somali society. Evidence of this are the ceremonies performed by the Bantu and the roles that women are allowed to play in the community, such as being allowed to work in the fields and, although they dress modestly by American standards, not wearing the hijab, which some Muslim women wear to cover themselves while in public. There is no evidence to link the Bantu with any fundamentalist religious or extremist political group. In fact, some fundamentalists in Somalia dismiss the Bantu's religious saints (Sufis) and Islamic practices as unorthodox.

Like other Islamic groups, the Bantu people celebrate the two major religious occasions, Eid-al-Fitr, which comes at the end of the holy month of Ramadan, and Eid-al-Adha, which coincides with the annual pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

There appeared to be no Christians among the Bantu who first arrived in refugee camps in 1992. By 1996, however, a small number had converted to Christianity in the Ifo refugee camp, which was also home to several hundred Christian Ethiopians. The Christian Bantu stated that they didn't want to belong to a religion (Islam) that could allow atrocities to be perpetrated against them. A 2002 report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) notes the presence of a Bantu-constructed Christian church in the Ifo refugee camp.

**Daily Life and Values**

Although it is difficult to say what is important to all Somali Bantu, let alone describe what they value, the authors' experience with the Bantu indicates that they, like Americans, wish to better the lives of their children and are willing to work hard and make sacrifices to achieve this. Like other marginalized minorities around the world, the Somali Bantu have been forced to accept their supposed station in life. Part of this acceptance meant keeping their true feelings about their position in Somali society to themselves. Once in the refugee camps, however, where Kenyan police, aid workers, and Kenyan government officials treated the Somali Bantu more respectfully, the Bantu began to speak out and defend themselves against their mistreatment. By treating the Bantu as fairly and respectfully as they treat other refugee groups, resettlement workers in the United States will help establish rapport and earn the Bantu's trust.

Despite the abuses against them, the Bantu have been described as a resourceful people with many different skills. Bantu who have gone to the cities have worked in a variety of labor intensive occupations. Their resourcefulness and hard work is evident in the refugee camps as well, where the Bantu have been engaged in similar types of jobs as well as agricultural work. The Bantu have also been described as humble and hospitable. They are known for their capacity to easily adjust to any situation.
Family Life

The IOM reports that the average Bantu family consists of between four and eight children, often with a number of very young children, and that a nuclear family typically includes grandparents, uncles, aunts, and other relatives. Most Bantu adults also consider themselves members of more than one family. A married woman, for example, retains membership in her father’s family.

Daily life may vary slightly from one Bantu family to another, but generally Bantu society is a patriarchal one in which the father is the main provider and the mother is the general manager of the family’s domestic affairs. However, for some lower Juba Bantu who have maintained their east African language and culture, traditional rituals are passed down through the mother. Increasingly, women are playing a role in helping provide for the family. Bantu children typically work alongside their parents on the family farm and participate with adults in some traditional ceremonies.

The Bantu maintain their traditional hospitality and support toward extended families in times of trouble. In fact, their hospitality extends to outsiders who are in need of help. For example, when neighboring pastoral communities lose their animals due to drought and disease, they are welcomed to settle with the Bantu communities. In these cases, a house is built and a piece of farm land assigned to the newcomer under a rental agreement known as doonfuul or berkaber, which means sharecropping.

Marriage and Children

Marriage among the Bantu people can be divided into two types. The first, known as aros fadhi, is consensual and arranged by the parents. The second, known as msafa, is not approved by the parents and involves the couple running away together to the house of a local sheikh to be married. Before performing the wedding, however, the sheikh calls the children’s parents to ask them whether they give their blessings to the marriage. The parents on both sides will usually give the wedding their blessing out of respect for the sheikh. In traditional Bantu marriages, the father of the groom pays a dowry to the family of the bride. Bantu weddings are festive occasions where the groom’s parents also arrange a large party for the guests after the ceremony. The IOM estimates that while some Bantu marry before the age of 16, it is rare, and that many marry between the ages of 16 and 18.

With the Bantu, as in much of Somali society, the children are given the father’s names while the wife keeps her father’s names. The Bantu should be addressed by their first name. Traditionally, a child is given a name on the third day after birth. Islamic names are predominantly used these days, although there is also evidence that some Bantu still use traditional names as well. Some male traditional names are Kolonga, Shaalo, Juma, Mkoma, Mberwa, Nameka, Arbow, Kabea, and Kasamila. Examples of male Islamic names are Kabirow, Malik,
Mustaf, Abdulrahman, and Mohammed. Several female traditional names are Unshirey, Mwanamku, and Mwanamvua, while some Islamic female names are Fatuma, Nuuria, Rahma, and Amina.

Divorce is not uncommon among the Bantu, and men and women may have children by different partners. Young children typically stay with the mother after divorce, but older children may stay with the father.

**Community Life**

Public life in Bantu villages is similar to that in other African societies where people know and interact with each other to provide for their sustenance and protection. Daily life for most men is consumed by either working on private farms or at wage earning jobs. Most women play the role of the head of the household, while also being responsible for food preparation and farming tasks. This social structure was recreated in the refugee camps, where the Bantu settled into several community sections or blocks. They quickly organized themselves into functioning communities with gardens for supplemental food, appointed elders and leaders to conduct ceremonies, and built fencing with guards to protect themselves against bandit attacks.

**Festivities and Ceremonies**

Like other Muslims, the Bantu follow the lunar year system while also using the solar year system to determine the timing for crop planting and harvesting. One of the popular and celebrated traditional festivities is the fire festival known as Deb-Shid, in which people dance and sing around a bonfire to celebrate the beginning of a new year.

Bantu ceremonies and dance groups are strongly linked to their community structure and spiritual well-being. Thus, traditional ceremonies and ritual dancing among the Bantu will most likely continue to be an important aspect of their lives once they are settled in the United States. Resettlement agencies should therefore try to incorporate these aspects of community organization into the Bantu’s resettlement placement and delivery of services. In the United States, clustering Bantu families together in housing units would allow them to draw on their community cooperation and support.

Another important and traditional festival is Anyakow. This is a dance and singing celebration in which both males and females participate and is mostly held at night in the forest. It is only performed during the day for the commemoration of an important figure in the community or for someone who is about to get married and requests it for the wedding. Other celebrations are held at night to allow participants to spiritually connect with their ancestors. Night is also a time for people to rest and make social acquaintances.

A fascinating and entertaining dance is Masawey, in which men and women wear dried banana leaves on their waists, metal anklets on their feet, and...
bracelets on their hands to make synchronized rhythmic noises. This is an acrobatic dance with participants simultaneously swinging and moving their bodies. This dance, like Anyakow, is sung in either Swahili or a local dialect. Another famous dance is Cadow Makaraan. Shulay is a dance competition between Bantu villages that is performed by the best boy and girl dancers from each village. In all these events, whether ritual or fantasy, performers play different drums and other instruments.

Artistic woodcarvings are demonstrated during the festivities of Anyakow and other dancing ceremonies. Various carved masks are worn during daytime dances to cover one's face. During these festivities, the artists’ mastery of art, literature, and music are said to not only capture the audience's attention, but to mesmerize them as well.

Although festivities are mainly religious, there are other nonreligious social occasions that are celebrated, such as the birth of a baby, marriages, circumcisions, and the commemoration of saints. The Bantu’s animist beliefs reveal themselves in rural child-rearing practices. Women with babies under 40 days old traditionally stay inside. If a new mother needs to go outside, she will often take a metallic object with her to ward off evil. This tradition is mostly practiced by those living in rural Somalia, while the urban population often no longer practices such traditions.

**Diet**

The staple food for the Bantu is maize, locally known as soor, which is a thick porridge. Other foods are beans, sorghum, vegetables, and fruits. Through outside influences, additional foods such as rice and spaghetti have become common. The Bantu catch fish for themselves from the Juba River and occasionally buy or trade for ghee, milk, and meat in the market from the nomads. They normally eat three meals a day. Breakfast often includes coffee with bananas, sweet potatoes, or yam. For lunch, they may eat boiled corn and beans mixed with sesame oil and tea. Dinner could be soor with mboga (cooked vegetables), fish or meat, and milk.

The Bantu eat halaal meat—that is, meat that comes from animals slaughtered by a Muslim—and are not permitted to eat pork and lard. Some Bantu also hunt wild game to supplement their diets. Although the Bantu follow restrictions against alcohol, a few brew local drinks made of maize and honey, which is consumed during the traditional ritual dance gatherings.

Resettlement agencies may want to provide the Bantu with bread and cereal (hot and cold), the fruit and vegetables listed above, and milk and loose leaf tea to drink. The Bantu have learned to make and cook spaghetti and flat bread (similar to a tortilla) in the refugee camps from their rations of wheat, cooking oil, sugar, and salt. They have also grown tomatoes, onions, papaya, and watermelons in the camps and should be familiar with this produce in the United States.

The staple food for the Bantu is maize, locally known as soor, which is a thick porridge.
Dress

As mentioned earlier, Bantu women do not wear the hijab for religious purposes. However, if married, they cover themselves by wearing a *shaash dango* (head-scarf), a locally styled blouse called a *cambuur-garbeet*, and a large wraparound cloth called a *gonfo*, similar to the Indian sari. Some Bantu dressing styles are worn only on special occasions such as weddings, traditional festivities, and religious celebrations.

Many Bantu men in the refugee camps, and particularly the older ones, dress in buttoned shirts or t-shirts along with the traditional wraparound cloth that other Somalis wear around their waists. Like their Somali compatriots, the Bantu may wear this clothing at home once they arrive in the United States. Younger men engaged in manual labor are more likely to wear pants rather than the wraparound cloth. Some Bantu men also put on the Muslim cap or, less often, a turban.

Clothing worn by the Bantu children in the refugee camp generally mirrors that of the parents. With limited money for clothes, children are often provided with the most affordable clothes that are available in the camps, with girls wearing dresses and wraparound skirts and boys dressing in t-shirts and pants. Due to a lack of money, some refugees even used the liner in their tents as material for clothing.

Art, Literature, and Music

Art for the Bantu primarily takes the form of music and dance, as described in length in the sections on religion and festivities. Important aspects of their culture are passed down from one generation to the next through storytelling, singing, and oral recounting of their history. The Bantu play musical instruments, primarily drums, in their traditional ceremonies. Some Bantu work in urban Somalia playing in bands for the wider Somali population.

Language and Literacy

The Somali language has distinct regional variants. The two main variants are Af Maay (pronounced *af my*) and Af Maxaa (roughly pronounced *af mahaa*). Both are Cushitic, with virtually all Somalis speaking at least one of these languages. Af Maay, also known as Maay Maay, serves as the lingua franca in southern Somalia as an agropastoral language while Af Maxaa is spoken throughout the rest of Somalia and in neighboring countries, including Kenya, where the refugee camps are located.

Both languages served as official languages until 1972 when the government determined that Af Maxaa would be the official written language in Somalia. This decision further isolated and hindered southerners, including the Bantu, from participating in mainstream Somali politics, government services, and
education. Af Maay and Af Maxaa share some similarities in their written form but are different enough in their spoken forms as to be mutually unintelligible.

While the main language in the Juba River valley is Af Maay, some Bantu in traditional villages do not understand it at all. These Bantu still speak their ancestral tribal languages from Tanzania (primarily Zigua), with Swahili occasionally used as a common language. In the refugee camps, some Bantu adults have taken it upon themselves to learn English while others have gained greater proficiency in Swahili in order to communicate with Kenyan aid workers, police, and government officials. A limited number of Bantu refugees are also able to speak and understand some Af Maxaa, which is predominantly spoken in the Dadaab refugee camps and in the surrounding districts of Kenya's Northeastern Province.

Resettlement agencies in the United States may want to try first using Af Maay, then using Af Maxaa-speaking Somali staff to translate. Some Bantu children may have a strong enough command of English to communicate with resettlement workers. With Zigua and other traditional Bantu, resettlement agencies can utilize their Swahili-speaking staff from east Africa (Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, and Tanzania) to communicate with these Bantu. If Somali translators are used, there may be issues of trust and respect between them and the Bantu.

Although the male head of household will most likely represent the family, resettlement workers should also speak directly with the other members of the family to ensure that their needs and concerns are being met.

The Af Maay Dialect

The Sound System and Pronunciation

Af Maay uses the Roman alphabet with minor modifications to accommodate unique pronunciations. Since it has only recently been codified, the written language is very much a work in progress, with variations quite common. Like Af Maxaa, the Af Maay grammar is not well documented although the use of proper grammar is very important in both.

Af Maay consists of 24 consonants and five vowels:

Consonants: $b$ $p$ $t$ $j$ $jh$ $d$ $th$ $r$ $s$ $sh$ $dh$ $g$ $gh$ $f$ $q$ $k$ $l$ $m$ $n$ $ng$ $ny$ $w$ $h$ $y$

Of these, fifteen are pronounced almost as they are in English: $b$, $d$, $f$, $g$, $h$, $j$, $k$, $l$, $m$, $n$, $s$, $sh$, $t$, $w$, and $y$. Af Maay does not use the English letters $c$, $v$, $x$, and $z$. Unlike the Af Maxaa language, Af Maay has no pharyngeal or glottal sound such as $ha$ and ‘a, which are also common in Arabic ($xa$ and $ca$ in Af Maxaa).

Vowels: $a$ $e$ $i$ $o$ $u$
Typically, Somali Bantu will pronounce English words the way they would pronounce them in Af Maay.

English vowels will present some difficulty to Somali Bantu, since English lacks Af Maay’s one-to-one correspondence between vowel letters and sounds; in English, each letter has more than one sound, and each sound has more than one spelling. Typically, Somali Bantu will pronounce English words the way they would pronounce them in Af Maay. Thus, boat might be pronounced “bow-at” with two syllables, and the word may might be pronounced “my.”

In the Af Maay, as in Af Maxaa, the consonants r, m, and l are doubled within some words (e.g., arring, ‘matter,’ illing, ‘kernel’) to indicate a sound which is pronounced with much more force than its single counterpart. Thus, Af Maxaa and Af Maay speakers often pronounce the doubled consonants in English words such as “bigger,” “middle,” “merry,” “simmer,” and “nibble” with more strength than they would be pronounced by a native speaker of English. However, unlike in Af Maxaa, the letters b, d, g and n are not doubled when emphasis is needed. Instead, the letters p, th, gh, and ng respectively are used in their place. These sounds are unique to Af Maay. There are no letters to represent these distinct sounds in Af Maxaa. Note the following words:

- **barbaar** ‘youth’ - **heped** ‘chest’
  P always occurs in the middle of the word and it sounds similar to the v in the English alphabet (e.g., apaal, ‘gratitude’; hopoog, ‘scarf’).

- **derdaar** ‘advice’ - **mathal** ‘appointment’
  Th is pronounced as in ‘the’ in the English language (e.g., etheb, ‘politeness’).

- **legding** ‘wrestling’ - **saghaal** ‘nine’
  Gh sounds like the Parisian r and does not have an English equivalent (e.g., dhaghar, ‘deceive’; shughul, ‘job’).

- **tinaar** ‘oven’ - **ungbeer** ‘dress’
  Ng is similar to the sound of ‘ing’ in English (e.g., angkaar, ‘curse’; oong, ‘thirst’).

The letters dh, jh, and ny (or yc) are used to represent sounds common in Af Maay. They are also not found in the Af Maxaa alphabet.

Dh is a hard, aspirated d.
The Somali Bantu

Upon arrival in the Dadaab refugee camps, few, if any, of the Bantu were observed to be literate.

Jh is guttural and sounds like j in ‘jar’ with the addition of aspiration. (e.g., jheer, ‘shyness’; jhab, ‘fracture’).

Ny, a sound found in the word signore, bsogno, and agnello in the Italian language, is a source of controversy. This sound is universally found in many Asian and African languages and in some Af Maay scripts this sound is represented as yc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ycaaycuur</th>
<th>‘cat’</th>
<th>maacy</th>
<th>‘ocean’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ycuuycy</td>
<td>‘name of a person’</td>
<td>ycsaang</td>
<td>‘the youngest’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>myyceeg</td>
<td>‘fieble’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Y (pronounced as in ‘yes’) is a common ending on nouns and verbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maghy</th>
<th>‘Noun’</th>
<th>Misgy</th>
<th>‘Sorghum’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maacy</td>
<td>‘Ocean’</td>
<td>Jyny</td>
<td>‘Heaven’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shyny</td>
<td>‘Bee’</td>
<td>Myfathaaw</td>
<td>‘I do not want it’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Grammatical System

There are no equivalents to ‘a’, ‘an’, and ‘the’ in Af Maay. So tulaah (‘apple’) means “an apple” and “the apple.” Interpretation depends on context. Nouns have three genders (masculine, feminine, and neuter) and number (plural and singular) but no case. The preposition is put at the end of the prepositional phrase, so it is more accurately called a postposition.

Af Maay has three basic verb tenses: past, present, and future. Unlike English which has a complex verbal system, Af Maay uses the degree of pastness or futurity in their verbal system. The most common word order is OSV (object-subject-verb) but can also be SVO (subject-verb-object) in certain contexts.

Literacy

In 1975, government figures estimated that the literacy rate among Somali citizens was 55%, in contrast to a 5% rate before the adoption of the national script. The United Nations, however, estimated the literacy rate in Somalia at 24%.

Due to their exclusion from formal education and positions in Somalia that require literacy, the Bantu have remained largely illiterate. Upon arrival in the Dadaab refugee camps, few, if any, of the Bantu were observed to be literate. Without any accurate data, it can only be said that the rate of literacy for the Bantu is low and certainly well below the United Nations estimate of 24%.

With primary and secondary education offered to all refugees in the Kenyan camps, many school-age Somali Bantu children, and especially the boys, have learned to read and write. Some adult Bantu have taken it upon themselves to learn to read and write too, sometimes with the help of educated English-speaking Kenyan Somalis who hire themselves out to the refugees as translators and teachers.
Education

Their general exclusion from mainstream Somali society has hindered the Bantu from participating in the education system. The Somali government has established far fewer schools in Bantu regions than in towns inhabited by dominant clans. This denial of access to education represents one of the most egregious and detrimental examples of Somali institutional discrimination against the Bantu. Some Bantu children in Somalia did attend Koranic (religious education) schools.

The lack of schools in Bantu residential areas, along with an unfamiliar language used as the medium of instruction, are among the obstacles to education faced by the rural Bantu. Those who can afford to send their children to a city to earn a high school degree face discrimination against pursuing higher education. In general, Bantu students have been deliberately excluded from studying abroad on scholarships. In the past, the few Bantu students who did receive scholarships mainly went to the Soviet military academy because at the time there was very little interest among Somalis in studying in that country.

General discrimination by the majority Somalis has further excluded the Bantu from virtually any but the most menial positions in Somali-run organizations. These positions generally do not require literacy, thus further decreasing the need for the Bantu to pursue formal education.

IOM officials report that while some Bantu children in the refugee camps attend primary and secondary school, only an estimated 5% of all Bantu refugees have been formally educated. Some Somali refugees refused to allow their children to study alongside Bantu children. This resulted in some Somali students attending separate classes, and, in some cases, separate schools, from the Bantu. Educating boys has been the priority for Bantu parents, although some female children attend primary school with a smaller number pursuing secondary education.

Knowledge of English

The Bantu from the Lower Juba River valley arrived in the Dadaab refugee camps with virtually no members among them able to speak English. Some Bantu who were living on the Somali coast prior to the civil war, however, were able to speak some English.

While in the refugee camps, some of the adult Bantu refugees began to learn English informally. The Bantu children in the Dadaab refugee camps who attended primary school were taught according to the Kenyan national education system, which normally uses English as the medium of instruction in secondary school with an introduction to English in primary school.

The IOM estimates that approximately 5% of the adult Bantu refugees (mostly males) are proficient in English. Bantu children attending CARE International primary and secondary schools have learned to speak some English.
Resettlement Challenges

As would be the case with other farmers from rural Africa, the Bantu will face a culture and civil society in America that is as foreign to them as any on earth. Although other refugees with similar histories of persecution and marginalization, such as the Hmong from Southeast Asia, have resettled in the United States, no such large group of African immigrants from one minority group has come to the United States.

In addition to obstacles such as illiteracy, lack of English skills, immigrant status, lack of formal education, and no modern-economy job skills, the Bantu will also face the obstacle of discrimination inherent in American society. For these reasons, it is suggested that American resettlement professionals devote sufficient resources to help the Somali Bantu overcome the immense challenges they will face in the United States.

The Bantu have a very strong sense of family and community. This strength can work to overcome some of the challenges they will face in the United States. Resettling extended family and kin groups together could provide the social, spiritual, and physical support that will be needed by the Bantu to more effectively integrate into American society. This is particularly important as Bantu refugees will neither have established family, nor kin support networks waiting to assist them in the United States. Moreover, they have proven time and again that they can adapt to extremely difficult and new situations. With sufficient levels of mentoring and resources, the Bantu can successfully adapt to American society.

Although the Bantu come from a rural farming region, many have been living in large camps with approximately 40,000 other refugees. In this regard, some of the Bantu have gained limited exposure to urban ways of life, such as transportation systems, rental property, and government services, which they weren’t familiar with in Somalia. The Dadaab refugee camps, for example, are served by taxis and buses on a regular basis. There are even buses originating in the camps that travel directly to major Kenyan cities, including Nairobi.

The IOM conducts cultural orientation for all U.S.-bound adult Somali Bantu refugees over the age of 15. Orientation is geared toward preparing refugees for resettlement in the United States; topics include work, housing, health, and education. Due to concerns about the special challenges facing the Bantu, the U.S. State Department has approved enhanced cultural orientation of up to 80 hours for each individual. The additional training includes survival literacy and special classes for mothers and youth.

American resettlement agencies may wish to prepare training and support for the Somali Bantu that have worked well with other resettled refugees groups with similar characteristics, such as rural African refugees or the Hmong of Southeast Asia. In particular, agencies may wish to focus on high school equivalency (GED), English language training, crime awareness, rights and opportuni-
ties available to them as newcomers to America, and relations among the myriad ethnic groups in the United States.

The following briefly discusses areas of need for newly resettled Bantu refugees and what service providers might do to address these needs.

**Housing**

Since the Bantu have had very little exposure to Western housing, conveniences, and food, resettlement professionals will need to employ strategies with the Bantu that have previously worked with other rural refugees. Electricity, flush toilets, telephones, and kitchen and laundry appliances are all foreign to most Bantu refugees.

**Work and Finances**

Although the Bantu possess few modern economy job skills, they are in other ways well prepared to enter the American workforce. Their ability to accept virtually any job in Somalia and Kenya in order to provide for their families will serve them well in the United States.

The placement of newly arrived refugees in occupations in which they have skills, such as mechanics, small-scale farming, and construction, would enable them to more quickly learn their new jobs and prove their worth as employees. Working in semirural, nonmigratory agriculture may help some Bantu better acclimate to American society by placing them in a residential and work environment that is more familiar to them than standard modern-economy jobs in urban areas.

Bantu women have primarily worked in the home and on the farm. Some women acquired land in Somalia in order to earn their own money. Their hardworking and resourceful nature will help Bantu women find and keep jobs in the United States. Resettlement professionals may wish to use employment strategies for the Bantu women that were successful with other women of similar rural backgrounds, such as the Hmong.

The Bantu, like other rural refugees, have had little experience with banks, checking accounts, or automatic teller machines. Although the Bantu are familiar with borrowing land and money, selling produce in markets, and earning wages from private and public employers, the refugees will still require intensive training on finances, budgeting, and financial planning.

**Health Care**

The IOM reports a high birth rate among the Bantu population, noting that most married women are either breastfeeding or pregnant and that the concept of family planning does not exist. According to recent data collected by the UNHCR, an estimated 60% of the Bantu are under 17, and 31% are under 6.
Although these characteristics are not unique to the Bantu, let alone other refugee populations, resettlement professionals should be prepared to deal with significant health care, sanitation, and social support issues relating to small children and mothers. For instance, the Bantu use pit latrines and are unfamiliar with typical American bathroom facilities and common sanitation items such as diapers and feminine care products.

The Bantu are a rural people who practice traditional beliefs. This extends to medical care in which local healing techniques are used. The IOM reports that some Bantu apply a heated nail or metal object to an infant’s head in the belief that the burns will reduce the swelling of the head in cases where it is unusually large. They also burn small holes in the skin to cure ailments like stomach aches and migraine headaches. Like other rural east African people, the use of herbs in traditional medical practices is common.

Religious healing, such as prayer, is also frequently used. Some Bantu women, accompanied by traditional healers, perform ritual ceremonies, known as Gitimiri or Audara, to cast off illness and evil spells. Other such healing techniques are practiced among the Bantu and other Somali groups. Resettlement professionals in the United States may want to consult with their southern Somali colleagues to better understand the scope of such healing techniques practiced in that region.

Like other Somali groups, the Bantu circumcise both males and females. Aid workers in the refugee camps state that female circumcision practiced by some Bantu is a milder form than that practiced by the other Somali groups. While service providers report that the Bantu are agreeable to giving up the practice when they arrive in the United States, there have been reports from the UNHCR that some Bantu, knowing that they cannot legally circumcise their daughters in the U.S., rushed to circumcise them before departing Kenya. Health and legal concerns around this should continue to be addressed by resettlement agencies upon the Bantu’s arrival in the United States. It should be noted that female circumcision is a tradition that may have accompanied Islam but is not mandated by Islam.

**Mental Health**

Bantu refugees with a lineage to slavery have a long history of marginalization. The years of subjugation and fear have adversely affected their sense of equality and self-esteem. The Bantu were further affected by the recent civil war with many fleeing only after their villages were attacked. Many witnessed friends and relatives being killed in bandit attacks in Somalia.

The prevalence of violence and the constant threat of attack in the refugee camps have further eroded the Bantu’s sense of security and well-being. The IOM reports trauma-related problems, including hopelessness and depression, among the Bantu being interviewed for resettlement. Thus, resettlement professionals will have to contend not only with the aftereffects of trauma from violence, but also...
the Bantu’s intergenerational culture of inferiority and second-class status. Service providers should closely monitor the Bantu to determine if any are experiencing serious mental health problems.

Margaret Munene, a UNHCR psychologist, explains that the Bantu’s withdrawn demeanor could indicate low self-esteem. Munene further states that the Bantu have escaped their oppressors in Somalia only to live among them in Kenya. In the Dadaab refugee camps, the Bantu still lack the psychological freedom to be themselves.

It is important to recognize that Bantu children who will attend American public schools are probably traumatized as well, and will need special services in this area. Helping local host communities understand the background and experiences of trauma that the Bantu refugees have suffered will be very important.

Education

Since education was often out of reach for Bantu children, most worked on their parents’ farms instead of attending school. As formal education has only begun to be available in the refugee camps, educators in the United States may find Bantu parents reluctant or unable to participate in their children’s education.

Given the critical importance of literacy in the United States, resettlement professionals may want to prepare an intensive adult literacy campaign for adult Bantu refugees. Without literacy skills, Bantu adults will be unable to participate in the modern economy and integrate into mainstream American society.

Learning English

Learning a new language in a foreign country poses many challenges. However, given their versatility and strong adaptive ability, the Bantu are likely to overcome the challenges they encounter in this area. Af Maay and English are more similar in pronunciation than are Af Maxaa and English. Also, since many Bantu are at least bilingual, and in some cases speak four languages, they bring to the task of learning English the experience and understanding of what it takes to communicate in a different language.

Style of Communication

One cultural issue in orientation will be the Bantu’s style of communication. The IOM reports that some Bantu are not accustomed to being interviewed and answering questions in a linear, sequential way. Many women are not able to give the exact age of their children, and use weather markers or particular events rather than specific dates to answer questions about dates of birth and other family history. Only after long conversations with many follow-up questions can the appropriate information be determined. The IOM also reports that the Bantu are uncommonly open and honest with their answers compared to some other groups.
Special Needs of Women

Female circumcision, rape, a lack of education, second-class status in Somali society, high birth rates, single parent status, and trauma from past experiences are all conditions that Bantu women have had to endure in Africa.

In the United States, the Bantu women will be further challenged if they cannot draw upon their extended family and kin networks to assist them with child rearing and moral support. Providing the Bantu women with appropriate social services and ensuring as much as possible that people belonging to the same social support network are resettled in the same geographic location will assist them in their transition to American society.

Relations Between Bantu and Other Somalis

Although the Somali population in the United States may not be openly hostile to the Bantu, and in some cases genuinely willing to assist them, service providers should not assume that there will be immediate mutual trust and respect between them. Resettlement professionals should use the same caution and sensitivity with regards to translation and case management with the Bantu and Somalis that they use with other ethnic groups with a history of contentious relations.
### Some Basic Af Maay Expressions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Af Maay</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bariideena</td>
<td>Good morning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepeda kabariini</td>
<td>Indeed, it's a good morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se lakabariyi?</td>
<td>How is everybody this morning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faayne</td>
<td>We feel fine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hergeleena?</td>
<td>How is your day?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See atiing?</td>
<td>How are you feeling?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faayne</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepeda kahergelni</td>
<td>We feel fine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jirinya</td>
<td>I'm sick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhuuri lhaaye</td>
<td>I'm in pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathy dhuury</td>
<td>Head ache</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alooly duury</td>
<td>Stomach ache</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gooy Dhuur</td>
<td>Tooth ache</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maghagha?</td>
<td>What is your name?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maghaaghey Ali</td>
<td>My name is Ali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meghaa Jarty</td>
<td>How old are you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kooy</td>
<td>Come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fadheew</td>
<td>Sit down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiiry</td>
<td>Look</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May subiyooyte?</td>
<td>What are you doing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walne</td>
<td>Nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inte anjeede?</td>
<td>Where are you going?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suuktah anjeede</td>
<td>I'm going to the market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunguri amooye</td>
<td>I'm eating food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inte kukoyti?</td>
<td>Where are you coming from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shuqul’aa kukooyi</td>
<td>I'm coming from work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>harti</td>
<td>husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>billan</td>
<td>wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>llmoogey</td>
<td>my children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhaloogey</td>
<td>my children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>so’</td>
<td>meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wang</td>
<td>milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ming</td>
<td>house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shir</td>
<td>meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reer</td>
<td>family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aw</td>
<td>Mr. (for head of the household)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ay</td>
<td>Ms. (for an older women)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dab</td>
<td>fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maalmo Sitimaangk</td>
<td>Days of the Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabtih</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ehed</td>
<td>Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isniing</td>
<td>Monday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talaadih</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arbaa</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamiis</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumaa</td>
<td>Friday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qibliyaalkih</td>
<td>Directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barih</td>
<td>East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orsih (irre-dhiimih)</td>
<td>West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waaqow</td>
<td>North</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koonfur</td>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1 | Kow (hal) | 1000 | Kung |
| 2 | Lammih    | 10,000 | Tummung Kung |
| 3 | Seddih    | 50,000 | Kontong Kun |
| 4 | Afar      | 100,000 | Bogol kung |
| 5 | Shang     | 1,000,000 | Hal Milyang / malyuung |
| 6 | Li        |     | |
| 7 | Todobih   |     | |
| 8 | Siyeed    |     | |
| 9 | Sagaal    |     | |
| 10 | Tummung   |     | |
| 11 | Tummung I Kow |     | |
| 12 | Tummung i Lammih |     | |
| 13 | Tummung i Seddih |     | |
| 14 | Tummung i Afar |     | |
| 20 | Labaatung |     | |
| 30 | Soddong   |     | |
| 40 | Afartung  |     | |
| 50 | Kontong   |     | |
| 60 | Lihdung   |     | |
| 70 | Todobaatung |     | |
| 80 | Siyeetung |     | |
| 90 | Sagaalung |     | |
| 100 | Bogol    |     | |
Bibliography


Cultural Orientation Resource Center

The Cultural Orientation Resource Center at the Center (COR) for Applied Linguistics (CAL) works closely with the U.S. government, international organizations, refugee resettlement agencies in the United States, and their representatives overseas to:

• Develop and distribute resources about refugee training and resettlement;
• Provide technical assistance regarding refugees’ native cultures, languages, and orientation needs;
• Develop a globally linked network of U.S. refugee service providers that exchanges refugee orientation information, concerns, and best practices.

The Cultural Orientation Resource Center produces Culture Profiles and Phrasebooks to build linguistic and cultural understanding between newly-arrived refugees and their American communities.

**Culture Profiles** are designed for service providers and individuals assisting newcomers in the United States. They contain a basic introduction to the people, history, and culture of different refugee groups:

- The Bosnians
- The Haitians
- The Iraqis
- The Montagnards
- The Iraqi Kurds
- The Somalis
- The Afghans
- The Somali Bantu

The first print copy is free to resettlement agencies only. Additional copies may be downloaded from [http://www.culturalorientation.net/fact.html](http://www.culturalorientation.net/fact.html), or ordered from CAL for $3.00.

**Phrasebooks** include phrases, translations, and useful word lists selected for their relevance to the needs of newly arrived residents of the United States. They are available from CAL for $5.00 each.

- English-Bosnian
- English-Chinese
- English-Haitian Creole
- English-Farsi
- English-Russian
- English-Somali
- English-Spanish
- English-Vietnamese

To order publications:

Phone: (202) 362-0700, ext. 231
Fax: (202) 362-3740
Email: cor@cal.org

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[http://www.culturalorientation.net](http://www.culturalorientation.net)
[http://www.cal.org](http://www.cal.org)
**TTSTA Tuesday**  
**Week #17**

Good Morning!  
Although open enrollment closed on Jan 31st, keep the information below in mind. Last year there was a special enrollment period for persons who were assessed the fine for not having health insurance. Those persons were given 1-month to enroll in lieu of paying the fine. As a reminder, the fee for adults without proof of health insurance is roughly $700 and $350 for children. For a family of 4 (2 Adults & 2 Children) could be fined $2100. Continue to advocate and educate our clients. We have reference materials at the clinics for in-person enrollment assistance with Covering WI, see their website here: [http://coveringwi.org](http://coveringwi.org)

I will keep you posted with information about special enrollment opportunities.
CMS BLOG
http://blog.cms.gov/2016/01/29/in-these-last-days-of-open-enrollment-immigrant-families-need-to-know-affordable-coverage-options-are-available
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 29, 2016
In these last days of Open Enrollment, immigrant families need to know affordable coverage options are available
Affordable coverage options are available in the Health Insurance Marketplace for eligible immigrant families. In fact, most people shopping for coverage on the Marketplace can find a plan with monthly premiums of $75 or less. But, act soon: January 31, 2016 is the final deadline for you to sign up at HealthCare.gov or CuidadodeSalud.gov for 2016 coverage. Don’t miss out on getting coverage for 2016 and risk owing a fee of $695 or more.
If you work with immigrant communities, we need your help to make sure people who are eligible for coverage understand that they should not be worried about applying for coverage if they have a family with mixed immigration status.
Here are 10 things immigrant families need to know about Marketplace coverage:

1. To buy private health insurance through the Marketplace, you must be a U.S. citizen, a U.S. national, or be lawfully present in the United States. In addition, immigrants with certain other statuses are also eligible. See a list of immigration statuses that qualify for Marketplace coverage.

2. If you recently gained U.S. citizenship or had a change in your immigration status that makes you newly eligible to enroll in coverage through the Marketplace, you may qualify for a Special Enrollment Period. See if you can enroll in a Marketplace health plan outside Open Enrollment.

3. Financial help is available. If you’re a lawfully present immigrant and meet other eligibility criteria, you can buy private health insurance through the Marketplace, and may be eligible for lower costs on monthly premiums and lower out-of-pocket costs based on your income. More than 8 out of 10 people who have enrolled in a health insurance plan through the Marketplace have qualified for financial help. In fact, most people can find monthly premiums for $75 or less, after financial assistance. In general, individuals and families whose household income for the year is between 100 percent and 400 percent of the federal poverty line for their family size may be eligible for the premium tax credit or financial assistance to pay for your premium. You can find the levels here based on the
household size. If you make less than 100 percent of the federal poverty line, which is $11,770 for an individual or $24,250 for a family of 4 (higher in Alaska and Hawaii) and you aren’t eligible for Medicaid because of your immigration status, you may still qualify for lower costs on Marketplace coverage.

4. If you’re a “qualified non-citizen” and meet your state’s income and other eligibility rules, you may be eligible for Medicaid or Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) coverage. See a list of “qualified non-citizen” statuses and other important details.

5. If you’re a “qualified non-citizen,” you may have a 5-year waiting period to get full Medicaid or CHIP coverage. This means you must wait 5 years after receiving “qualified” immigration status and meet all other eligibility rules in the state before being eligible for full Medicaid or CHIP. See a list of exceptions to the 5-year waiting period and other important details.

6. Many immigrant families are of “mixed status,” with members having different immigration and citizenship statuses. Mixed status families can apply for financial assistance for private insurance for their dependent family members who are eligible for coverage through the Marketplace, or for Medicaid and CHIP coverage. Family members who aren't applying for health coverage for themselves won't be asked if they have eligible immigration status.

7. Federal and State Marketplaces, as well as state Medicaid and CHIP agencies, can’t require you to provide information about the citizenship or immigration status of any family or household members who aren’t applying for coverage for themselves.

8. States can’t deny you benefits because a family or household member who isn't applying has not provided his or her citizenship or immigration status.

9. Information that you provide to the Marketplace won’t be used for immigration enforcement purposes.

10. If you’re not eligible for Marketplace coverage or you can't afford a health plan, you can get low-cost health care at a nearby community health center. Community health centers provide primary health care services to all residents in the health center’s service area. Find more information here.
TTSTA Tuesday
Week #18

Good Morning,

A few special populations of refugees that PACA resettles were not covered in the previous TTSTA emails. One such country is Eritrea. The screen shot attached, is a picture of Africa, with the country of Eritrea highlighted. The link below, is the EthnoMed webpage that provides specific elements of the Eritrean culture and health care topics.

https://ethnomed.org/culture/eritrean

Eritrean Homepage — EthnoMed

ethnomed.org

Starting place for browsing EthnoMed for information about Eritrean culture and health care topics.

Best,
This week's focus is on Vaccines. The CDC publishes a book each year, commonly known as the "Pink book."

Directly from the CDC website: "The 13th Edition Epidemiology and Prevention of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases, a.k.a. the "Pink Book," provides physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, pharmacists, and others with the most comprehensive information on routinely used vaccines and the diseases they prevent.

Six appendices contain a wealth of reference materials including: vaccine minimum ages and intervals, current and discontinued vaccines, vaccine contents, foreign vaccine terms, and more."

Bookmark this site as the reference for Immunization Schedules, including catch-up, and other vaccine-specific reference materials.

Be Well,
TTSTA Tuesday
Week #20

Good Afternoon,

Covering Wisconsin just completed a 1-year project to develop low health literacy materials to assist people in navigating the WI-Health Care system. The materials are only offered in English.

Milwaukee Health Care Partnership just released the newest Milwaukee Co. Safety-net clinic directory. I received 2 'Hard' copies at the FC3 meeting today, one for each clinic. You may access it online using the link above. You may also access the newly released Community Health Needs Assessment 2015-2016. This report is a "comprehensive community health needs assessment revealing chronic disease, mental health, substance abuse, violence and access to care as the leading health concerns for Milwaukee County residents." The Executive summary is linked here.

http://coveringwi.org/resources-and-links/materials/

For Consumers – Covering Wisconsin

coveringwi.org

SAMPLE CONSUMER FACT SHEETS: HEALTH INSURANCE MARKETPLACE. Consumer fact sheets will be finalized in November and posted as they become available.

http://coveringwi.org/resources-and-links/for-assisters/
For Assisters – Covering Wisconsin

coveringwi.org

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION WI
Consortia Map. WISCONSIN COUNTY-
SPECIFIC PUBLIC BENEFIT FACT
SHEETS Please select your county.
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