



**SEEKING REFUGE:
FAITH-BASED APPROACHES
TO FORCED MIGRATION**

Poverty and Peacemaking II
March 3–4, 2017 at Princeton University

In Every Generation: Descendants Carry on the Work

Melissa Borja, College of Staten Island (Moderator)

Patrick Barry, Catholic Charities, Diocese of Camden

Louise Sandburg, The Jewish Center's Interfaith Resettlement Committee (TJC/IRC)

Hemant Wadhvani, Hindu American Seva

Safa Syed, Princeton University (Student Rapporteur)

Patrick Barry

- Mother is Cambodian and father is of Irish descent
- Born in Philadelphia
- Father taught English in Saudi Arabia
- Grandmother and great-grandmother were both refugees from Cambodia
- As a child, didn't understand what "war" meant when his family talked about why they had to leave home
- Performed his own research and spoke to members of the community who were not his family members to understand what the flight of refugees meant
- For much of his life, wanted to explore his Cambodian life and finally went in 2001
 - An epiphany, understanding the work of non-profits and charity work
 - Went back to Cambodia to do an internship
- Came back to America and started working for Catholic Charities
- Became an interpreter

Hemant Wadhvani

- From the Sindhi community of South Asia
- In 1947, British India split into Pakistan and India
- Forced migration of Hindu Sindhis to move from Pakistan overnight
- Sindhis had been traders throughout the world, in the Philippines or the Virgin Islands, globally
- On his father's side, his father's family moved to Bombay two years before partition and his family became responsible for "resettling" families
- Wherever the ties were—religious, financial, family—they would go
- But refugee camps were set up throughout India, mostly in former military barracks
- Creatively had to survive by entrepreneurial means—they would put "made in USA" on products.
- Dynamics of partition still continue as a refugee flow still continues.
- Strong community organizer locally
- His parents were part of the first wave of Indian immigrants to the US and were Hindu-American immigrant community organizers.



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- Worked on another resettlement project with Hindu Bhutanese people.
 - They were a primarily agricultural people who were resettled in an urban area, New York City

Louise Sandburg

- Her grandparents were Jewish refugees from persecution by the Cossacks
- Her grandparents came into America in the 1880s
- Reminds people about the human capital
- Her grandparents never lost their accents and spoke Yiddish. They worked very hard and moved as teenagers to the US, where they met in a Philadelphia cigar factory.
- When her grandparents arrived, HIAS took her grandparents in for a very brief time.
- Jews from various backgrounds would band together, mostly to form burial sites.
- Anti-Semitism was a constant, which was another reason Jews banded together.
- Her father helped liberate concentration camps in Europe during WWII and was worried about coming back to America and being Jewish.
- Anti-Semitism is very similar to the Islamophobia happening now.
- Trenton community refugees
 - Central America was imploding, but the Jewish community was doing well, so they brought in some refugees from Central America.
 - Burmese
 - Bhutanese of Nepali descent
 - Turkish Muslim minorities
 - West African families
- She went to her synagogue and asked for their help with the problem.
- The Jewish concept of “Repair the World”—people asked, “Why donate here when we should be donating to Israel?” But this Jewish concept informed their beliefs
- Helped resettle an Ahmadi family into Princeton. Urdu speakers in the university and at the mosque helped them.
- Currently helping a woman from West Cameroon who sought asylum for domestic violence abuse and received it from the U.S.
- Two Syrian refugee families just resettled into Highland Park
 - Expected to accept 50 refugees but that number has been cut because of the new presidential administration
 - Catholic Charities were expecting 125 refugee individuals but numbers have been cut
- History of the Jews is linked to persecution
 - The Exodus
 - There were many Jewish refugees after this as well—Russia, Holocaust, so many times
- Helping refugees is part of the Jewish heritage
 - “A person’s manner is determined by his words and actions”



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- “Saving the life of one is saving all of humanity”
- From the Bible—To welcome the stranger, remember the story of Abraham
- Everyone has the possibility to contribute
 - People are going to be working, paying taxes, and contribute
- Einstein was brought into the US by a Jewish family that had come at the same time Sandburg’s family came into the US
- Formed the Institute of Advanced Studies
- Some believed that all Jews coming into the country were communists

Discussion

Something that really resonated—working with youth.

- Really saw the struggle for kids during their teens, especially in this narrative of asking the questions
- Especially in the asylum-seeker populations
- Narrative behind why they were here was often not spoken about. Had simple answers but didn’t know why they were here.
- These kids wanted to engage but didn’t know how. Felt the weight in their DNA, but their parents wanted to protect them

How do you empower someone to engage them in this population instead of wearing a very heavy mantle?

- Humanizing over idealizing
- A juxtaposition—Having done a lot of work with adolescents and intergenerational students, both teens and parents—want to be American and don’t want to speak the home language.
- One man, a former refugee, took his sons to West Africa, where his father was buried. Took his two sons there and to where his village was.
- His sons came back changed from this experience.
- Parents want them to take the good of both sides. Need to remember the past, but not as a shackle but as a launching pad.
- A compromise between the experience of the past and the future.
- Second individuality of adolescents in Western psychology—trying to form an identity. It’s often safe to take on the family identity. Is there such a sequence as generations move forward? When is it safe again to embrace and own the legacy while advancing?
- Sandburg spoke to Wadhvani: How to get the Hindu-American community to engage?
 - A lot of people are second-generation Indians who came to work and find a life here, so they don’t engage as personally with issues.



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- The Hindu and Muslims Sindhis always got along until politics got involved.
 - Outside forces were fermenting the violence
 - Muslims Sindhis helped create safe passage for Hindus Sindhis
- Political utility in rejecting the refugee identity right now
 - Mung refugees don't want the refugee identity to define them, because especially in America, having a stateless identity is countercultural.
 - In the current situation though, the Mung refugees are reaffirming their refugee identity in order to make a political statement.
- Homeland security meeting
 - Funding to investigating white supremacy/KKK groups is being cut
 - Pamphlets have been created in Trenton area for the KKK but funding has been cut
 - Hindus, Muslims, Jews, and Christians were present

Coalition building

- The space that we occupy as people that support this work. What would happen if we changed the narrative of us helping, but creating culturally-sensitive coalitions to help rather than people coming for interpreters in the IRC
- Everyone seems to be doing the same work, so how would things change if specific cultural groups are in charge of resettling
- Catholic Charities is very fortunate to have several mosques and charities in the area
- Had a refugee carnival, where you could trade tickets for toys. Bridged the gap between individuals of all cultures. Very successful day.
- A refugee resettlement program does not last very long without the support of a local community.
- Need to shift away from the narrative that resettlement agencies are being helped by the local communities but rather the opposite; refugees will be a part of these communities forever, but will leave the resettlement agencies.
- Because numbers of refugees and resources have been cut, focus has been shifting to asylum-seekers

West African refugee

- Originally from Mauritania
- His father was arrested for being against the government and he visited him several times.
- Was given the choice to stay with his father or never see him again, so chose to stay with him
- Deported to Senegal, but his father sued the Mauritanian government and passed away in the process in Senegal



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The refugees that have been resettled—do you get people that really need to help the people coming in? Are people willing to help out as a unit? Are recent refugees willing to help out incoming refugees?

- Yes, there is support from people who have resettled in the community.
- Can't say that like a Burmese family has assisted a Syrian family.

Some of the notes taken by student rapporteurs were submitted as rough notes from the session rather than as a polished summary.