

- North, D., & Yang, D. (1988). *Profiles of the highland Lao communities in the United States*. Washington, DC: Office of Refugee Resettlement, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Social Security Administration.
- Pollard, S. (1919). *The story of the Miao*. London: Henry Hooks.
- Purnell, H. (1970). Toward a reconstruction of proto Miao-Yao. Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University.
- Quincy, K. (1988). *Hmong: History of a people*. Cheney, WA: Eastern Washington University Press.
- Ratliff, M. S. (1986). The Morphological functions of tone in White Hmong. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Chicago.
- Savina, F. M. (1920). *Abécédaire Meo-Français* (Hmong-French Reader). Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême Orient.
- _____. (1924). *Histoire des Miao*. Paris: Societe des Missions Etrangères.
- Smalley, W. A. (1976). The Problems of consonants and tone: Hmong (Meo, Miao), In *Phonemes and orthography: Language planning in ten minority languages of Thailand*. (pp. 85-123). Canberra: Australian National University.
- _____. (1982). History of the development of the Hmong romanized popular alphabet. Presentation and handout to the Hmong Language Council, August 12, Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota. The nature of the meeting was to conduct studies to standardize the Mong language.
- _____. (1994). *Linguistic diversity and national unity: Language ecology in Thailand*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- _____. (1997). Personal Communication with the author, August 21.
- Thao, C., & Robson, B. (1982). *Interim report of the Mhong Language Council Conference August 12-14, 1982*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Thao, P. (1985). Teaching modals in Mong ESL classes. M.A. departmental paper, Northeastern Illinois University.
- _____. (1994). Mong resettlement in the Chicago area (1978-1987): Educational implications. Ph.D. dissertation, Loyola University of Chicago.
- _____. (1997). *Kevcai siv lug Moob* (Foundations of Mong language). Marina, CA: PT Publishing.
- _____. (1999). *Mong education at the crossroads*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Thao, S. (1996). *Ncu txug txajntsig Moob I/II* (Special tribute commemorating the Mong I/II), Video. Fresno, CA: S. T. Universal Video.
- Tsaj, C. (n.d.). *Hmoob nyob Pa Tawg teb* (The Hmong in Wenshan). Guyane, France: Association Communauté Hmong.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (1988). *Profiles of the highland Lao communities in the United States*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (1995). *Report to Congress FY 1995*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Xiong, L., Xiong, J., & Xiong, N. L. (1983). *English-Mong-English dictionary*. Milwaukee, WI: Hetrick Printing.
- Xiong, X. D. (1989). *Txooj Moob huv nplajteb* (The Mong in the world), *Txooj Moob* (May): 4, 8-12.
- Yang, D. (1975). *Les Hmong du Laos face au développement*. Vientiane, Laos: Edition Siasavath.

CHAPTER 13

Scars of War: Educational Issues and Challenges for Cambodian-American Students

Khatharya Um

CONTEXT FOR UNDERSTANDING THE CAMBODIAN DIASPORA

The communist victory in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam in 1975 brought an end to the Second Indochina War, America's longest war, but it also created conditions for protracted conflict, political and socio-economic upheaval, and ultimately, mass refugee exodus. For the Cambodian people, who have little prior history of overseas migration, 1975 also marked the beginning of the diaspora that saw to the displacement and resettlement of close to one million Cambodians. Some 146,346 refugees from Cambodia were admitted to the United States between 1975 and 1994, constituting approximately 13%, of the total 1,180,538 Southeast Asians and Amerasians that were resettled in the United States (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 1994). At large, Southeast Asians constitute the single largest category of refugees to be resettled in the US in the post-1965 period and the fastest growing segment of the Asian-Pacific-American (APA) population.

The Southeast Asian American community has become much more visible in recent years for at least two reasons: (1) the community has seen rapid growth, and (2) the community has concentrated in distinct geographical areas due to postresettlement or secondary migrations. This increase in visibility has both positive and adverse consequences. Public perceptions of Southeast Asian communities are polarized. At one extreme, is the image of refugees as being helpless and dependent, lacking the necessary requisites for effective transition into the post-industrial American society and economy. In this sense, the community is seen to be at risk. At the other extreme are the presumptions of economic and scholastic achievements, exemplified by the numerous

vaedictorians, visible presence on college campuses and booming ethnic enterprises. While inspirational, the media's focus on individual success stories such as that of the Cambodian girl who struggled and succeeded despite her limited English proficiency to win a spelling bee, contributes to the oversimplification and generalization of the Cambodian experience, which, in turn, masks the myriad education-related problems confronting youths of refugee families. The implications of such stereotyping for policies and programs are, by extension, grave.

Despite the frequent tendency to view Southeast Asians as a homogenous community in the United States, to lump them generically as Indochinese, the communities that came into being in the aftermath of the Vietnam War reflect tremendous diversity among groups and within groups. The complexity of the refugee experience points to the importance of looking at the timing, context, and process of migration in the study of adaptation. Depending upon the time of exit from the home country and arrival in the United States, Cambodian refugee cohorts, for instance, reflect vast socioeconomic and experiential differences. During the Khmer Rouge regimes (1975-1979) infliction of systematic class persecution, endemic starvation, and hard labor resulted in the death of over 1 million Cambodians, more than one-seventh of the population, with a disproportionate percentage of the educated, professionals, and urbanites being killed. The demographic profile of refugees who eventually escaped to the border camps following the collapse of the Communist regime (resettled in third countries in the early 1980s) reflects this politico-historical experience. The Cambodian refugee community, at large, consists of a high percentage of people of the peasant or lower socioeconomic class or those who had successfully hidden their upper-class background. In comparison with the smaller group of refugees who were resettled in 1975, the overwhelming majority of the later arrivals were less educated, more rural in origin, and generally less endowed with the skills, or the "human capital," that are generally deemed essential for successful resettlement.

In addition to the temporal factor, the context and process of migration also have implications for adjustment-related issues such as physical and mental health. In addition to the trauma of displacement shared by all refugees, the post-1979 cohorts endured and survived chronic starvation, unimaginable violence under the Khmer Rouge, and endemic perils of flight, of minefields, insurgency, and banditry. Once in border camps, they were further diminished by a life of uncertainty and divested of their sense of self-determination in critical aspects of their daily routine. Their physical safety, access to food, and future welfare depended on forces beyond their control—international politics, immigration policies and officers, and regional politics as they determined the degree of receptivity to refugees on the part of host and resettlement countries. This learned helplessness has direct implications for their adjustment in the post-

resettlement context and particularly for their capacity to regain their sense of self-sufficiency.

The ability of refugees to make successful transition towards integration, however, depends as much upon the host context as it does on pre-resettlement experiences. Success is reflective of the adaptive resources of the individual refugee and community as much as it is of opportunities and condition that exist for capitalizing upon those resources. In short, it depends equally upon the context *into* which refugees are being resettled, as it does the context *out* of which they emerge. Intrinsic human capital notwithstanding, the state and condition of local economies and politics do determine opportunities and constraints for the optimization of those resources. Given their low level education and skill, Cambodian refugee employment is highly concentrated in the manufacturing sector which is tremendously vulnerable to economic vicissitudes. Thus the economic welfare of large segments of the refugee population depends upon the continued vitality of these rather volatile sectors of American economy.

Be it in terms of economic or social adjustment, the tribulations that continue to affect the lives of refugee families—poverty, racism, urban violence, crime—deter successful adaptation as much as the trauma that they experienced and carry with them into exile. These adverse conditions that confront refugee families, in turn, are linked in very significant ways to student academic performance. Temporal and contextual factors, therefore, are critical in accounting for variations in the degree of individual and community resiliency, as well as accounting for the patterns and dynamics of the response to change. An understanding of the issues and concerns of Cambodian refugee communities must involve the examination of these multiple dimensions—cultural, structural, historical, generational—as they affect the adaptation of Cambodian students and their families. People working with Cambodian refugee families must determine not only the extent to which each of these factors bears upon the process of adjustment and integration, but they must also determine how these forces interface with and reinforce each other to generate compounded adverse consequences.

WAR, REVOLUTION, AND ENCAMPMENT: CHALLENGES TO CRITICAL ASPECTS OF CAMBODIAN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Of exile, Barudy (1987) points out that it "is never the fulfillment of a wish; it is a 'forced choice,' necessary to escape danger and survive. It always involves a break or a *repetition* of the break in the individual's personal and social history which began with the repression" [my emphasis]. While refugees have some commonalities with other immigrants, it is this contextual particularity that distinguishes the refugee condition from voluntary migration. What further separates the Cambodian refugee experience from that of other Southeast Asian groups is the compounding nature and concomitant intensity of the dislocation experience. For the Cambodian people, the disruption generated by war and revolution was multilevel as well as multidimensional. The nature

and scope of dislocation extended from the individual, to the communal, to the nation-state, and involved structural, sociocultural, and psychical dimensions. Revolutionary transformation and turmoil consumed everyone living under the Communist regime, regardless of age, gender and class. By extension, the disruption, whether systematic or incidental, affected fundamental aspects of Cambodian culture and society, from the social consciousness of her people to the structural and functional integrity of key institutions.

To a regime such as that of the Khmer Rouge, which sought totalistic control over its populace, any force that commanded traditional loyalty was viewed as a challenge to the state. Buddhism, the nucleus of Khmer weltanschauung and the basis of its cultural, literary, social, and spiritual tradition, was banned. Bonzes were forcefully defrocked and sent to work camps or summarily put to death, while the *vat* (Buddhist monasteries), which traditionally constitute the social and spiritual center of the village, were transformed into rice granaries or makeshift prisons. The undermining of Buddhism was one aspect of that overall process of institutional destabilization. Despite subsequent efforts towards cultural restoration, the implication of this institutional weakening continues to register in diaspora, depriving the community of one of the cementing forces.

Just as Buddhism was seen as being oppositional to the secular faith of communism, so were family and community ties perceived as a threat to the regime. The policy of mass and repeated relocation was motivated, therefore, not by economic imperatives but by the need of the totalitarian state to undercut communal ties to ensure absolute loyalty and undermine potential resistance. The institution of family, which is the locust of Khmer social identity and primordial relations, was systematically attacked. During the Khmer Rouge regime, working age Cambodians were assigned to age and gender-based mobile work brigades and subjected to constant uprooting. As one refugee recalled, "In all four years under A-Pot ('the wretched Pot'), I had nothing. Just a *krama* (a scarf), a spoon that I had made myself, and one set of clothing. I knew no village, no home. My [work] team was sent everywhere. They did not want us to stay in any one place too long for fear that we would get to know the locals too well" (S. Khon, personal interview, Oakland, California, 1989). Assignment to work teams in which members not only worked but lived, and ate together, meant the purposive fragmentation of the family unit and systematic reintegration of individual members into a new organization. In some cases, children as young as five years of age were separated from their parents, and subjected to systematic indoctrination.

The Cambodian social and economic lives, thus, were reorganized into a new hierarchy. Parents, who traditionally were accorded a place second only to Buddha within the Khmer cultural universe, were made subordinate to the omnipotent state. Children were taught that they now belonged to *Angka* (The Organization). For young adults, the state replaced parents and kin in the selection of marriage partners and the sanctification of marital relationship. Endemic fear, suspicion, and chronic starvation further atomized the individual and threatened the integrity of the family: "There are no more parents or children. We owe our life and loyalty only to *Angka*. It was as if we were no

longer a family with thoughts and respect for each other. We no longer relate to each other the same way" (Um, 1990, p. 254). The Khmer Rouge motto *sok muy, kbal muy* (one strand of hair, one head) encapsulates the credo of the regime which deemphasizes the individual for the good of the group. Among surviving Cambodian refugees, the legacy of trauma is reflected in the fear of, and unquestioning obedience to, authority and the high degree of fatalism. Furthermore, the undermining of critical institutions such as the family and religion divests the diasporic community of the structural cohesion and support necessary for facilitating resettlement.

Other consequences of this history of dislocation are less tangible but equally salient to the discussion of adaptation. For a culture that is based significantly on oral tradition, the degree of rupture that was inflicted by the decimation of one-seventh of the population is immeasurable. Thus, while culture is a significant component in addressing education-impacted issues, it is important to recognize that fundamental aspects of Cambodian cultural norms and institutions have been significantly affected by historical and generational factors. The cultural dimension of refugee community studies, therefore, must be situated simultaneously within the contexts of continuity and change.

In sum, the recent history of the Cambodian people is one of dislocation and disempowerment. Destabilization of traditional institutions and social relations did not end with exit from the home country; it continues during the process of migration, through the period of encampment, and in resettlement, with detrimental consequences for the sustained viability of the Cambodian social support system. For many Cambodian refugees who survived the Khmer Rouge experience and for whom flight often resulted in further loss of family members through separation and death, the years of languishing in refugee camps were marked by uncertainty, artificiality, and concomitant social psychosis that further aggravated the unraveling of the social fabric of family and community. In this regard, it is significant to note that Cambodians experienced a much longer period of encampment than other Southeast Asian refugee groups, averaging 3 to 5 years. The implications of the refugee camp experience are wide ranging and persist long after exiting from the camp. Educational disruption, dependency, and a sense of fatalistic helplessness ultimately resulted from camp policies that discouraged institutionalization of economic and educational pursuits as a deterrent against permanent border settlement. In less than a decade of turmoil, a culture once based upon agrarian tradition came to produce a new generation who knew only that rice came from the UN trucks.

IMPORTANCE OF HOST ENVIRONMENT

Adjustment is affected not only by the legacies of dislocation and trauma but also by postresettlement experiences and the political relationship of the refugee community with the receiving society. Even for refugees with the necessary adaptive resources, resettlement is not without considerable challenge. While studies of refugee adaptation consistently point to the self-sufficiency and preparedness of the 1975 cohort to gain access to employment, very few studies report the significant downward mobility, particularly of the educated elite. The

tendency to equate employment, even underemployment, with "successful" adaptation disregards the frustration that many high-achieving refugees feel about the un/under fulfillment of their life aspirations. Moreover, where educational and occupational achievements have been possible, social and cultural alienation continues to inculcate a sense of marginalization. Regardless of economic standing, given that the majority of Cambodian-Americans are of the majority -identified group in their home country, the effects of being reduced to minority status in the highly racialized American society are multiple and grave. Whereas differentiation and marginalization are the lived experiences that contradict the loftier rhetoric of pluralistic democracy, many continue to be preoccupied with the homeland, partly as a way of rationalizing and coping with their present condition. The dream of the return to the ancestral land is, therefore, "a pragmatic solution to the dilemma of being part of two contexts, two countries and two sets of norms and values, which may not only be different, but in most cases contradictory" (Al-Rasheed, 1994, p. 200). This preoccupation not only deters the prospect for planting permanent roots in the new place of resettlement but also deflects critical resources in terms of leadership, capital, and attention away from the refugee community in America, which is floundering in fundamental ways.

REINTERPRETATION, RENOVATION, RECONSTRUCTION: CULTURE AND COMMUNITY IN DIASPORA

The refugee experience involves not only aspects of disruption but also of recollection, selection, interpretation, modification, and reconstruction. In the process of moving from the destruction of all that is familiar towards integration into everything that is new, a refugee has to learn to make sense of his or her world that, in essence, has been turned upside down. Thus, analyses of refugee adaptation in the United States cannot be confined to examining the disconnection in their experience. They must also highlight the continuities that are present in the transition from one culture to another; that is, in addition to articulating the aspects of marginalization and helplessness refugees face, the Cambodian people's undeniable resiliency that is demonstrated at individual, family, and community levels must also be emphasized.

Refugees are in many ways a selective population, not only in terms of their decision to flee but in their ability to survive. This, in itself, is a critical adaptive resource that they have brought with them. Despite the United States government policy of dispersal, an ethnic community has been re-established through secondary and tertiary migration. Ethnic based mutual assistance agencies, cultural and professional associations, Buddhist temples and Cambodian Christian churches have all emerged as key institutions for the gathering and dissemination of critical information, for the pooling and sharing of scarce resources. Since its inception in 1989, the Cambodian Network Council, based in Washington D.C., has served as the umbrella organization for the Cambodian mutual assistance agencies, providing the community with a political presence in the national policy and advocacy arenas, while institutions such as the United Cambodian Community and the Cambodian Association of

America, both of Long Beach, California continue to provide leadership at the local and regional levels. These institutions, among others, provide support and structure for those who have been stripped of even the most basic sense of family and community. Refugees turn to these community institutions for information about jobs, housing, parenting advice, peer support and culturally appropriate interventions in times of life crises. For instance, because mental health clinics carry a certain social stigma associated with mental illness, Cambodian families often turn to Buddhist monks for solace through counseling, prayers, and holy ablution, essentially through venues that are comprehensible within the Khmer cultural universe.

More importantly, these institutions serve as important loci for the articulation and reaffirmation of ethnic identity and homeland culture, as it is remembered. In a world of whirlwind changes, they yield that security of sameness, a context, however fleeting, where traditional norms in regards to social status, leadership, authority, and relations of obligation, are still valid and legitimated. Participation in community functions becomes a way for the diasporic Cambodian community to "live out the tension embedded in the 'experiences of separation and entanglement,' of living here and remembering/desiring another place" (Clifford, 1994, p. 15). At various religious ceremonies and cultural events, Cambodian-Americans immerse themselves in momentary reprieve in the reconstituted world of familiar sights, sounds, and smell, in the adornment of traditional dress, in the partaking of traditional food, music, and religious chants. Inside the walls of Buddhist temples or ceremonial halls, the community is brought together in the affirmation of cultural and ethnic identity, of continuity in a world of disruption and rupture. Though weddings are now abridged and religious festivals charted not in accordance with cosmology but practicality (i.e., made to coincide with weekends, for instance, in order to facilitate community participation), they remain important cementing forces for a community that is often fractionalized along class, gender, generational, and political lines. In this context, the community, even in diaspora, can be imbued it with a reconstituted ethos.

In promoting new partnership, schools may look to these community based organizations (CBOs) as a resource and a conduit for accessing the refugee community. Access to bilingual and bicultural staff afforded to the schools through this relationship can facilitate outreach to families, such as through the provision of quality primary language translation and materials, and culturally and experientially appropriate technical assistance. In discussing the role of community-based organizations in promoting home-school partnership, the executive director of the Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia points out the critical link between these institutions and the community: "They (CBOs) can understand the problem because they live there, they've been there, they come from there, they're one of them" (National Coalition of Advocates of Students, 1997, p. 72).

RESETTLEMENT AND THE CHALLENGES OF ADAPTATIONS

Over the last two decades since the initial resettlement, the Cambodian-

American community has developed and evolved, both in terms of numerical growth and in terms of importance in the economic and sociocultural tableau of American society. Following the admission of the initial cohort of 4600 Cambodians in 1975 (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 1988), successive resettlement initiatives led to an exponential increase in numbers and complexity in the socioeconomic composition of the refugees admitted. Nevertheless, comprehensive and systematic studies of the Cambodian refugee population remain relatively scarce which impedes access to, and implementation of, effective and efficient service delivery. The community assessment that does exist (National Association For the Education and Advancement of Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese Americans, 1995; Ima and Rumbaut, 1983) points to inherent vulnerabilities among Cambodian-American refugees and immigrants. The legacies of war, revolution, and exile are registered in the adjustment challenges that the community encounters in resettlement. Because of the decimation of the educated class, the surviving, diasporic community reflects a high percentage of people with low level of formal education; 64.3% of Cambodian adults have less than a high school education, compared to 39.4% Vietnamese and 24.4% of the mainstream population (National Association For the Education and Advancement of Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese Americans, 1995). Analysis based on the 1990 census reveals that 24% of Cambodians in the 25-44 age group and 40.8% of those in the 45-65 cohort have no formal education at all. A study of the San Diego Cambodian community (Rumbaut and Ima, 1988) indicates an average of less than three years of formal education among the adults. The scarcity of the educated and entrepreneurial classes, along with the destruction of familial and communal support networks, constrain the ability of the Cambodian refugee community to mobilize internal social and economic resources. Of direct significance to education is the absence of support for students. Parents often feel ill-equipped to provide their children with academic assistance after a certain grade level. Advocacy for the students is also constrained by the scarcity of community leadership. Without institutional backing and mediation, refugee parents, particularly those without much familiarity with formal educational systems, feel tremendously disempowered in their dealings with schools and bureaucracies.

Economic Marginality

Lack of education and transferable skills among a high percentage of Cambodian refugees, furthermore, has resulted in employment concentration in highly vulnerable economic sectors; approximately 38% of Cambodian workers are employed in manufacturing sectors with machine operator/assembler and precision/craft accounting for 15.6% and 23.8% respectively (National Association for the Education and Advancement of Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese Americans, 1995). In Massachusetts, for instance, the downsizing of Wang Industries severely affected the Cambodian-American community, which had grown in response to the employment opportunities within that sector, and resulted in an increase in welfare dependency. Statistics on labor participation and income level obscure the fact that many refugees hold multiple, low-paying

jobs without employment security, health and retirement benefits. With over 40% continuing to live below poverty line, Cambodian refugees constitute not only a community in transition, but one clearly at risk.

Social Marginality and Mental Health

In addition to structural constraints, the adjustment process of Cambodians is complicated by subjective factors. Being a refugee "means being engaged in a kind of lifelong psychological balancing act" (Wicker and Schoch, 1987, p. 17). The experiences of dislocation caused by displacement and exile may foster a sense of marginality long after their arrival in the United States. Indeed, many refugees seems to continue to exist in a discontinuous state of being, caught between the inability to free oneself from the past and the uncertainty of the future: "Sometimes, I don't know what is real anymore... the past, the present.... I used to say to myself, 'This can't be real; it must be a nightmare, and I will wake up.' Except that nightmare never ends. I just got used to it" (A. Thong, personal interview, San Diego, March, 1989). As a result of the unanticipated, and often secretive nature of the escape, the perilous journey resulting in more deaths and disappearances of friends and relatives, compounded by the inability to communicate with the home country during the mid-1970s to late 1980s, many Cambodian refugees feel a sense of unresolved business. For Khmer Buddhists, the inability to perform appropriate funereal rites has contributed to the deterring of the healing process and further impeded the achievement of a sense of closure to these tragic life experiences. These various factors all contribute to keeping many Cambodian refugees in a state of limbo and perpetuate their continued preoccupation with the ancestral homeland, hence prolonging their sense of being uprooted.

For many refugees, particularly among the post-1979 cohort, adaptation to a new context thus entails greater challenges than those posed by the market place. Language and cultural bafflers not only impede access to the job market but keep segments of the refugee population in linguistic isolation. This is particularly true of the elderly. Speaking of his daily existence, an elderly Cambodian gentleman reflected that "I stare at the wall and blink until three o'clock, when the children come home from school. Then there is noise and activity; there is life" (A. Ung, Personal interview, San Diego, December, 1992). Cultural differences, in norms and expectations, are also the basis of many adjustment issues. For the majority of Cambodian refugees who come from a more agrarian background, negotiating the transition from a rural existence to life in a postindustrial society can be a highly daunting and disorienting process. The notions of mutual assistance, life-long obligations and patronage, are obfuscated by the deep sense of alienation prompted by the postmodern environment of the United States. Whereas the Khmer social system is based upon personal relationships and a sense of communalism, the impersonal nature of the welfare and social service bureaucracies of America can be tremendously alienating for the new arrivals and exacerbate the high degree of insecurity and uncertainty many refugees feel. Adaptation-related stress may compound the traumas incurred during the migration process and

induce high levels of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms among Cambodian refugees. As a result of the compounding effects of their politico-historical experiences and persistent sociocultural and economic marginalization, Cambodian refugees manifest a degree of fatalism that is significantly higher than that of other refugee communities.

In a different sense, the circumstances for the younger generation may be even worse. Those who were too young to remember the Khmer Rouge years can neither relate to their parents' traumatic experiences nor empathize with their adjustment difficulties. Nevertheless, they live under the constant shadow of the trauma with which their parents struggle. In addition, many are culturally disconnected from the home culture and traditionalism of their parents and older siblings, and are understandably resistant to the demands for conformity they encounter at home.

Changing Dynamics of Cambodian Refugee Families

In addition to the need to adapt to external changes with regard to jobs and social institutions, Cambodian refugee families must struggle to adjust to changes within the family which the immigration experience has prompted. As assets and resources are redefined by the new social and economic contexts, many aspects of tradition lose their relevance. Power relations within the family and within the community are consequently altered. The Khmer Rouge years witnessed forced separation of family members and an astonishing death rate among the male population who were either systematically killed or had died of harsh labor and starvation. Nearly two decades after the end of the Khmer Rouge regime, the demography of Cambodia continues to reflect an imbalance in gender ratio. Thus, the high percentage of fragmented families and widowhood within the Cambodian refugee community (in some locales, the percentage of widows may be as high as 25% [Rumbaut and Ima, 1983]), has led to the displacement of the male figure as the head of household and to the alteration in gender roles and relations within the family. In many instances, women are now compelled by economic necessity to seek employment outside of the home. While Cambodian women have always played critical economic roles, their economic contributions are now the primary, and not simply supplementary, source of family income. In the refugee camps, international relief agencies avoided being criticized for feeding warring soldiers by issuing food assistance only to women and girls (Ledgerwood, 1990). This situation continues in the United States where many Cambodian families are dependent upon the government program of Assistance to Families with Dependent Children in which the check is often made in the mother's name.

For Cambodian women, greater access to economic resources, whether through public assistance or low-skill employment, means increased independence; even housewives now find that they can generate supplemental income through engagement in home industry such as piecework sewing. Enhanced economic mobility and independence of Cambodian women, however, contrast with the real or perceived economic demotion of the Cambodian males; as one Cambodian-American man pointed out, "We now

have to live under the wings of our wives" (S. Ol, personal interview, Long Beach, July, 1990). These changes fundamentally affect relational dynamics within the family, upsetting traditional gender hierarchy, and calling into question basic assumptions about gender roles and relations. Shifts in traditional power relations contribute to the increase in domestic violence and divorce rates within the Cambodian-American community (Ledgerwood, 1990) and hence to the continued erosion of the Cambodian social fabric.

Parent-Child Relations

Role reversal and altered power relations are also manifested in parent-child relations. From a cultural context which places youth at the bottom of the social hierarchy where they are to be seen but not heard, Cambodian refugee youths are often moved into an unprecedented position of power by their ability to adapt better and more rapidly than the adults. Given the adults' limited education and English language skills, children in many refugee families have assumed the role of linguistic and cultural brokers, with powers to mediate, filter, and manipulate information. One parent who was informed by school personnel that her child was failing academically was shocked to discover that, contrary to what her son had been telling her, F does not mean "fine." Another parent explained the nature of his total reliance upon his children in this way: "We are blind and mute; the children are our bridge to the outside world" (T. Lim, personal interview, Sonoma, January, 1990). In view of this role reversal, it has been argued that filiality, a system whereby children assume power positions, has emerged in the Cambodian-American social context. The power of children to access confidential correspondence can interfere with effective home-school relations, especially if such relations are reliant exclusively upon written and telephone communication.

Alterations to the parent-child relationship have led to Cambodian youth being forced to assume responsibilities inappropriate for their age. This, coupled with the mounting disempowerment that Cambodian parents feel, has a definite effect on family dynamics. Some Cambodian youths have used their newfound leverage to disregard parental authority, sometimes threatening to report their parents for purported child abuse when subjected to strict discipline, or when their freedom is being curtailed in other ways. Feeling the loss of control over their children and being unfamiliar with American laws, Cambodian parents may opt for extremist recourse of either resorting to traditionally sanctioned corporal punishment or abdicating completely their parental roles as disciplinarians. Their predicament is evident: "When we discipline our children, the police comes to take us to jail. When we don't do anything and our children err, we, as parents, are blamed. We no longer know what to do" (S. Tith, personal interview, San Francisco, March, 1991).

Another area of contention in parent-child relationship is communication. Differential rate of acculturation is often the basis of intergenerational conflicts, exacerbated in many cases by the children's loss of the primary language in the process of acquiring English. Communication is often reduced to a unidirectional flow of parental commands and imperatives. Even families who

understand the need to be more expressive and interactive may find their intention constrained by demanding work schedules and the burden of their own adjustment difficulties. Nonetheless, whereas parents tend to attribute this lack of communication and expressiveness to culture or survival demands in a new environment, Cambodian youths often interpret it as family dysfunctionism and lack of parental care and concern. In many instances, this reinforces their sense of alienation from their own family and ethnic community, and further justifies the dismissing attitudes they exhibit toward their own parents and other Cambodian adults.

Marginality and Identity

The effects of all these changes are felt equally by the youth and by the adults. Like their parents, children of refugee families often find themselves having to navigate the multiple demands and conflicting pressures to conform. They are subjected to the competing influence of the home culture, the school culture, the street culture and societal culture at large: "The immigrant child is exposed to the conflicting values of home, peer group, school, to clashing definitions of the good life, and to the tug-and-pull of competing loyalties" (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1997, p. 4). Some can effectively negotiate the necessary delicate balance and can function in multiple worlds, but many falter. Traditionally, the socialization of youth occurs and is reinforced at home, at school, and in society. Cambodian youths in the United States receive messages from each of these arenas that are often conflicting and polarizing. At school and through the media, they are socialized to believe in individualism, assertiveness, and independence. At home, they are confronted with the pressure to adhere to the traditional Cambodian values of collectivism, self-effacing modesty, gender and age hierarchy. From mainstream society, they learn that English is the language of power. At home, they see in their parents' and their own limited English proficiency, the epitome of social and economic marginality. From mainstream society and the media, they acquire consumerist and materialist values.

At home, they live in poverty, in neighborhoods replete with forces proffering alternative venues to economic "success," that is crime and delinquency. In a racialized society which lumps all Asian-Americans into a homogenous grouping, youth from refugee families are sometimes entrapped by the image of the model minority, with its generalized ascription of success and wealth. Meanwhile, at school and in the work place they are confronted with the disempowerment that comes with their linguistic and educational disadvantages. Many are overwhelmed by the inherent tension between their desire to live up to expectations, whether societal, communal, or familial, and the educational obstacles that they encounter. The sense of failure that they have internalized is further aggravated by the survivor's guilt many refugees feel.

In a society that identifies Cambodia and everything Cambodian with nothing more than the killing fields and with politically and socioeconomically disenfranchised refugees, many Cambodian youths have come to internalize these messages. They have come to associate their parents—their Cambodian-

ness, and their refugee-ness—with social stigmas and regard them as possessing no inherent usefulness for success in America. This contributes to intergenerational conflict and the progressive disempowerment not only of parents and guardians but of the youth themselves. Often shame translates into loss of self-esteem as they struggle with their own identity, that is, their Cambodian-ness and refugee-ness. Within the school's social hierarchy in which immigrant students are ranked at the bottom, this Filipino student's remark captures the disparaging treatment of Cambodian students in the public schools: "A white guy was calling us names, like 'Cambodian'—very derogatory names. We beat him up" (National Coalition of Advocates of Students, 1988, p. 60). It is thus not surprising that many reject their ethnic and cultural identity and, being unable to overcome social and cultural marginality, find themselves in perpetual limbo.

In an environment in which they are made to feel psychologically, intellectually or physically unsafe, students cannot be expected to focus on academic pursuits. As one student put it, "Sometimes you can't concentrate in class because there is trouble, like when somebody calls you a name or gives you a bad look or pushes you. You can't talk back, and then you are so mad and all you can think about is revenge, so you can't concentrate" (Koschmann, 1987, p. 185). For many non-English speaking students, linguistic constraint reinforces the sense of helplessness and vulnerability: "What can you do? They say bad things to you, but you can't talk to them because you can't talk English. So they just keep on doing it, and you keep on doing nothing. Then one day you get in a fight" (Koschmann, 1987, p. 185). Because of their political experiences and cultural predisposition, some students communicate their frustration in other inarticulated ways. In their comparative study of refugee youths, Rumbaut and Ima (1988) referred to the expressive withdrawal of Cambodian students whereby students choose not to confront problematic situations at school, but simply to drop-out.

The relationship between school climate and school retention is well-documented in the existing body of scholarship. Adding to the urgency of the issue are the recent findings of the Asian Law Caucus (1997), which documented a disconcerting increase of hate crimes in schools and college campuses. In working towards reform, schools need to place policy priority on the creation of an environment that is conducive to personal and intellectual growth. Such an environment must reflect not just tolerance of diversity but its celebration through curriculum, program, and the overall school climate as it is shaped by the attitude of faculty and staff. Given the perilous absence of positive reinforcement, for refugee youths, it is imperative that the core curriculum integrate fundamental components of Southeast Asian histories, cultures and the contributions that these communities have made to the overall enrichment of American culture and society. A well designed and effectively implemented multicultural curriculum would provide not only intellectual enrichment but also help diffuse racial and ethnic tensions, which are usually rooted in fear and spawned by ignorance.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SCHOOLING AND EDUCATION OF CAMBODIAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

While all population movements necessarily entail some degree of uprootedness, forced migration imposes a compounding multi-dimensional character onto the dislocation that is unparalleled in its scope and intensity in other experiences. As such, refugee students and their families have particular needs and concerns that are not shared by other immigrant communities. Given the diversity of the Cambodian refugee community at large, both among and within groups, the issues and concerns vary in nature, scope, and intensity. In order to effectively address those needs, school staff must be cognizant of the diversity of the Cambodian-American student population that is reflected along generational, class, and gender lines. Existing literature and studies of Southeast Asian refugees 'have addressed the issues of the "1.5 generation," those youths who immigrated in their adolescence, having been imbued with aspects of the traditional culture in the formative years but have also been acculturated by their immersion in the American educational system. What is glaringly absent, however, are the voices and concerns of the group which I term the "1.8 generation," and those of the second generation. The "1.8 generation" refers to the cohort of refugee youths who arrived in their pre-adolescent years, often too young at the time of migration to have had anything 'more than an intuitive affinity with the traditional culture. Most have little difficulty with the English language but have virtually no command of their primary language; a few may have some comprehension of the primary language but are not necessarily conversant in it. Their issues and those of the second generation differ from the older cohort, the "1.5 generation," to the extent that they do not revolve as much around problems of English language acquisition, except perhaps in mastering academic English. These cohorts are concerned more with intergenerational and identity issues, in addition to their adolescent anxieties. While generational factor is one dimension of difference within the refugee student population, it is also important to note that class, gender, and personal experiences are important mediating variables in educational achievement. Educational pursuit has frequently been prematurely interrupted by the need to secure early employment to help support the family, particularly for young Cambodian males, or by pressure to marry early in the case of young Cambodian women.

Overall, many of the challenges facing youths of refugee families are not academic. For instance, problems that appear to be learning disorders may, in fact, be rooted in nonacademic factors. Addressing the needs of refugees, therefore, must begin with an understanding of the historical and personal experiences that critically impact the educational experience. Further, the tremendous diversity of refugee experiences must be recognized. Educators and people working with refugee families need to be aware of the conscious and unconscious assumptions that they may have about individuals and ethnic groups—assumptions about students' value systems, aptitudes, predisposition, learning styles, and capabilities.

It must be recognized that the refugee experience may not have allowed for the development of academic preparedness and school readiness. Given

disruptions in their educational experience, refugee youths may enter American schools with social and intellectual development which do not match their age. A sixteen-year-old in high school may in fact have had only a few years of formal education but have lived through experiences that would defy the imagination of the average adult in America. Assumptions about social and intellectual development are further challenged by the attempt of some refugee parents to minimize the effects of educational disruption by reporting an age lower than the actual age of their children. This issue has been brought to the fore in instances when seemingly underaged girls are married off or in cases of socially overdeveloped youth manifesting behavioral problems in school. Sensitive and responsive education of refugee students, therefore, begins with the knowledge of the student population. Further, the willingness and ability to be flexible in pedagogical methods, policies, and efforts to accommodate variations in learning styles, educational experiences, psychosocial development, and situational particularities are also critical.

Being cognizant of the historical experiences of refugees, however, should not lead to the presumption that all refugee students are traumatized beyond reprieve and, as a result, are academically dysfunctional. All too often, students' capabilities and aspirations are stunted, not by inherent deterrents but by low expectations. In many instances, English learners are informally tracked by the classes they are advised to take and by the information that they are given or not given. A common complaint among limited English proficient (LEP) refugee students is that they are not being given the same information as other high-achieving students, particularly in regard to postsecondary educational options. A survey of Southeast Asian refugee students at Berkeley revealed that 98% received college information from older siblings and friends rather than from teachers and counselors; while in high school, most were given information about vocational programs or junior colleges but rarely about four-year institutions (Urn, 1997).

Similarly, the tendency to adhere to the generalized image of the cohesive and supportive Asian family disregards the reality of fragmentation, informal adoptions, and reconstituted households that are common features of the refugee community. A study of the Cambodian refugee community in San Diego revealed that over 50% of the households were headed by single parents (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988). Koschmann (1987), in her study of Cambodian youth in an eastern city, also documented the complexity of the Cambodian families, including informal adoptions and kinship relations that differ from what may be on record in official immigration documents. In some instances, families may have informally adopted orphans or unaccompanied minors out of a sense of altruism or obligation to friends and relatives. Moreover, it is not uncommon to find households reconstituted of unrelated individuals who came together for practical reasons, such as shared housing costs or companionship. Given the changing dynamics and composition of the Cambodian family, it is quite possible that the adults responsible for the youth may not be the natural parents but older siblings or extended family members. It is critical that, in their ongoing efforts to promote home-school relations, schools recognize this complexity

within the refugee community which extends far beyond the conventional definition of family.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONS

Different understandings of roles and responsibilities of family members have also complicated home-school relations. Within the traditional Khmer social hierarchy, educators command a highly respected position because of the responsibilities entrusted to them. Traditionally, education is regarded as a lifelong process, aimed at the total development of the individual, thus extending beyond the academic realm into the civic and the moral. The role of a teacher is therefore that of instructor, mentor, counselor, a lifelong guide. One Cambodian parent commented, "We respect and regard the teachers like the second parents. Therefore, we have no need to teach the kids because the teachers already teach them" (National Coalition of Advocates of Students, 1997, p. 4). There is a Khmer saying that reflects the level of trust that Khmer parents place in educators: "Do as you wish, just keep his/her skin and bone." This statement expresses the underlying values that Cambodian parents hold, that a teacher's use of corporal punishment is acceptable as long as he or she exercises it for the betterment of the child and does not cause permanent injury. As a result of the differences in expectations, issues about rights and responsibilities are, by extension, unclear. A Cambodian father reflected, "In Cambodia, once children were registered in schools, everything was taken care of by the teachers. As parents, brothers, and sisters, we had no right to interfere in the system regarding our children's education" (National Coalition of Advocates of Students, 1997, p. 4). Once in the United States, Cambodian parents are understandably confused by the seeming inability of the school system to provide strict accountability for the students. One parent commented, "After they (students) are dropped off at school, parents have no way of knowing what they do or where they go. It is the responsibility of the school to monitor them. My daughter missed school for nearly a month but the school never informed me until it was too late. She was already in trouble" (S. Chhum, personal interview, San Francisco, March, 1992). Given their histories and cultural predispositions, Cambodian parents are often reluctant to question school policies and decisions or to actively advocate for their children. This, however, should not be interpreted as lack of concern for their children's education and welfare but understood as stemming from fear of authority figures and the absolute faith refugee families have in the educational system.

Home-school relations and parent-child communications are also undermined by the different understandings of the goal and objectives of education. The American educational system values subject areas beyond the core academic content areas, such as art and music, as well as extracurricular activities such as sports, photography, and participation in student organizations. Cambodian parents tend to view these interests and activities as unimportant and distracting from the educational focus on the core content areas. For them, education is much more narrowly defined. As such, they are less supportive of their children's interests and desire for participation in what they deem to be

superfluous activities. This discrepancy between the notion of Cambodian parents as to what constitutes core education and that instilled by the American educational system poses problems particularly for female Cambodian youths, who are subject to stricter control than their male peers. Culturally, Cambodian girls have strictly prescribed roles of social conduct and are generally not allowed to participate in unchaperoned social activities. Furthermore, they are expected to assume their full share in household responsibilities starting from early adolescence. Rigid rules govern gender interactions; dating is a virtually non-existent concept, and disagreement over the permissibility of dating is a common source of family conflict where the exercise of corporeal punishment could lead to real or alleged cases of child abuse. In view of these cultural constraints, there are high expectations in regard to sexual virtues. Parents sanctify marital relations, with arranged marriages still being quite commonplace, although the number has decreased in recent years. Many Cambodian parents, therefore, fear that their daughters' virtue will be compromised by the level of freedom and peer pressure in America. That is an impetus towards pressuring for early marriages. Rather than dismissing such decisions as being backward or irrational, or advocating outcomes that may further erode the cohesion of the Cambodian family, educators need to view these issues from the families' cultural and situational perspectives and assist them in exploring options and alternatives.

Schools and the average Cambodian family also differ in their understanding of support. Schools may base their notion of parent involvement on assumptions of middle-class American family dynamics, such as parents assisting their children with school work, attending parent-teacher conferences, and participating in school activities. Cambodian refugee families' involvement in their children's educational life, however, is shaped by their cultural understanding of their roles and obligations and by the pragmatics of their daily lives. In view of their low educational background and limited English, many Cambodian refugee parents feel incapable of providing academic support to their children. Efforts to involve the home and family in the education of Cambodian students, therefore, must seek to introduce limited English speaking parents to new ways of sharing in their children's educational life, such as promoting primary language-based activities or having children read to parents who may be illiterate. Because Cambodian parents feel very limited in their role in the education of their children, they tend to confine their notion of support to the provision of the fundamental necessities so that the children have only to concentrate on educational pursuits. Coming from a socioeconomic context where the pursuit of learning is a luxury not readily afforded to everyone, Cambodian parents may view their willingness and ability to free their offspring from economic obligations as the ultimate expression of support.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOLING

Presently, many schools find themselves severely overextended. When escalating demands are continually met with diminishing resources, however, schools are necessarily compelled to reassess their situations and, in many

instances, to recognize the need for new approaches. Resources need to be redefined, old partnerships strengthened, and new ones created. Both educators and the constituent community must recognize that effective education involves responsibilities and challenges that cannot be undertaken by any one party alone. Recognition of mutual dependence is the basis for collaborative relationships that are built upon trust and equity. All too often, discussions of school reform stops short of any proposal for the restructuring of power relations. Family and community involvement, however, is not reducible to parent education and "training," a term that is problematic in and of itself because of the deficit view of language minority parents that it implies. True involvement means the elevation of parents and guardians to positions of power within the school structure. It means giving them access to and a voice in the decision- and policy-making arenas. It requires close collaboration and shared accountability.

To achieve these goals, schools need to become a safe place for all students and their families, especially for those who have been historically marginalized. As a member of the San Francisco Board of Education pointed out, "Immigrant children in our schools enter an educational system that's foreign, where the language is incomprehensible, where the faces of classmates are of many colors, and where parents feel unconnected and frustrated. It is alarming, but not surprising, that so many of our students fail and drop out of school" (National Coalition of Advocates of Students, 1988, p. 66). In promoting greater family and community involvement in the educational process, schools must (1) honestly assess the situation and identify the root problems that impede diversification and inclusion; (2) adopt a new paradigm, if necessary, for promoting collaborative efforts among diverse constituents; (3) establish a shared definition and vision of partnership; and (4) provide personnel with the tools to work effectively with language minority students and their families. In efforts to increase community inputs, some schools have taken the initiative to formulate a linguistically and culturally accessible instrument to assess the needs of the community. In other instances, schools, community-based organizations, and the families collaborate in formulating meeting agendas rather than operating on the basis of one party imposing its agenda onto others. This process allows parents to establish their own priorities of needs and concerns and thus fosters community involvement and helps schools to recognize and include the diverse immigrant and refugee communities. All too often, family involvement programs have approached the English-learning communities as if they are a homogenous entity, lumping together preliterate refugees and those from the rural areas with well-to-do, cosmopolitan, and multilingual immigrant parents simply because their children are designated as being limited English proficient.

Only with the appropriate information and accurate profiles of the communities and student populations that they are to serve can schools develop programs that effectively address issues and concerns of their community. This endeavor, however, necessarily begins with a paradigm shift away from the conventional deficit view of immigrant parents to one that values their input and attributes critical importance to their role in the educational process. If the spirit of equity and genuine partnership that schools espouse to believe in is to become

a reality, schools must not only heed the needs of family and community concerns, but do so on the stakeholders' terms. This may entail school staff participating in community forum conducted in primary languages (with English translation) rather than the other way around, held in the community rather than at the school site, and at a time that accommodates the families' schedules rather than that of the school staff. For one educator, the rich learning experience that came from participating in such a community forum, has been invaluable: "I certainly understand parents better. It's really good to sit in a group and be the language minority, to get the perspective of how it feels from the other side, and it helps me to understand the hesitation to speak on the part of parents" (National Coalition of Advocates of Students, 1988, p. 95). It is through the process of involvement and collaboration that parents experience empowerment, and new leadership can develop within the community. Empowered parents can then recruit and mentor other parents and family members.

Home-school-community collaborations not only promote academic performance and retention but can also yield critical resources for the schools, allowing schools to do more with less. In working to enhance existing curriculum to more meaningfully reflect the cultural and historical experiences of the student population, institutions can tap into community resources. The funds of knowledge, mined from the cultural and experiential reservoirs of families, can form the bases of many culturally authentic, family-centered curriculum. In the San Joaquin Valley, a school's community garden brought parents and grandparents into the schools. It provided a rare opportunity for members of multiple generations to work alongside one another and for previously unrecognized talents and skills of refugee elders to be publicly revalidated. Similarly, a Seattle high school successfully implemented an integrated, hands-on curriculum in science, language arts, math, and social studies by utilizing parents' expertise in fishery and gardening. Using this concept, schools can tap into the vast body of knowledge of traditional medicine that abounds among the older generation of Southeast Asians to introduce, for instance, herbology as an integrated component of the science curriculum.

In addition to enriching the schools' academic programs, strengthening links between the home, school, and community can also reduce further fragmentation of refugee students' lives and psyche. If education is to be meaningful, it must bear relevance to the students' lives and experiences. The frustration of this refugee youth speaks loudly to the need for curricular reform: "I sit in this classroom and listen to the noise about the American Civil War and about civics. Who cares? For me, the reality is the streets and money and getting a good paying job. What do these people know about war and history, about life? I lived through the war" (Tenhula, 1991, p. 119). For the United States, the Vietnam War was one of the most scarring chapters of its history, and a community of over one million Southeast Asian refugees stand as the living legacy of that experience. It is inexcusable that a whole new generation of Americans can move through the nation's high schools and colleges without knowing anything about the role of Southeast Asians in our collective history. Including the mosaic of voices, cultures and experiences that define true American history and

civilization is not simply an enrichment of our educational curriculum; it is the core curriculum that reflects the realities of America's pluralist democracy.

CONCLUSION

All migration entails dislocation. For Cambodian refugees, however, the diaspora was forced, unanticipated, and abrupt, resulting in a deep and lasting sense of trauma, dislocation, and loss that has persisted through multiple stages before, during, and after migration. It is the nature and degree of the dislocation that distinguishes the refugee condition from that of other immigrant experiences and that creates the tremendous challenges in the adjustment process of Cambodian refugees. With the fracturing of their familiar, orderly social world, refugees experience the loss of coherent structure in which one's roles and relations are clearly defined, where norms and expectations are readily understood, and behavior strictly prescribed. For the Cambodian people, war, revolution, genocide, and diaspora have destabilized their fundamental social and cultural institutions. Forced into a new social, economic, and cultural context, they must reconcile and adjust not only to changes in the external world but, even more disconcerting, to changes within the family. In other migration contexts, the institution of the family can serve as the last remaining stabilizing force in the face of upheaval; for most Cambodian refugees, however, this support structure has been weakened by the progressive fracturing of the family institution. Simply making the adjustment—whether educational, economic, or social—not to say anything about achieving excellence, is in itself a daunting challenge.

Despite certain commonalities shaped by their refugee condition, the Cambodian student population, like that in any other immigrant and refugee community, is quite diverse. The timing and process of migration as important determinants of the sociology and demography of refugees converge with factors of class, age, and gender to account for variations in the issues and needs that impact upon adaptation, including educational adjustment. Depending upon their background and experiences, Cambodian students and their families are differentially equipped to deal with the challenges that confront them; hence, their needs and concerns vary.

Because the refugee condition is marked by such a pervasive sense of dislocation, the schooling process must not contribute to further disorientation and fragmentation. Education must be aimed not simply at the inculcation of knowledge but at the total development of the individual—the intellectual, the spiritual, the moral, the civic. Schooling is, therefore, as much about imparting information as it is about fostering critical thinking, as much about building the foundation of knowledge as it is about inculcating self-esteem and a sense of personal and social responsibility. In this totalistic approach to education, there is an inherent recognition of the need for collaboration and of the undeniable interdependence of the various forces and institutions that impact the overall development of the individual student. The family, the school, and the community are critical stakeholders and agents in this process, and collaboration among them must be effected if we are to ensure a positive outcome. This

supracommunity, however, is only as enduring and viable as the force that cements the relationships within it. That glue is trust, which can be extremely difficult to establish among peoples and communities so long imbued in the culture of fear. Trust stems from mutual respect and acknowledgment of a common goal; at the basis of any effective working relationship is the conviction that all stakeholders are working towards the same end, one that supersedes their individual or institutional interests. It begins with the recognition of the "we" in this process, of our own roles, responsibilities, and of our interdependence. A Cambodian poem speaks eloquently to the essence of this interconnectedness: "If I fail as a parent, as a son he fails." To this I add, that if we fail as educators, they will fail as students, and if we, collectively, fail as a community, they will fail as citizens.

REFERENCES

- Al-Rasheed, M. (1994). The myth of return: Iraqi Arab and Assyrian refugees in London. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 7, (2/3).
- Asian Law Caucus (1997). *Anti Asian crimes audit 1996*. San Francisco, CA: Asian Law Caucus.
- Barudy, J. (1987). Therapeutic value of solidarity and hope. In D. Miserez (Ed.), *Refugees: The Trauma of exile*. Norwell, MA: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Clifford, J. (1994). Diasporas. *Cultural Anthropology* (summer): 1-48.
- Koschmann, N. (1987). *The resettlement process of Southeast Asian refugee adolescents: Making it in America*. Doctoral dissertation, Cornell University, New York.
- Ledgerwood, J. (1990). *Changing Khmer conceptions of gender*. Doctoral dissertation, Cornell University, New York.
- National Association for the Education and Advancement of Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese Americans (1995). *A Profile of the Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian and Vietnamese people in the United States*. Fort Lauderdale, FL: National Association for the Education and Advancement of Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese Americans.
- National Coalition of Advocates for Students. (1988). *New voices: Immigrant students in US public schools*. Boston, MA: National Coalition of Advocates for Students.
- National Coalition of Advocates for Students. (1997). *Unfamiliar partners: Asian parents and US public schools*. Boston, MA: National Coalition of Advocates for Students.
- Office of Refugee Resettlement. (1988). *Annual report to Congress*. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Office of Refugee Resettlement. (1994). *Annual report to Congress*. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Rumbaut, R., & Ima, K. (1988). *The adaptation of Southeast Asian refugee youth: A comparative study*. Final report by the Office of Refugee Resettlement. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Sham, Y. (1989). *The frontier of loyalty*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Tenhula, J. (1991). *Voices from Southeast Asia: The refugee experience in the United States*. New York, NY: Holmes and Meier.
- Um, K. (1990). *Brotherhood of the pure: Communism and nationalism in democratic Kampuchea*. Doctoral dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, California.
- Um, K. (1996). Issues facing Southeast Asian students in education. Paper presented at the National Asian Family-School Partnership Conference, Boston, Massachusetts, October 30, 1996.

- Um, K. (1997). Resettlement into Limbo. In *Unfamiliar partners: Asian parents and US public schools*. Boston, MA: National Coalition of Advocates for Students.
- Wicker, H. R., & Schoch, H. K. (1987). Refugees and mental health: Southeast Asian refugees in Switzerland. In D. Miserez (Ed.), *Refugees: The trauma of exile*, Norwell, MA: Martinus Nijhoff.

CHAPTER 14

Linguistic Perspective on the Education of Cambodian-American Students

Wayne E. Wright

On April 17, 1975, Pol Pot and his murderous Khmer Rouge regime captured the Cambodian capital and took over the country. They emptied the cities, drove the entire population into the countryside, and forced the people to perform hard agricultural labor under slave-like conditions. All institutions, including the schools, were abolished. For nearly four years, Cambodians were subjected to starvation, disease, and execution. Former government workers, teachers, professors, and other members of the educated elite were systematically executed, with between one and three million people put to death during the course of the Cambodian genocide. At the end of 1978, the Vietnamese invasion brought an end to the Killing Fields of Cambodia, and hundreds of thousands of Cambodians fled to the Thailand border. From the United Nations-supported border camps, Cambodian refugees had the opportunity to relocate and settle in other countries, such as the United States (Chandler, 1993).

Between 1975 and 1977, approximately 6,000 Cambodian refugees resettled in the United States (Table 14.1). This first wave of refugees consisted mostly of former government leaders and other members of the urban elite who were able to escape just before the Khmer Rouge take over.

Between 1978 and 1987, over 134,000 Cambodians were allowed to resettle in the United States (see Table 14.1). This second wave of refugees makes up the majority of the Cambodians in the United States. In general, these refugees had rural backgrounds and were less educated than those of the first wave (Smith-Hefner, 1990). Most refugees from this group have had a difficult time adjusting to life in the United States. Their rural backgrounds and lack of education, combined with trauma from the Khmer Rouge years, have made it difficult for the adult family members to learn English and find employment.