BUILDING BRIDGES, NOT WALLS

Immigration, Integration and Transformational Community Development

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23 April 2017

Portions of this thesis paper are based on previous work submitted for the following MAICD courses:

Culture Studies in a Global Context
Community Development
Globalization
Spirituality, Culture, and Social Justice
Disaster Relief and Development
Practicum IV: Thesis Project I

A synopsis paper by the same title was presented at
the 2017 Faith in Humanities Conference at Northwest University

Contents

I. Introduction 3

A. Background 3

B. Methodology and terminology 4

II. Mandates for immigrant support 5

A. The moral mandate for involvement in social justice 5

B. The Christian mandate for immigrant support 6

C. The social mandate for immigrant support 8

D. Ethical considerations 10

E. Realistic morality 12

F. Why this research matters in the context of small towns 13

1. Global push-factors driving migration trends 13

2. Local pull-factors and other influences on immigrants' decisions to relocate 15

3. Existing gaps in differentiated services 17

III. Building Walls: Barriers to Integration in Host Societies 19

A. The importance of local contextualization 19

B. Underlying fears and assumptions 20

1. Barriers to integration from the perspective of immigrants 20

2. Barriers to integration from the perspective of host society members 26

C. Structural barriers 31

IV. Building Bridges: How to Foster Integration in our Communities 31

A. Why International Festivals and other "diversity events" are not enough 31

B. The Solution: Relationships and community 34

C. Relationship-building as a shared cultural value 37

D. Transformational Development theory in praxis 39

1. Principles of Transformational Development 39

2. Three stages of Transformational Development 40

V. Conclusion 46

A. Our individual responsibility toward creating a welcoming environment 46

B. A reiteration of our moral and societal obligations to our immigrant neighbors 47

INTRODUCTION

Background. Two years ago I was teaching classes for adult English-as-a-Second-Language students and I saw a need among my students for a greater sense of connection and involvement in the predominantly white, American-born community outside the walls of our classroom. I observed how my immigrant students' many gifts and talents are largely untapped due to both language barriers and attitudinal obstacles which hinder relationships outside their immediate circle. In the absence of a welcoming environment and a more holistic approach to integration in our community, an entire sub-section of our population lives on the fringes and both they and the community suffer as a result. My students and their stories inspired me to begin research into how principles of community development can be applied to the integration process in small communities like mine.

More recent events both internationally and in the United States have further contributed to an environment in which we as a society, and even as a Church, are polarized: some call for exclusionary responses to increased global migration in an effort to preserve our culture and protect our citizens; others feel equally compelled to offer unconditional sanctuary to anyone at risk of harm either within or outside our borders. As an alternative to these extremes, and as a long-term solution to the underlying need for greater community integration, I propose there is a third option, one based on a commitment to social justice and key principles of transformational community development. In short, we must work together to welcome, connect, and empower our immigrant residents for both their benefit and the benefit of our community as a whole. We must build frameworks for integration around an understanding of the unique needs of our immigrant neighbors and the existing host society in which they live. The purpose of this paper is to explore some of the moral and sociological foundations of these necessary frameworks,

examine immigrant support practices through the lens of transformational development theory, and suggest possible next steps toward the development and implementation of effective integration practices at the local community level.

Methodology and terminology. My research is focused in particular on the process of integration in smaller, relatively homogenous communities of less than 100,000 people where ethnic minorities have fewer same-group members with whom to build relationships. I conducted my primary fieldwork in Cowlitz County, Washington, which has a total population of just over 100,000 of which approximately half is loosely concentrated in the twin cities of Longview (population ≈ 37,000) and Kelso (population ≈ 12,000). A limited review of the extensive international body of literature from a variety of disciplines related to immigration and integration is embedded within each sub-section of this paper, along with references to texts and other course materials from the MAICD program. In addition, I have included ethnographic observations, interviews, and other qualitative data collected during my fieldwork. The *Case in Point* sections of the paper highlights this fieldwork along with other examples from my own experience.

I use the term *integration* throughout my thesis, which I define as the on-going process by which newly-arrived or previously marginalized residents become full participants in the social, economic, and decision-making systems of their new community, which is itself transformed by residents' participation in those systems. Other terms which appear in the literature include assimilation, acculturation, and incorporation. Each of these communicate different connotations and implications for how immigrants view themselves and how they are perceived by the host society. *Assimilation* generally implies a complete disengagement with the culture of origin and absorption into the existing host society, *acculturation* is a more moderate

process by which immigrants gradually acquire elements of their new cultural context, and *incorporation* refers to the degree of economic and political engagement and influence an immigrant group may have within the larger society. While useful in specific situations, none of these terms reflects the ideal of genuine two-way integration which, according to researcher Helga Leitner, "requires knowledge of and a willingness to learn from and recognize value in the Other" (843) and results in a richer, more diverse community experience for all residents.

Finally, I have used the term *Latino* when referring generally to immigrants from Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries of origin, with the understanding that some individuals prefer to self-identify as Hispanic or by specific nationality. I chose this term based on observations of preferred usage by local Latino residents and community leaders.

MANDATES FOR IMMIGRANT SUPPORT

The moral mandate for involvement in social justice. Before beginning to look at the specifics of immigration, it is important to lay a foundation of sound moral reasoning of why we all need to be actively involved in social justice issues in the world today. We must also consider how we can find ethically sound solutions to the current problems facing marginalized members of our communities. My own observations confirm Daniel Groody's statement that "poverty and gross inequality throughout the world waste human potential, weaken the entire community, and put the whole human family at risk" (11). We thrive as a society when those who are able are willing to contribute to the well-being of the whole. Groody goes on to state, "At the core of social justice is a respect for each person's human dignity and an overall commitment to the common good," a commitment which has been outlined by the Parliament of the World's Religions to include nonviolence, economic justice, truthfulness, and equal rights for men and women (101,

148). This global ethic is driving social justice efforts of all kinds around the world by members of numerous belief systems.

Non-religious world leaders also recognize the need for a moral framework. In 2015 the British Library opened an exhibit, *Magna Carta: Law, Liberty, Legacy*, which brought together in one place for the first time originals of Magna Carta, the U.S. Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights, and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. This collection represents the globalization of the ideals of democratic human rights, a set of values and ethical principles that can and should be applied to all of humanity. The UN Declaration has proven itself to be applicable across cultures and over time, and states in part:

> …the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom… (UN General Assembly art. 1)

This preamble serves as a powerful mission statement for community development work of all kinds. As we introduce and affirm this common ethic around the world, the commitment to a universal moral foundation enables us to work alongside one another towards a more just society.

The Christian mandate for immigrant support. When we look at social justice from the Christian perspective, the Bible clearly mandates that we welcome the stranger, care for the poor, and love our neighbors as fellow human beings created in the image of God (e.g. Deuteronomy 10: 17-19, Exodus 23:9, Ezekiel 22:4, Matthew 25:35-40 NLT) These injunctions provide an important starting point in my personal convictions about social justice and in particular immigration issues. Going deeper in an understanding of our responsibility to one another,

Christian theologian Miroslav Volf explores how we, as people created in the image of the Triune God, are designed to live in covenantal relationships which require "the work of mutual 'making space for the other in the self' and of re-arranging the self in light of the other's presence" (154). In contrast to setting up contractual relationships based on a certain set of requirements, Volf contends that instead we must aspire to form relationships in which all parties are dedicated to the well-being of the other. Volf asserts, "…a key political task must be to nurture people whose very identity should be shaped by the covenants they have formed so that they do not betray and tyrannize one another" (153). Accepting societal conditions which systematically or relationally exclude others, therefore, violates both our created purpose and our calling as Christians.

The actual application of these moral and Biblical principles can be challenging in the face of multiple diverse belief systems and political viewpoints. Even within the Christian faith there are multiple viewpoints on how best to approach social justice efforts. The first step is accepting my obligation as a Christian to engage in the conversation rather than shutting my ears to it. As Jesus teaches, we are to be "the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they set it on a lampstand, and it gives light to everyone in the house" (Matthew 5:14 NLT). In an essay directed toward the World Council of Churches, Stephen Sidorak draws attention back to historical principles of social engagement and the vital importance of commitment among Christians to "the moral responsibility and civic duty laid upon us to fight for our ecumenical convictions in public life" (110). Similarly, Father Bryan Ochs, the priest at St. Rose Catholic Church in Longview, affirmed in a fieldwork interview the long-standing Catholic tradition of active engagement in social justice issues like immigration reform and expressed approval that more conservative

evangelicals like me were becoming involved. As he stated, "It's good to see you getting out of the baptism pool and out into the world doing the compassionate work of Jesus Christ" (Ochs). Paul Abrecht also echoes Sidorak's call for ecumenical dialogue and the need "to make a new analysis of the world political and economic situation...and examine openly the ideological and cultural differences within the ecumenical movement" (168). However, he also warns against the "implicit triumphalism" of historical Christian thought and encourages more openness toward working closely with other faiths in "cooperative action towards international peace and justice" (168). The role of the Christian community development worker clearly requires the ability "to combine a diplomatic temperament with a prophetic spirit" (Sidorak 111) and fostering this quality of leadership in ecumenical and inter-faith social justice work is an essential goal of my personal development as I move forward.

The social mandate for immigrant support. Having established that we share a moral obligation to care about social justice issues, what specifically are the ways in which immigrants in our communities may be marginalized, underdeveloped, or otherwise in need of support? Although not all immigrants are materially poor, they often lack one or more of the 'basic needs' identified by the International Labour Organization and included in the Basic Needs Approach to development. These needs include not only food, shelter, and clothing, but also social capital, or the capability to access essential services, acquire adequately-paid employment, and participate in personal or community decision-making (Willis 104). Immigrants are marginalized when they lack this social capital, that is, when they are not connected in a meaningful way to other members of the community and to those in power. This results in a diminished quality of life for both the community and those on the fringe as neither is able to benefit from what the other has to offer.

In his book *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, Bryant Myers summarizes Robert Chambers' theory of poverty, which includes material poverty, physical weakness, isolation, vulnerability, and powerlessness, to which Myers adds the concept of spiritual poverty (115). Applying this theory to immigrants, it is clear that even while surrounded by the relative prosperity of the United States many immigrants live in poverty. They work at low-wage jobs and send a large proportion of their income back to their home country (resulting in material poverty), suffer injuries from repetitious jobs and untreated illnesses due to inadequate health insurance (contributing to physical weakness), are distanced from family and their home culture and have limited English proficiency (creating isolation), and fall prey to unethical employers or landlords and worry about their immigration status (compounding vulnerability). In many cases they are also cut off from a faith community where they can worship in their own language (bringing about spiritual poverty). Most importantly for the purpose of my thesis, Chambers describes how "the [powerless] household lacks the ability and the knowledge to influence the life around it and the social systems in which it lives" (qtd. in Myers 115), which captures the experience of many immigrants. John Friedman also views poverty as "lack of access to social power" and advocates that "building, empowering, and nurturing social networks…is the key to expanding social power" (qtd. in Myers 118, 158). Immigrant support services should therefore provide a means by which all residents, regardless of their cultural background, language ability, or legal status, can become connected to the community in which they live, access available services, and as Myers describes, "become actors in their own history" (242). In a recent opinion article in the New York Times writer Domingo Martinez describes his hometown of Brownsville, Texas as two towns in one. He writes:

> These two towns have lived side by side peacefully for generations. It's like a tide meeting a shore, a pattern repeated naturally, with a telescoping logic…There's the world, there's America, there's Texas, there's the border town and finally, within the town, there's still another world *waiting to get in*. (Martinez, emphasis added)

In the absence of social capital, millions of American residents, including those with legal residency or citizenship, are resigned to a lifetime of simply "waiting to get in" so that they can fully participate in community life.

Ethical considerations. Even with an understanding and acceptance of these underlying moral and social reasons for engaging with immigrants and their needs in our society, there still remain complex ethical dilemmas especially in regards to the presence of millions of undocumented migrants living and working within the United States. According to the Pew Research Center this demographic has stabilized at approximately 11 million residents of which 8 million are working or seeking employment, and accounts for approximately one-fourth of the total foreign-born population of the U.S. (Krogstad et al). On one hand, there are those who believe that unless individuals are here with full legal documentation and a commitment to conform to certain social norms they are in effect criminals and illegitimate members of society and should be punished, deported, or otherwise cut off from society's support until they legalize their status. While harsh, this position does reflect a certain ethical value for the rule of law and societal expectations. On the opposite end of the spectrum are those who believe the current state of immigrants in the U.S. can be likened to the Jews of Nazi Germany and that protecting them against the evil immigration system is the highest of moral callings. They argue that the conditions in Mexico and Central America (where most undocumented migrants originate) are so inhumane, and the legal immigration process so convoluted and costly, that those who come illegally genuinely had

no other viable option. Nathan Smith observes that "illegal migration is motivated by real economic desperation. No jobs at home. A family to feed. Maybe fear of religious persecution, or gang warfare. All such morally serious reasons for illegally migrating easily override the weak arguments against it…" (4). Smith goes on to equate giving a false Social Security number to an employer as ethically comparable to clicking the "I have read the terms and agreements" box when signing an on-line contract – it is what he calls "a legal fiction, and we do not really expect people to do so" (5). From this perspective, we are all equally guilty of ethical violations of one kind or another.

Most Americans fall somewhere in between these extremes in their opinions about undocumented immigration. Small-town Americans in particular value self-sufficiency, reliability, and a general compliance with community standards of decency but also recognize the pragmatic reality that undocumented immigrants are necessary to our economy. Griselda Wheeler, who was brought to the U.S. illegally as a child, shared a story in a fieldwork interview about how her mother's employer would tell her to "take a few days off" whenever he had advance notice that ICE would be doing a sweep of the fruit warehouse where she worked (Wheeler). As a hard worker who was doing her best to integrate into society, raise her family, and stay out of trouble, Griselda's mother had earned a certain level of protected status under the unwritten ethical code of her community. Local social service and law enforcement agencies also operate under a "don't ask, don't tell" policy in keeping with this ethic – as long as a community member stays out of major trouble, no one is concerned about his or her legal status (Johnson).

This solution, however, is neither truly ethical nor sustainable and in the long run it exposes undocumented immigrants to serious injustices. As with other marginalized groups forced to stay in the shadows under similar policies, undocumented immigrants and their families

live in a constant state of dread that one day they will be discovered and held accountable to the law. In addition, less morally conscious members of society find it easier to exploit vulnerable people for their own benefit under these conditions.

Case in Point: Madrid Family

Former ESL students Karina and Isak Madrid were successful landowners and business entrepreneurs in their home country of Mexico. Due to the extreme corruption and breakdown in centralized government control, their local area was soon taken over by a mafia group who demanded, at gunpoint, "protection money" from the family. Not willing to risk the lives of his wife and children, Isak felt he had no other choice but to flee to the United States and find work on a remote ranch in Wyoming. He is now essentially an indentured servant, working long hours seven days a week with no breaks, no insurance, and no guarantee of a minimum wage. As long as he complies with his employer his family is treated well and allowed to live at peace in the community, but the fear of being turned in to the authorities and sent back to the life-threatening conditions in Mexico keeps Isak quiet and working under illegal and inhumane conditions. He feels he has no legal rights due to his documentation status, and the small community in which he lives has no support services designed to help immigrants navigate the legal system. At the same time, his employer undoubtedly feels justified by providing Isak with a safe place to live and a means to support his family. This story illustrates just how complicated the moral and ethical questions become when considering both the global and local context in which immigrants live.

Realistic morality. What is the solution to this moral dilemma? How can I, as a Christian and proponent of basic human rights, best approach the process of designing policies and programs aimed at helping immigrants – both documented and undocumented – gain social capital in small

U.S. communities while still respecting the rule of law and the requirements of the host society? As much as I would like to believe that an appeal to a global ethic of inclusion and embrace will persuade everyone to welcome and support immigrants, a more achievable approach to this issue must also include an appeal to the self-interests of a community as a whole. Joseph Carens addresses "the constraints which must be accepted if morality is to serve as an effective guide to action in the world in which we currently live" (156). For example, Carens warns that while morally defensible, an extremely liberal "open borders" approach to immigration may result in a severe backlash against immigrants by current citizens and, in effect, create an environment in which immigrants suffer even more. Carens states that "the key ethical question is what we ought to do, *all things considered*" (160 emphasis added). He goes on to conclude that "the most that a realistic morality can hope for [regarding immigration] is that people will transcend narrower group identifications and interests to some extent and will ask "What's good for us collectively as a community?"" (161). Community development frameworks, then, must be built on the conviction that while we can and should work for meaningful change in lives of immigrants and the immigration system, we must also recognize the need for what Carens terms "realistic morality" (157) in the process.

Why this research matters in the context of small towns

Global push-factors driving migration trends. The question now arises as to why research into immigrant support is especially relevant in the context of small towns and cities in the United States today. Beginning on a global level, migration has been increasing due to myriad political and economic forces pushing people out of their home countries and across borders. This creates internationally-recognized groups of refugees such as those coming out of war-torn Syria as well as thousands of desperate individuals making the difficult decision to move to a new culture in

search of physical and economic security for themselves and their families. The majority of U.S. immigrants come from Mexico and Central America where the impact of free trade agreements, the 2008 global recession, drug-related gang violence, and climate change are all factors in making life in those regions difficult at best and, as the Madrid family experienced, potentially deadly. According to an editorial by Sergio Muñoz Bata, in many places in Latin America "…the power of the criminal organizations is stronger than that of the local government" and people are fleeing this region not only to avoid immediate physical harm but to protect their children from initiation into violent gangs (1). I have had many ESL students from this region, most recently a young man from Guatemala who is fearful of using his last name and refuses to talk about his home country except to say "it's a bad place and I can't go back" (Marcos F.). Statistical evidence reported by the U.S. Department of State confirms that "Guatemala has one of the highest violent crime rates in Central America and is rated in the top 25 most dangerous places to live in the world" ("Guatemala 2016 Crime and Safety Report"). Many immigrants, then, are quite literally fleeing for their lives. Others do not have such dramatic stories but simply lack opportunities for themselves and their children and believe life in the United States will be better. Another student came to the U.S. with her husband because as the youngest of four sons he had no meaningful prospects for social or economic advancement in his traditional Korean hometown (Hwang). Whatever the reasons, the decision to leave one's home country, say goodbye to family and friends, and relocate to a new cultural context is always the result of powerful motivating factors.

Upon arrival in the U.S., many immigrants settle in large gateway cities such as Los Angeles and New York. However, larger cities have higher costs of living and a lack of affordable housing which pushes lower wage earners into more rural areas. My own

community's minority population has doubled since 2010 ("Cowlitz County Profile") and will continue to become increasingly diverse as the housing crisis in Portland, Oregon forces more and more area residents north. Increased immigration enforcement in cities with higher concentrations of migrants may also begin to push more undocumented immigrants into smaller communities.

Local pull-factors and other influences on immigrants' decisions to relocate. In addition to reasons for leaving their country of origin, immigrants come to the U.S., and in particular to smaller communities, in response to a variety of pull factors. These include the opportunity to work, the existing presence of extended family members or friends, and the possibility of achieving some or all of the elements of The American Dream such as home ownership, financial security, and a good education for their children. Daniel Lichter observes that "the large-scale movement of Hispanics – America's largest minority, immigrant, and urban population – into many parts of rural and small town America…is one of the most important and least anticipated demographic changes in recent U.S. history" (4). This migration trend reflects in part the perception that smaller towns are friendlier, safer, and more community-minded than larger cities, positive factors which outweigh the higher potential for language barriers and the lack of support services for ethnic minorities.

Case in Point: Rigo Muro

The first individual I interviewed in the course of my research was Rigo Muro, the manager of my family's favorite Mexican restaurant. The primary goal of our conversation was to help me gain understanding into the Latino culture in the context of my local community. Rigo arrived in Longview as a teenager, joining relatives who had previously relocated here. He quickly integrated into the local high school by way of the soccer team and several English-

speaking friends in his neighborhood. He described how he was forced to learn English quickly "because nobody at my school could speak Spanish," and because of his language proficiency was able to get a job and move up to a managerial position directly out of high school. Having visited relatives who settled in the San Francisco Bay area, he appreciates our smaller, family-oriented community because the pace of life is slower, people know each other, and "it's a pretty nice place to live – no earthquakes, no hurricanes, no blizzards, not too hot or cold." The only thing he would like to change about our community would be to have a Mexican-style street fair with music, food, and activities for the whole family, but for now he travels down to Hillsboro (near Portland) where there is a much larger, thriving Latino social scene. Rigo recently underwent surgery for a congenital heart defect and has benefitted from community support for his family while he recuperates. Although Rigo has successfully integrated and feels he is a contributing member of our community, his mother still doesn't speak English and stays in her apartment all day unless she is at Rigo's house helping care for his young children. Because of the lack of integration services in our area for first-generation adult immigrants, she remains isolated from the larger community. This story demonstrates both the positive and negative aspects of life for immigrants in smaller, less diverse communities.

An important side-note to the discussion of pull factors influencing immigration patterns is presented in a mixed-methods study by Filiz Garip and Asad L. Asad in which the authors discuss how immigrants may, in fact, exaggerate the benefits of their new home in an effort to avoid shame or criticism from the families they left behind. These exaggerations can then inadvertently motivate others to make the decision to move, contributing to the well-documented "cumulative causation" effect whereby the population of a particular ethnic group grows exponentially within a particular community. According to Garip and Asad, "because migrants

with negative experiences in the United States choose not to share those experiences, individuals in the sending communities retain a glorified view of migration" which results in "an ingrained culture of migration" (15-6) in many Mexican communities. This insight into the social dynamics of migration trends may prove helpful in developing complementary programs on both ends of the global migration trail.

Existing gaps in differentiated services. The general demographic of migrant populations can be broken down into more specific groups, each of which has its own set of needs. *Migrant workers* are generally considered to be temporary, transient residents of a community who follow seasonal patterns of work and return, if possible, to their home country as often as possible. In his book *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies*, Seth Holmes provides an extensive ethnographic study of one particular group of migrant workers from Oaxaca, Mexico and the unique challenges they face as temporary residents of rural Washington State. *Refugees* are those who have been displaced due to natural or human disaster and have been accepted into government-sponsored resettlement programs with the intention of permanent residency in the United States. For the purpose of this paper, I focus on *immigrants* in reference to those people who have chosen to move to the U.S. and resettle in a semi-permanent fashion, but who may have varying degrees of commitment in terms of their long-term goals for residency or citizenship. I contend that small towns must develop frameworks by which these immigrants *in particular* can be welcomed, connected, and empowered in our communities due to their unique needs as well as perceptions about them among host society members. Researchers Kate Murray and David Marx conclude, "...individuals do appear to differentiate between types of immigrants when forming beliefs and attitudes…This suggests the importance of moving beyond broad social categories when assessing prejudice, emotions, attitudes, and beliefs" (339). In addition to being aware of these

attitudinal differences it is necessary to address the current gap in services designed for documented and undocumented immigrants as opposed to refugees or migrant workers, especially in communities with limited migrant support services of any kind. William Bernard summarizes the common challenges faced by migrants of all types and concludes that while refugees' needs may be more urgent and are thus a priority for governmental agencies, "…immigrants suffer from disadvantages also and have similar needs that should receive similar help, if not as dramatically, at least as substantially" (277). For example, services typically offered to government-sponsored refugees upon arrival in their assigned community include several months of financial support, access to safe and affordable housing, and job placement services. They may also receive an individualized assessment of their existing educational level and language abilities in order to connect them to appropriate programs as quickly as possible ("Refugees in America"). These services would be equally beneficial for immigrants who voluntarily choose to settle in our community.

Case in Point: Thuong Derby

Thuong Derby, a highly skilled pediatric nurse, was working at a hospital in Vietnam when she met her future husband, an American who was traveling with a short-term medical mission team. After several years of long-distance dating, they got married and Thuong moved to a small town just across the river from Longview. She is eager to get back to work using her nursing skills to "help moms and babies" but she does not know how to transfer her credentials. Although she can read and write English fluently, her spoken English needs improvement. She sought help at the community college, where she was placed in the upper level ESL class – one of only two classes offered - along with numerous individuals who speak and understand English fairly well but who have very little formal education and struggle to read and write even in their

native languages. The program staff told her she would "just have to start over" and earn a Washington State high school diploma in order to gain entry into nursing classes and eventually become licensed to practice in the United States, a long and tedious process which will take many years to complete. Meanwhile, in larger cities with established resettlement services, government-sponsored refugees often receive individualized assessment of their skills and credentials and are directed to programs which match them with employers willing to provide further training and job-specific language instruction. Thuong's story demonstrates the disparity between the support available to refugees in large cities compared to individual immigrants in smaller, more rural areas and is evidence that there is a need for more comprehensive immigrant support in every community.

BUILDING WALLS: BARRIERS TO INTEGRATION IN HOST SOCIETIES

The importance of local contextualization. It is tempting at this point to immediately jump into program implementation and transfer those "big city" solutions to smaller communities. However, genuine and sustainable community development must take into consideration the local cultural and social context. Geert Hofstede, et al observe that "we cannot change the way people in a country think, feel, and act by simply importing foreign institutions…If we want to understand their behavior, we have to understand their societies" (24-5). William Easterly describes how current development theory has moved away from paternalistic efforts to bring in The Next Best Thing from outside a community, and instead builds on the belief that "only insiders have enough knowledge to find solutions, and that most solutions must be homegrown" (6). In his article "Improving Relations Between Residents and Immigrants" Walter G. Stephan also presents a persuasive argument for localized research, because as he warns, "The needs of immigrants and the concerns of residents may be different from what they are imagined to be"

(44). My local fieldwork, however, did confirm the existence of common barriers to integration which have also been explored in the literature. Of greatest significance is the evidence that regardless of the services and programs available, in order for immigrants to transition from outsider to engaged community member they must first feel welcome and connected to members of the host society. Genuine relationships with others are fundamental to the development of social capital among immigrants, but building these relationships is often difficult due to the presence of real and symbolic fears, overt and hidden racism, and systemic barriers that hinder the integration process.

Underlying fears and assumptions. In the article cited above Stephan writes from the perspective of the psychology behind integration and why both individuals and communities often struggle with the process. He identifies the fears faced by both immigrants and the residents of their host society, and how those actual or perceived threats can interfere with the integration process. His findings can be examined in conversation with Helga Leitner. She states, "Emotions, particularly anxiety and fear, need to be taken seriously in understanding and addressing tensions and conflicts between long-term residents and new immigrants" (843). Leitner's research provides an excellent case study from a community in rural Minnesota that shares key characteristics with my own fieldwork site.

Barriers to integration for immigrants. From the perspective of immigrant residents, Stephan summarizes their concerns as follows:

> For immigrants, realistic threats exist in the form of discrimination, exploitation, poverty, poor health, problems with immigration authorities, and potential violence or mistreatment by residents. Concerns that arise due to group differences in culture, values, beliefs, and worldviews are considered to be symbolic threats… [and] immigrants worry

> about the loss of their culture and traditions… Immigrants may also perceive that their group is being delegitimized [i.e. not entitled to social capital] by residents. (34)

Stephan goes on to discuss how immigrants frequently experience "loss, feelings of incompetence, hopelessness, humiliation, embarrassment, alienation, distress, disorientation, dysphoria, loneliness, and depression" (35), all of which can create barriers to building relationships with others.

Recent studies also show how subtle "micro-aggressions" can impact an individual's willingness to engage with others in the community. Researchers Oscar Jimenez-Castellanos and Gustavo Gonzalez identify four categories of micro-aggression: micro-insults, micro-assaults, micro-invalidations, and institutional policy micro-aggressions (209). Micro-insults are "rude or insensitive behaviors…that convey a hidden message," such as referring to undocumented immigrants as *illegal aliens* which connotes criminality and non-humanity. Going one step further, micro-assaults include "name-calling, avoidant behavior, and purposeful discriminatory actions." For example, a local resident refused to serve on a jury because he observed that the Latino defendant in the case was using an interpreter during the jury selection process (Jacobsen), and a local teacher reported incidences of white students telling those of Latino origin to "go back where you came from" (Coffee). Micro-invalidations occur when the past experiences of immigrants are discounted, as if their lives began only at the moment they crossed the border into the United States. For example, one of my students refused to include on a job application his 10+ years of work experience at a butcher's shop in his hometown in Mexico because he had been told it "doesn't count" when applying for jobs in our community (Guzman). Finally, institutional micro-aggressions are those policies that are intended to create disproportionate fear among immigrant populations, such as the recent expansion of deportable

criminal offenses to include minor traffic violations. Micro-aggressions such as these, when allowed to occur unchecked, can negate other community integration efforts.

Two of the less obvious but equally significant obstacles to social integration among immigrants in the context of small towns are the fear of losing their cultural identity and their belief that they will one day return to their home country. Leitner describes the culture of her research site as that which emphasizes cultural assimilation – that is, conformity to white American values and lifestyles – rather than cross-cultural integration. She observes that in less diverse communities immigrants are more likely to encounter "white Americans defending white privilege, culture, and their place against the outside and outsiders" (831). In other words, they perceive host society members as holding the belief that "if you want to live here you need to be 'like us.'" I also saw ample evidence of this during my fieldwork, such as the prominent display of t-shirts for sale at a community festival which read, "This is America. We own guns, drink beer, eat meat, and SPEAK ENGLISH! If you don't like it, MOVE." Other less blatant but still powerful messages include judgements against large families, expectations that women will work outside the home, and intolerance of traditional medical practices or religious beliefs. Because they lack the support of a larger ethnic community, immigrants in smaller towns are especially fearful of losing their cultural identity in the face of these intolerant attitudes among host society members.

Case in Point: Examples of Divergent Cultural Values

In addition to increasing numbers of residents from Spanish-speaking countries, Cowlitz County has a growing Chuukese (Pacific Islander) population. According to a local newspaper article this is "the fastest growing minority" in the area, and members are experiencing many of the barriers to integration described in the literature (Norimine 1). In addition, first generation

Chuukese are fearful that their children will lose important cultural values such as generosity and communal reliance on family members. Anter Sasuo, a Chuukese who works as a cultural broker for the Kelso School District, explains that "those who try to be independent get [negatively] labeled as 'American.' They need to remember where they came from as Chuukese. As Chuukese we help each other out." Sasuo goes on to describe how children are often absent from school when there is a family obligation, adding to their struggle to "fit in and develop a sense of belonging" at school (qtd. in Norimine 4). Our community also has a small Russian-speaking population, many of whom arrived in the early 1990's as conservative Christian refugees from the former Soviet state of Kyrgyzstan. For them, raising their children in the liberal culture of modern America creates tension as they attempt to pass on their traditional values regarding marriage, gender roles, and religion to the next generation. This tension has led to a splitting of their original church into two groups, one which conducts services in English and whose members are becoming more acculturated and one which conducts all services in Russian, provides Russian-language classes for the children, and maintains traditions such as expecting all women to wear dresses and keep their hair long. Another example is that of Francisco Uribe, a local pastor from Colombia, who finds it extremely frustrating when teenagers in his church say they are in an exclusive dating relationship. From his cultural and religious perspective this means they are engaged and planning to get married, which is a view of dating at odds with the surrounding societal norm but one which he fervently holds onto as both a pastor and the father of two young daughters. Our community also has a small Muslim group which meets at an undisclosed location in order to protect its predominantly Somalian members from being threatened or disturbed during times of corporate worship and teaching. Due to the small number of Muslims in the community, they feel particularly pressured to

conform to the predominantly Christian culture around them (Shaheed). These are just a few examples of how immigrants are challenged to maintain their sense of self-identity and preserve their core values in the transition from their home country to their new cultural context.

In a related study Efrén Peréz discusses the impact that community hostility toward cultural outsiders has on immigrants, in particular those of Latino origin. This research provides quantitative evidence that when faced with anti-immigrant attitudes and speech, those who have a strong sense of cultural identity "assert their group's value, whereas low identifiers … distance themselves from it" (559). In other words, when they encounter rejection of their cultural identity some immigrants in fact become even more committed to maintaining it at the expense of becoming full participants in community life while others choose to abandon their cultural uniqueness. Either way, the community suffers lost opportunities to benefit from the unique contributions of these members. Considering this dynamic in the context of the local community is helpful in determining how to best engage immigrant residents without alienating them from either their own cultural group or the host society at large.

Along with this fear of losing their identity, there is a trend among recent immigrants to hold on to the belief that they will someday return to their native country, where they think life will be better in spite of there being little change in the conditions which contributed to their decision to leave. This attitude is seen among migrant groups of all kinds worldwide and is understandable in the case of involuntary migration such as that experienced by Syrian refugees in Western Europe. However, it is increasing most notably among voluntary immigrants who in past generations would have relocated with a much firmer commitment to permanent residency in their new country. For example, Anne Sigfrid Grønseth describes how in spite of extensive community support and permanent resettlement efforts, the first-generation Tamils in a small

Norwegian village "struggle with…social marginalization within the larger community" (502) a decade or more after arrival, in large part because they still intend "to move back to Sri Lanka as soon as peace comes" or, failing that, "move to Canada where there is a large Tamil community with its own temples and doctors" (504-5). Julia Albarracín summarizes the typical stages of integration as "contact, conflict/negotiation, incorporation, and full incorporation" in the host society (xxxiii). After an extensive mixed-methods study in Central Illinois, the quantitative data from her study shows that 28.8% of the Latino immigrants interviewed said they are "not planning to apply for citizenship," and a further 12% "didn't know or refused" to answer the question (25). Albarracín concludes that "immigrant groups do not necessarily go through all these stages, and they can even live in the United States for decades without getting out of the stage of conflict/negotiations" (xxxiv), which creates a continued barrier to the development of social capital.

Case in Point: Local Examples

The pastor mentioned above, Francisco Uribe, believes that the majority of the first-generation immigrants in his Latino congregation have the expectation to go back to Mexico. Based on conversations with them he has concluded that "they are living in a fantasy based on their old memories of how nice life was," which he sees as a significant impediment to their willingness to study English, seek long-term employment, or invest in the local economy through home ownership or entrepreneurship (Uribe). He sees his ministry as primarily teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ for spiritual salvation, but in addition serving as a role model and exhorting his church members to accept their responsibilities as members of this community, so that both they and the city can prosper as described in Jeremiah 29:7 (NLT). Anter Sasuo, also quoted above, admits that the local Chuukese "have the mentality that someday, we'll go back to

Chuuk" (qtd. in Norimine 4), and a former ESL student, Yadira, admits that she is here "just until my kids can get a good education, then we will probably move back to Mexico" (Robles) While this does not apply to all immigrants in our community, it is a trend which suggests a creative framework is necessary in order to facilitate a greater degree of integration among those who are unsure about their futures.

In addition to experiencing micro-aggressions and in some cases outright racist behaviors, immigrants also bring with them certain fears and assumptions which can hinder their integration into a community and limit the degree to which they participate in community life. Building relationships with immigrants therefore requires an understanding of their strong desire to maintain their cultural identity along with a potentially tenuous commitment to permanent residency. In some cases, they themselves may not be aware that they hold these beliefs and simply need safe, supportive relationships within which they can process their experiences and feelings as they transition from one cultural context to another.

Barriers to integration for host society members. Looking at existing fears and assumptions about immigrants from the perspective of the host society, Stephan states:

> For long-term residents, realistic threats consist of competition for jobs, worries about crime and drugs, the costs of indigent care and the provision of other services… and – for some – the threat of spawning domestic terrorists. Residents worry that their way of life is being undermined and that immigrants will not assimilate to their society. (34)

Again supported by the research done by Leitner and my own fieldwork, these are common fears which severely reduce the probability of a welcoming environment toward immigrants, thereby hindering their integration and access to social capital in a community.

"They're here to take our jobs" is one of the most common refrains heard in conversations with host society members who object to the presence of immigrants in the community. One individual I interviewed described how his father, a 49-year-old native of Cowlitz County who works in the logging industry, frequently complains that "all the tree-planters are Mexicans" who "took those jobs away from regular people." When pressed, however, his father admitted that very few non-immigrants in the community would be willing, or able, to do the back-breaking work for the prevailing wage (Robinson). Numerous studies have been done which show that immigrants generally fill jobs at the extreme upper- and lower-ends of the skill spectrum and very rarely displace native-born Americans in significant numbers (see for example Chomsky). However, this continues to be a very powerful perceived threat, especially in economically-depressed areas such as mine.

Host society members also often erroneously assume that the majority of immigrants are involved in criminal activity. One woman interviewed by Leitner tells a story about a trailer court with a large number of Latino residents and how "the cops [are] having to go out there every fifteen minutes" (837), which Leitner was not able to confirm with any quantifiable evidence. This echoes a similar perception voiced by many in my community, who insist that the police blotter [arrest report] in the local newspaper is always full of Latino names. In fact, an analysis over the course of two months during my fieldwork revealed that the majority of arrests, and almost all drug-related offenses, were of individuals with non-Latino names. However, in spite of ample evidence to the contrary, the mere perception of immigrants- as-criminals (or, even more threatening, immigrants-as-terrorists) is enough to create a barrier between host society members and those whom they fear.

Another deleterious assumption host society members make is that immigrants are a drain on social services. The individuals interviewed by Leitner "portray whites as victims of unjust government practices that favor immigrants, who are perceived not only as having easier access to public services but also consuming more of them" (835). Sheryl Gonzales, a former staff member at the local Ethnic Support Council where I did my fieldwork, asserts that the immigrant clients "just come here and suck on welfare, and there aren't hardly any services for regular whites in this town." Another resident believes "the Mexicans keep having kids they can't afford" and resents paying taxes so they can get "free education and free medical care at the expense of hard-working Americans" (Carlenius). Again, regardless of what the data shows regarding actual government spending on immigrants as compared to native-born residents, the mere perception of fraud, waste, and injustice is enough to create resentment and animosity.

Creating a further barrier is the belief among many host society members that immigrants do not work hard enough to assimilate by learning English and adopting a white, Euro-centric lifestyle. This point of view is expressed regularly in local letters-to-the-editor and social media, including one man's statement that immigrants are "angry minorities who refuse to assimilate and often protest to emphasize their major differences" (Malone). One of Leitner's interviewees states the common refrain, "If they want to live and work here they need to learn English as fast as possible" (Vicky, qtd. in Leitner 839). This and other similar statements "place the burden [of integration] on non-white immigrants, making them responsible for adapting to American values and ways of life" (840). As we have seen, the research does show that this perceived reluctance to be absorbed into the host culture has a basis in fact. However, historical evidence disproves popular narratives of rapid integration and adoption of an American identity among past waves of immigrants. As Gary Gerstle explains, "American history…is also full of episodes of partial

or non-incorporation of immigrants…which is an important story that we must comprehend if we are fully to understand the process [of integration]" (29). Given the massive changes that have occurred in our global society it is unproductive to insist that immigrants today assimilate in a way identical to what is, in many ways, a fictional account of prior generations. In fact, Gerstle argues that historically, "Americanization…has also meant altering, disrupting, and sometimes transforming prevailing patterns of American politics, culture, and society in ways that allowed the newcomers to embrace the United States as their own" (36). Integration has always been a process that goes more than just one direction.

Case in Point: Language Learners

Because of my work as an ESL instructor, I am especially sensitive to the common complaint that immigrants are not working hard enough to learn English. I usually hear this from individuals who have neither taught English nor given serious effort to learning a second language themselves and are therefore unaware that language acquisition is an extremely long process that often takes years. There is also the common assumption that there are ample English classes available somewhere in town, when in fact these programs are extremely limited. Research shows that even with full immersion the minimum time needed to acquire functional fluency is two years (Eaton). Students in my classes frequently live and work with other non-native English speakers, reducing the level of immersion they experience outside of the classroom. When asked how much they use English in their daily lives, many shared stories of being "too scared" to try to communicate in English while out in the community, or too busy working in fast-paced, noisy environments such as a chicken processing plant to practice English at work. In my fieldwork I discovered for myself how even though I was in a room with Spanish-speakers for hours at a time, the repetitious nature of my job entering data into a computer

numbed my mind and greatly minimized the possibility of practicing my Spanish while working. After considering the challenges to language acquisition from their perspective, I have concluded that having regular interaction with native English-speakers in the context of safe, meaningful relationships is vital to language learning, in contrast to the common assumption that language proficiency is a pre-requisite to relationship-building.

Finally, the current political climate has heightened concern among host society members that immigrants are potentially undermining core American values such as the rule of law and separation of church and state. As Nancy Foner and Patrick Simon write, "Many Americans worry that 'illegal' immigrants are overrunning the country and think that a much larger proportion of the foreign born are undocumented than is the case" (11). Again, in another recent letter-to-the-editor, a local resident writes, "We have known for years about illegals in America…this whole country including Alaska and Hawaii was taken over by illegals, and we've all learned, history will repeat itself" (Connors). In addition, the potential arrival of Muslim refugees from Syria has prompted suspicion that their "attachment to their home societies and values" may interfere with their willingness to integrate (Foner and Simon 16). This is an argument that echoes previous generations' concerns about the arrival of large numbers of Roman Catholics who were presumed to be loyal first and foremost to the Pope. For some host society members these arguments are simply a convenient and more politically-correct form of racist xenophobia, but for others these are genuine fears which we must address at the individual and community level. As with the corresponding fear among immigrants regarding the loss of their cultural identity, host society members also hold dear to many core values and societal norms and fear *any* kind of change, not only that which they perceive as being of foreign origin. For integration to be successful it is important acknowledge these fears, educate the

community about the facts beyond the myths, and promote those values and goals that are common to all community members.

Structural barriers. In addition to the barriers to integration that we find in our local communities there are also wider societal practices which create structural barriers. These include difficulties with gaining legal residency, federal educational mandates which unfairly impact immigrant children, and financial restrictions which limit access to mortgages and other types of financial services. These are worth mentioning as areas where we must make large-scale changes in our increasingly diverse society, but are outside the scope of this paper. In particular the recent expansion of immigration enforcement efforts has brought the issues faced by undocumented immigrants to the forefront, which has created opportunities for conversations across sectors and mobilized communities of all sizes to consider how they can contribute to broad immigration policy reform. Such reform is a critical issue that we must address at the national level. It is essential, however, to remember that legal status does not automatically confer social status. Even in the unlikely event that all of America's 11 million undocumented immigrants were to become legal residents, the challenge still remains as to how to ensure they can fully participate in community life at the local level.

Thus far, I have established our moral mandate to assist marginalized members of our community gain social capital and described the significant barriers that exist to successful integration of immigrants in the context of small towns. Now I would like to look at ways in which we might attempt to build bridges instead of walls.

BUILDING BRIDGES: HOW TO FOSTER INTEGRATION IN OUR COMMUNITIES

Why International Festivals and other "diversity events" are not enough. When we consider the kinds of programs which may work to promote integration in a community we can look first

at those things that have already been tried, not as an unfair criticism of those efforts but in order to assess their success in achieving the outcomes for which they were designed. Successful community development involves changing both the attitudes and behaviors which keep groups marginalized and disenfranchised within that community. Programs intended to enhance immigrant support and integration, therefore, should be evaluated on the basis of how well they bring about the development of social capital and full participation in community life among immigrant residents.

Most American communities, including mine, have at least a passing knowledge of the ethnic minorities in their midst and make an effort to acknowledge their cultural uniqueness. This generally takes the form of international festivals, diversity days, or other similar community events that take place once or twice a year. Minority groups are encouraged to bring out their native costumes, food, and artwork to be put on display in order to celebrate diversity in the community. Promoting awareness of the contributions of various groups is a good first step and these events do serve to foster a positive group identity among members of an ethnic group. However, they do not do enough to bring about the deeper changes that are necessary. In some cases this type of program may in fact do more harm than good by further marginalizing a group into an annual "entertainment" category and failing to consider their role in the community the remaining 364 days of the year. Referring again to her research in Norway, Grønseth describes how these kinds of activities can create "symbolic borders [which] establish and mark differences between 'us' and 'them' and do little to alleviate the social segregation by which immigrants are "left out of informal, personal networks" (506). Grønseth goes on to discuss the ramifications of this social ostracism in the context of health care, in which doctors "often perceive the patient as representing a cultural category rather than as an individual" (509).

Case in Point: My Life as a Celebrity

Shortly after graduating from college, my husband and I accepted an offer to go to Japan and teach English for a Christian church. At that time, this kind of "dendo" (evangelism) was in its heyday and many of our friends were also doing it, so without much in the way of cultural preparation or language learning we packed our bags and went. We spent the next three years in two different small, rural communities in which we were among only a handful of non-Japanese residents. We quickly rose to almost celebrity status as the token Americans, invited to meet with the mayors, attend community events, and share our insights into what Americans think about a wide variety of topics ranging from food preferences to global politics. At first we were flattered, but as time went on and our homesickness increased, we struggled with chronic loneliness and a sense that no one really wanted to get to know us as individuals. Because of our role as the English teachers everyone we met would use our conversations as an opportunity to practice their English, so our Japanese proficiency remained at a humiliating toddler level. This further limited our sense of belonging and ability to form meaningful relationships. Although we were never asked to go so far as to don cowboy hats and grill up hot dogs, we felt somewhat exploited as simply a means to draw people into the church building. In spite of our training and experience as teachers, we were not included in decision-making about curriculum or classroom procedures because we were told we "did not understand the Japanese mind." This experience reminds me of the importance of seeing each and every person as a complex, multi-faceted individual, not simply as a token member of a stereotyped culture group.

A second means by which well-meaning community members may try to bring about a greater awareness and appreciation of multiculturalism is to include immigrant residents in larger "diversity" efforts. For example, the local theater group in my community recently put on a

staged reading in which actors presented real-life stories from a variety of individuals who had suffered intolerance or discrimination in recent months. The majority of the voices heard were either those of political liberals who had voted against the winning presidential candidate or individuals who identify as LGBTQ. Scattered among these were a few stories involving ethnic minorities, but told from the perspective of white host society members who had observed from afar what they considered to be poor treatment of the victim (*Into the Storm*). This program is problematic in two ways. First, based on my conversations with ESL students and members of ethnic churches I know that many come from cultural and religious backgrounds which do not condone homosexuality, and many are offended when they are lumped together with the gay rights movement or other politicized efforts to build a more inclusive community. Second, the telling of stories about the perceived immigrant experience from a position of social privilege does little justice to the owners of those stories. Instead, we must intentionally and consistently include authentic voices from the margins in our on-going dialogue about the needs of immigrants and their integration in the community.

The Solution: relationships and community. In order to move beyond these limited attempts to acknowledge ethnic diversity in our communities, we must find ways to develop genuine relationships with one another. One local pastor, René Devantier, stated in an interview that “welcoming communities require welcoming people,” a simple phrase that has shaped much of my on-going research. In the Gospels, Jesus confronts the religious leaders of his day with the parable of the new wine, stating, and “… no one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the wine would burst the wineskins, and the wine and the skins would both be lost. New wine calls for new wineskins” (Mark 2:22 NLT). Likewise, implementing new programs aimed at increasing the integration of immigrants in our communities is doomed to failure unless we address the

underlying relational barriers that exist at the individual level and foster a new welcoming environment in which community members are committed to building positive reciprocal relationships with one another. Expanding access to social capital for all community members therefore requires relational proximity with one another, by which we can develop empathy for others and gain an awareness of our shared values and goals.

The importance of relational networks to societal health is supported by decades of sociological research. Max Weber, building on the work of Ferdinand Tönnies, details the distinction between *associative* and *communal* relationships, in which the former are seen as "pure voluntary associations based on self-interest" and the latter "rest on various types of affectual, emotional, or traditional bases" such as the family (41). Weber states, "The communal type of relationship is…the most radical antithesis of conflict" (42) and as such should be promoted as the basis of a peaceful society. Thomas Sander and Robert Putnam assert that "[expanding] social capital makes citizens happier and healthier, reduces crime, makes government more responsive and honest, and improves economic productivity" (9). Conversely, Michael Schluter and David Lee describe how modern society has suffered due to the decline of relationships based on personal encounters and their replacement with interactions at the more distant, impersonal "mega-community" level (12). The expansion of social media has further eroded the quality of our relationships and created environments where hate and exclusion can easily thrive.

One established practice in building positive relationships and social capital is the *intergroup contact approach*, which was introduced by Gordon Allport in 1954 and remains a valid basis for program development in many diversity-related fields including immigration and integration studies. In order to be successful, however, members from different groups must be

given opportunities to interact as equals and work together toward a common goal with the support of group authorities. Miles Hewstone explains how "contact theory argues that engaging in positive contact with individuals from different groups promotes positive intergroup attitudes. A welter of evidence has now been accumulated for the positive effects of contact in many different contexts, under many different conditions, and on many different outcome measures, including trust" (420). Based on more recent research, Thomas Pettigrew has added the requirement "that the contact situation have the potential for the growth of friendship between group members" (qtd. in Reynolds 267). Regarding her study on small-town attitudes towards immigrants, Leitner also concludes, "Building friendships with individual migrants, especially, holds some promise for transcending differences and identifying commonalities across racial and cultural divides and changing the category of the 'we'" (842). Especially in small communities where host society members place high value on who you know, being in genuine, personal relationships and physically interacting on a regular basis with others regardless of cultural, language, or socio-economic differences is a key component to successful integration.

Contact theory also forms the basis of Schluter and Lee's concept of *relational proximity* which encompasses five essential elements: directness, continuity, multiplexity, parity, and commonality. Directness refers to the importance of physical encounters with others in order to foster empathy and "understand, swiftly and acutely, the common frailty of the human race" (74). Lack of direct encounters leads to either apathy or unfounded prejudice against the Other, who can "become monstrous in the imagination" (73). Schluter and Lee also assert that trust can only be built over time, and therefore an expectation of continuity is essential for relationships. There is also the need for multiplexity, or "overlapping spheres of activity" (81). As mentioned previously, if we only encounter one another is in the limited context of a once-yearly

International Festival, genuine relationships will not develop. Parity refers to the necessity of a "level playing field," because "without parity the stronger party will tend to limit meetings with the weaker…and their exchanges when meetings do occur will be hampered by the shared awareness of the power gulf between them" (85). My growing awareness of this dynamic is one reason I have left my position as an ESL instructor, because I want my immigrant neighbors to view me as simply a fellow community member in terms of our relationship. Finally, it is vital to incorporate a sense of commonality, or shared purpose, in building effective relationships.
This ties in with Walter Stephan's article "The Role of Empathy in Improving Intergroup Relations." Stephan summarizes evidence that "creating a sense of a common identity has been found to reduce prejudice and discrimination" (735) and proposes programs such as community conversations, cooperative projects, and other means by which both psychological and physical distance can be reduced between various group members as they work together for a common purpose.

The importance of relationship-building among immigrants and host society members is further supported by research from other countries with high immigration rates. Giovanni Facchini, et al explore how friendship between non-native residents and German nationals impacts the processes of integration and assimilation into German society. They conclude that "having a well-developed, native-including social network in the destination country might be an important driver of cultural assimilation" (646) as well as greater success in educational and work environments. A Spanish study further confirms the theory that building positive relationships with host society members is essential to the integration of immigrants and their eventual self-sufficiency and full participation in community life (Garcia-Ramirez et al).

Relationship-building as a shared cultural value. In spite of the high level of individualistic

thinking in American culture as a whole, native-born residents of small towns are in reality very collectivistic and as such share this cultural value with many of their immigrant neighbors. One of my fieldwork interview questions asked, “What is one part of your cultural identity you would never want to lose?” Almost every person, including both immigrants and native-born residents, stated that loyalty to (and from) their family and friends was of primary importance. Geert Hofstede, et al describe collectivist cultures as those in which the group “is the major source of one’s identity and the only secure protection one has against the hardships of life” (91) and assert, “The vast majority of people in our world live in societies in which the interest of the group prevails over the interest of the individual” (90). Emphasizing this as a shared value is an important strategy when designing and implementing integration programs in small towns. According to Donna Chrobot-Mason, et al, “Members of collectivist cultures…are motivated…by serving the collective and thus more fully realizing one’s connectedness” (2024). Integration efforts can tap into this motivation by helping both immigrants and native-born residents self-identify as equally valued members of our local community. Specifically, the strategy of “recategorization” shows promise in helping bridge the gap between immigrant residents and host society members. In the context of a business Chrobot-Mason, et al observe,

> Assuming the super-ordinate identity is not perceived as a threat to existing social identity groups...employees from collectivist cultures will generally be more receptive [to recategorization] because a collective approach encourages employees to look beyond their individual identities and needs and places the needs of the organization in the forefront. (2024)

This recategorization allows individuals to maintain their cultural identity of origin while at the same time understanding their social position in a new, shared culture. By applying this strategy

in our local community, we can alleviate injustice and conflict between groups as we turn attention to our shared values and goals and develop a “new more inclusive social identity” (Chrobot-Mason 2024). This approach resolves the fear of losing one’s original cultural identity, a fear which is shared by both immigrants and host society members alike.

Transformational Development theory in praxis

Principles of Transformational Development. Equipped with this understanding of the existing barriers to integration and established theories of cultural identity and social capital, how do we put this knowledge into practice? This is where the principles of transformational community development can guide us. Transformational development is a highly context-specific, relational process that goes beyond superficial cultural events, political activism, or the implementation of programs designed around predetermined logic models and generic theories of change. This approach is based on an understanding that all people, regardless of their legal, social or economic status, have at their core a capacity for spiritual transformation and can learn to live in just relationships with one another. It is my belief as a Christian that this transformation in human relationships is only possible with the divine help of our Creator God. This underscores again the importance of Christians actively engaging in community development work and communicating clearly in both word and deed the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In his article “The Church and Transformational Development,” Bryant Myers writes,

> While psychology can help people to order their internal lives, and people of good will can seek the well-being of the community, Christian experience is that the full potential of any transformation is not possible without the transforming effect of a relationship with God. It is the central task of the church to live a life in the community that provokes questions to which the gospel is the answer and, by so doing, invite people to faith in

> Christ…When the church is at its best, it equips and releases holistic disciples, who are committed to serve the community in the community's search for its well-being. (66)

C.S. Lewis also asserts that "without good men you cannot have a good society" (70); my work in transformational development, therefore, begins with my own changed nature as a redeemed disciple of Jesus Christ in relationship with those around me.

In addition to this core belief that people and relationships can change for the better, transformational development emphasizes the participation of the entire community. As discussed earlier, community integration programs should build on an intimate knowledge of the local context as well as incorporate the perspectives of previously marginalized groups. Justin Byworth states,

> Community-based transformational development requires active ownership of all aspects of development by the whole community. Community ownership of the development process empowers whole communities and builds interdependent and empowering linkages with others. Community ownership starts with an analysis of community reality, which recognizes and builds on existing potential and opportunities, then develops and moves towards a shared vision. (109)

These two principles provide a solid foundation as we move into the specific application of transformational development to integration in our communities.

Three stages of Transformational Development. In *Walking with the Poor*, Myers outlines the three-stage approach which World Vision uses in transformational development efforts worldwide: the start-up "Seedling" phase of relationship- and capacity-building, the "Growing Tree" program phase which moves target populations toward independence, and the "Propagation" phase of self-sustaining momentum (268). Even in the domestic context of

development within American communities, this model provides a useful framework for program design.

Starting out, those seeking to welcome, connect, and empower immigrant residents must invest time and resources in gathering both quantitative data and qualitative insights about the local community. Early in my fieldwork in Cowlitz County I discovered that apart from basic census data, there has never been a comprehensive study done to collect information regarding the makeup of our immigrant population, leaving those residents in the shadows and systematically excluded from community life. This lack of hard data also contributed to the rejection of a grant proposal to provide funding for a cultural competency training for local law enforcement agencies. As our community becomes more diverse it is essential that we find a means to track our demographics in order to meet the needs of all our residents. For example, in California the Napa Valley Community Foundation commissioned a study through the non-partisan Migration Policy Institute to create "a profile of the county's immigrants using the most up-to-date data… [including] an estimate of immigrants' impact on the county's economy…" (Capps 1). Based on this report, the Foundation was able to design and implement a three-year initiative to "empower immigrants to feel more secure and engaged in the future of [the] community" including providing assistance for many of the area's 9,000 Legal Permanent Residents to become voting citizens ("One Napa Valley Initiative: What It's About").

Along with a quantitative assessment, those leading the integration process must make it a priority to invest in genuine relationship-building with a wide network of individuals including both immigrants and host society members. This provides opportunities to understand existing concerns, assess the strengths various groups bring to the community, and establish common goals. In the early stages of integration work it is especially important to avoid alienating

particular groups. While public protests and solidarity movements may be helpful in raising awareness and generating energy within communities, these activities cannot form the basis of long-lasting, community-wide integration efforts due to their potentially divisive messaging. The United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs defines integration as "a dynamic and principled process where all members participate in dialogue to achieve and maintain peaceful social relations. Social integration does not mean coerced assimilation or forced integration" ("Peace Dialogue"). Discounting the opinions and fears of either host society groups or immigrant rights advocates will only further polarize community opinions and create a combative public discourse.

A helpful resource in this collaborative approach is the *Welcoming America* initiative, which provides resources to local coalitions to support their efforts to "foster a culture and policy environment that makes it possible for newcomers of all backgrounds to feel valued and to fully participate alongside their neighbors in the social, civic, and economic fabric of their adopted hometowns" ("Welcoming Strategy"). Boise, Idaho is one city which has gained national attention for its work as a Welcoming America Community. A spokesperson from the mayor's office stated in an interview that the key to their success was "changing what it meant to be a Boise resident and making inclusiveness part of our community identity at every level" (Lachiondo). This approach recognizes the need for transformation in ways of thinking among both native-born and immigrant residents alike, building the two-way bridge of successful integration. Although currently *Welcoming America* and its partner organization *Welcoming Economies* focus on larger urban communities, many of their resources may be helpful when adapted carefully to a smaller local context.

In our efforts to show support for our immigrant neighbors we must also avoid approaching them with a paternalistic attitude. Especially in times of crisis it is tempting to ask, "How can *we* (white, privileged host society members) help *you* (weak, victimized strangers in our midst)?" Immediate help in the form of temporary physical aid or sanctuary may be an appropriate response by a loving community at certain times, but the deeper question should be, "How can we (all) build relationships with one another so that together we can make our community a better place to live for everyone?" This long-range approach also prepares the entire community for future crises. Judith Rodin contends that "our capacity to respond to a disruption…not only depends on how ready we are but also on the quality of our social cohesion" (167). Connecting immigrant residents with the community at large and building social capital is therefore essential so that both immigrants and the host society are equipped with "the capacity…to prepare for disruptions, to recover from shocks and stresses, and to adapt and grow from a disruptive experience" (Rodin 3). When community members have worked together to strengthen social cohesion, we can confidently face potential disruptions such as increased immigration enforcement activity, new influxes of political or economic refugees, ethnic conflict and local or regional economic recessions.

As we move into the second phase of transformational development we can begin to design programs which build on existing community assets and interests. The possibilities for projects are limited only by the creativity and degree of commitment among community members who are willing to first build genuine relationships and then work alongside one another to implement locally-relevant ideas. For example, in the rural community of Willmar, Minnesota leaders have responded to a huge influx of Latino and Somalian immigrant families by organizing a youth soccer league, reaching out to include Latino business owners in the

Chamber of Commerce, and creating a multicultural Design Team "to work on additional projects focused on improving community life" (Otteson 42). In response to needs expressed at recent community meetings, my own newly-formed local coalition has begun brainstorming ideas such as creating an employment cooperative, partnering on a community garden, forming a multicultural community advisory committee, and providing opportunities for local attorneys to become trained in immigration law in order to assist undocumented residents with legal paperwork. We are also working with the local community college and K-12 school districts to ensure that important information is available in a variety of languages and create opportunities to involve more immigrant families in the educational process.

Finally, the ultimate goal of transformational development practitioners is to work ourselves out of a job. In regards to immigrant services and integration support the ideal conclusion of development efforts is a community in which host society members maintain a welcoming attitude towards newcomers and immigrant residents access numerous entry-points into community life. This can be accomplished in part by strengthening ties between small ethno-cultural groups and the larger community. A representative from an immigrant group in Ottowa, Canada observes,

> Small [ethno-cultural] organizations have a unique contribution. We understand the language and culture of the community. We have the experience, the trust of the community and the knowledge of the pressing issues. Community members feel more comfortable in the environment provided by small community organizations. We listen to them. We do not judge them. We understand.…The large and small organizations need to work together. Each one has a distinct and complementary role to play – the large

> organizations at the macro level and the small groups at the micro level. (qtd. in Jimeno et al 9)

A successfully integrated community, therefore, has in place healthy organizations led by leaders from within particular immigrant groups who provide support to group members while at the same time facilitating their engagement with larger community systems. The host society, in turn, maintains a commitment to inclusiveness and willingness to support on-going integration efforts. Chaudhury, et al describes this process as "bridging social capital [which] can help groups to establish linkages, share resources, and unite towards common goals" (qtd. in Jimeno 11). These connections represent the culmination of the transformational development process.

Case in Point: Longview First Baptist Church

One salient example of successful integration from my fieldwork is how several local churches, including Longview First Baptist, offer Spanish-language worship services at the same time as English services. All the children (who typically do not have the significant language barriers faced by their parents) are together in Sunday School and members of both groups have an opportunity to interact before and after the worship service. In addition, the Sunday School teachers at First Baptist are taking Spanish-language classes so they can communicate more effectively with the immigrant children and their parents. Rather than merely renting out space or sponsoring an isolated immigrant church which is at risk of losing its relevance to second-generation immigrants, the church is using this co-congregation approach to honor the unique language and cultural needs of Latino worshippers while at the same time demonstrating a more holistic and long-term vision for its ministry to the community. The members of both congregations have shown a willingness to be transformed in their relationships with one another for the benefit of all.

CONCLUSION

Our individual responsibility toward creating a welcoming environment. Miroslav Volf writes, "But along with the grand visions we need stories of small successful steps of learning to live together even when we do not quite understand each other's language…The grand vision and the small steps will together keep us on a journey toward genuine justice between cultures" (231). As I quoted earlier, "Welcoming communities require welcoming individuals" (Devantier), so what can we do as individuals to take those "small steps" toward creating a welcoming environment in our communities? For myself, this has meant incorporating into my Rule of Life a commitment to heed Volf's exhortation to "create space in myself to receive the Other" (51). In addition to my natural tendency to seek out conversations with immigrants, I have also attended a monthly theological discussion group sponsored by a church other than my own, visited a prayer meeting conducted by the local Muslim fellowship, and submitted a proposal to present my thesis research to a group of politically conservative business owners. By being intentional on a daily basis to practice a lifestyle of welcome and embrace, I have inspired others to consider how they, too, might contribute to a welcoming community. As a result, our as-yet-unnamed integration coalition was born. At the time of this writing, we have hosted four well-attended public forums and have compiled an email list of over 150 local residents – both immigrants and host society members - who want to help support immigrants and integration efforts in our community.

Case in Point: An International Wedding

Whatever else I may accomplish as a result of my research and work on this topic, I have the great satisfaction of knowing that by practicing a lifestyle of welcome and embrace as an individual change agent I have positively impacted the lives of at least two immigrants in my

community. Dawn Wiltbank is a British national who had recently relocated to our area after working in campus ministry for many years in Australia. She first contacted me last summer to find out how she might be able to help with the Christian Club at the community college where I work. We began meeting for coffee and lunch and she been an invaluable asset to the Christian student ministry at the college as well as outreach to international students. Her involvement in the campus ministry led her to pursue permanent residency in the U.S., and as a result of that decision she developed a relationship with an eligible bachelor neighbor. When she eventually shared with me that she and her fiancé were looking for someone to perform their wedding, I suggested she ask Pastor Uribe. He agreed to marry Dawn and Grant and greatly appreciated the opportunity to perform his first-ever wedding in English. My husband and I served as witnesses, and as I stood and listened I thought, "I am the common link. I brought all these people together and welcomed, connected, and empowered them to use their gifts for the benefit of one another and others in our community." It was a humbling moment, and I felt immensely grateful that God has chosen to use me in this way at this particular point in our community's story.

A reiteration of our moral and societal obligations to our immigrant neighbors. As with other pervasive causes of material and social poverty found throughout human society, the deep-rooted tendency to reject those who are culturally different from ourselves creates significant barriers to integration in small towns like mine. I discovered during my fieldwork that many first-generation immigrants in my community aspire simply to survive in order for their children to have a better life, but that they themselves are resigned to living in the shadows. In addition, many members of the host society often assume that newcomers have nothing to offer beyond a willingness to work in undesirable, low-paying jobs. My research has shown that fear and exclusionary

attitudes hinder the development of meaningful relationships and prevent immigrants from fully participating in community life. These attitudes go far beyond language and cultural differences and must be addressed in order to accomplish genuine integration. Unfortunately, many individuals and communities simply accept these barriers as an inevitable part of life for immigrants and do little to mitigate the prolonged negative impacts. Rodin observes that "when chronic stresses develop slowly over time, they often come to be thought of as normal – just the way things are" (111). This can, in turn, lead to what Martin Seligman describes as "a phenomenon called 'learned helplessness,' a state in which people come to accept a given situation or environment…without trying to change things" (qtd. in Rodin 44). Our immigrant neighbors and our community as a whole suffer as a result.

I have proposed a more proactive approach to help immigrants thrive in their new community. We must first accept our moral and societal obligations to engage in well-reasoned dialogue about this important issue. As individuals, churches, and communities we must strive to create a welcoming environment and empower our immigrant neighbors with the same degree of social capital that native-born citizens enjoy. This includes working to legalize their resident status when possible in order to help them free themselves from the burden of fear and exploitation and honor our underlying societal values. Guided by principles and practices of transformational community development, we must cultivate meaningful relationships, discover our shared goals and build bridges, not walls, as we work together towards a more just society.

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