

Article

# Traditional Dance as a Vehicle for Identity Construction and Social Engagement after Forced Migration

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**Abstract:** The Karen are the largest non-Burman ethnic group in Burma. After decades of violence in their homeland, hundreds of thousands have fled into refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border. Over 73,000 Karen have been resettled in the United States. Karen youth in urban areas of the United States have been participating in traditional Karen dance, practicing and performing regularly. This study explored the reasons Karen youth choose to engage in this activity. Interviews were conducted and were analyzed using grounded theory qualitative research methods that were constructivist in nature. One over-arching theme, “If You Don’t Know Your Culture, You Don’t Know Who You Are”, and four sub-themes emerged from the data. Results demonstrate that group members are highly invested in maintaining their social engagement with their Karen community and find strength in Karen identity maintenance. This study demonstrates that those forced to migrate to a foreign country may face challenges to their sense of identity and belonging when immersed in a society that is unfamiliar to them. Local agencies can play an important role in the adaptation process by facilitating participation in meaningful activities that provide in-group social connections and opportunities to participate in familiar culturally relevant activities.

**Keywords:** refugee; immigration; cultural identity; belonging; cultural traditions; traditional dance

## 1. Introduction

In Myanmar, also known as Burma by many who are native to the country, the Karen are the largest non-Burman ethnic group with several subgroups that differ culturally and linguistically. The majority live in small mountain villages and are subsistence farmers. They practice Buddhism, Animism, or are Christian and have maintained many long-standing traditions including back strap weaving, Karen dance, and their own cultural celebrations [1]. They gather annually to celebrate the Karen New Year and every August celebrate their history and culture with the Wrist Tying Ceremony. In 1948, after Burma regained its independence from Great Britain, civil war broke out resulting in conflict between the Burmese government and non-Burmese ethnic groups [2] with an on-going attempt by the government to take over the land Karen consider to be their own. This conflict has continued until today. Since British rule came to an end, the Burmese government has been waging war against the Karen and other ethnic groups in an attempt to control the land for economic gain, to build roads, railways, and to build dams to generate electricity to sell to China. Over the decades there have been countless cease fires between the Burmese military and insurgent groups defending their land along the eastern border that have disintegrated into a return to devastating bloody warfare [3]. The government does not recognize the legitimacy of these ethnic groups, attempting to create one uniform people, all Burmese, denying groups such as the Karen any form of self-determination, eliminating the Karen culture. A Karen leader in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, quoted a saying he said is

commonly used to describe the attitude of the Burmese: “If you want to see the Karen in the future you will have to go to the museum” (Poe Wah, Personal Communication, 1 August 2018).

After decades of violence in their homeland, hundreds of thousands have fled to Thailand into one of the nine refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border or have become undocumented immigrants within Thailand. In 2005, with no hope in sight for repatriation or resettlement in a neighboring country, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees prioritized this group, and other smaller ethnic groups from Burma, for resettlement in a third country. Between 2006 and 2017, 109,402 refugees from the Thailand camps were resettled in other countries with the majority of them relocated between 2006 and 2008. Over 73,000 Karen have been resettled in the United States [4] with more than 1000 Karen living in the state of Utah, which is where this research took place. As of November 2017, 99,904 people from ethnic minority groups in Burma were still living in Thai refugee camps [5].

Refugees, who are forced to flee their native land and are relocated to a Western country encounter foreign cultural value systems that may differ greatly from the cultural values of their past. Researchers have documented the struggles that refugees may face when attempting to reconcile these differences [6–8]. In the field of occupational therapy, the term “occupation” refers to the activities people participate in throughout their day; the occupations that are meaningful and important to them are used as a therapeutic medium. Whiteford and Townsend [9] have discussed the powerful need people have to participate in occupations that support social and cultural structures. Participation in these occupations contributes to personal and collective identity construction. As Christiansen has said, occupations “are opportunities to express the self, to create an identity” [10] (p. 552).

The concept of identity has been examined and described as a perception of oneself that evolves over time, is context dependent, and is linked to a sense of belonging [11,12]. Identity has been identified as a “rooting point” [13] and is established and reinforced through engagement and participation in activities with one’s own community and social group with aspects of shared culture that include ancestry, language, customs, religion, diet, and leisure activities [12,14]. In the study of people with refugee experiences, it has become apparent that identity construction and maintenance, through the performance of music and dance, are an important part of coping with the challenges associated with forced migration.

For the Karen, having been relocated to the United States and several other Western countries, maintaining their cultural traditions is of key importance. Interviews with Karen weavers in the United States by Stephenson et al. [15] demonstrated how the occupation of traditional weaving had a positive impact on cultural identity construction and social support in their new environment and social context. A Karen leader residing in Utah listed their language, weaving practices, traditional dance, and cultural celebrations as necessary aspects of their lives in America. When asked about the reason for maintaining these cultural traditions his response was, “We have to. It is all we have left” (Personal Communication, 2015).

## 2. Purpose

In Salt Lake City, Karen teenagers and young men and women have been participating in the practice of traditional Karen dance, practicing regularly and performing at public venues and their own Karen cultural celebrations. With no experienced teacher of dance in the community, they initially turned to on-line videos to train themselves. Since then, they have been able to access lessons from experienced Karen dance instructors who moved into the area and visited from other states. Each year they raise money to acquire matching traditional clothing for their performances that they have shipped from a refugee camp in Thailand. In recent years, they have found the resources to travel to an annual Karen dance competition in another state in the United States. These competitions are a continuation of a tradition of competitions between village performing groups in Burma and performing groups in the Thai refugee camps. Having lived in Thailand only as young children, they were too young to participate in this traditional activity. Therefore, what is it about this occupation that is of such great interest to these youth? What drives them to commit so much time and energy when they have other

demands on their time such as doing homework, working part- or full-time, participating in family events, engaging in social media, and socializing with friends?

Folklorists, dance historians, and anthropologists have looked at motivation to participate and the perceived purpose of traditional dance with other migrant ethnic groups, such as the Acholi in Uganda, Estonians in Sweden and Germany, and the Lost Boys of Southern Sudan in the United States [16–18]. Similarities and differences exist in terms of what the participants say they gain from these performance acts, but identity construction is a common theme. In addition, dance scholar Scolieri has pointed out that, “Dance performs multiple and complex roles in refugee communities worldwide—as a form of cultural currency, survival strategy, movement therapy, political activism, and social service” [17] (p. XII).

The purpose of this study was to add to our understanding of forced migration experience by exploring the reasons Karen youth in an urban area of the United States, and the adults who provide transportation and other support to the group, choose to engage in the production of Karen traditional dance and public performances. The focus of the interviews was on personal perceptions of the meaning of this occupation and its relation to individual and collective identity construction and social engagement with their own and external communities, but interviews were structured in a way that provided participants with the opportunity to express ideas beyond these topics.

### 3. Methods

In 2008, I visited Mae La, the largest refugee camp in Thailand, home, at that time, to approximately 60,000 refugees from Burma, mostly members of the Karen ethnic group. This was the start of a long and enduring relationship with the Karen community in Utah. I have been heavily involved in facilitating a Karen women’s weaving group, helping them to gain access to needed materials, space, and opportunity for sales of the handmade items they produce. I have attended cultural celebrations, have traveled to Thai refugee camps several times with Karen who now live in Utah, have supervised occupational therapy fieldwork students doing work with local Karen people, and have developed friendships with members of the community. This relationship with local Karen resulted in easy access to a convenient and purposive sample of Karen dancers as I already knew several of them, as well as the adults who provide them with logistical support.

Although I am familiar with many of the Karen community members and their activities, an inductive, qualitative method was needed to structure the research to allow for information to emerge about values and feelings that are unfamiliar to the person conducting the research. The process was iterative, making adjustments to the interview questions based on the responses of the person being interviewed and the responses during prior interviews. The research approach was based on grounded theory and was constructivist in the sense that there was an awareness of the researcher’s subjectivity, position as an outsider, inhabiting the privileged role of university professor. There was a recognition that the interviews were co-constructed by the researcher and the person being interviewed [19].

After approval from the University of Utah Institutional Review Board, I attended a dance rehearsal where I explained the research project and what would be involved. I invited anyone interested in being interviewed to participate and assured them that they were under no pressure to do so. The number of Karen youth who participate in dance performances varies depending on the dance being performed. The Don Dance, performed at the Karen New Year celebration, requires the largest number of dancers with up to 30 local dancers and musicians participating. When this research was being conducted, seventeen dancers were present for a rehearsal of the Don Dance. Of the seventeen dancers, eight volunteered to be interviewed. Five were female and three were male with ages ranging from 16–24. All were born in refugee camps in Thailand. Additional interviews were conducted with two male adults who support the dance group by helping to organize activities and drive them to events. They were both born in Burma but arrived in Thai refugee camps as young children. These interviews were included due to an interest in why they were willing to spend a considerable

amount of personal time supporting the group and for their perspectives on Karen dance based on life in the camps as adults. All participants migrated to the U.S. with refugee status.

A community center where the Karen youth frequently rehearse was used to conduct interviews on two different days. Interviews were based on a list of primarily open-ended guiding questions and lasted anywhere from 15 to 30 min. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed by either a professional transcriber or graduate student trained in transcription best practice. Funding for transcription was provided by Utah Humanities. After the transcriptions were completed, I listened to all interviews, checked for any errors, and contacted some of the participants for clarification when their voices became inaudible or to check spelling on locations mentioned. The transcriptions were reviewed line by line to generate initial open codes which were then compared and organized for axial and selective coding. Member checking of thematic outcomes occurred through a presentation with most of the dancers present and with opportunities to discuss alternate perspectives which resulted in no changes to the results being suggested. All participants and those with personal communications identified by name in this article stated they preferred to have their own names used for quotes rather than a pseudonym.

#### 4. Results

These teenage and young adult dancers, who have spent over half their lives in the U.S., are highly invested in maintaining their social engagement with their Karen community, find strength in Karen identity maintenance, educating the public, and the concept of passing this sense of identity along with cultural traditions to the next generation. The adults who support them expressed the same investment in maintaining their traditions and sense of being Karen.

Analysis of interviews resulted in one over-arching theme and four sub-themes:

If You Don't Know Your Culture, You Don't Know Who You Are

Culture = History, History = Culture  
 "It's The Thing That Makes You Who You Are."  
 "So the Karen Won't be Perished"  
 Social Inclusion/Uniting as Karen

##### 4.1. *If You Don't Know Your Culture, You Don't Know Who You Are*

The concept of culture has been described by occupational therapy scholars Wells, Black, and Gupta as a, "complex system of multiple universal elements, such as language, values, traditions, and behaviors, that coalesce, in different combinations akin to a kaleidoscope, to create a whole" [19] (p. 4). There are both internal, invisible aspects to culture that are often difficult to describe, but there are also external aspects that are observable such as foods, arts, festival celebrations, and traditional clothing [20]. Culture is shared by a particular group of people and can distinguish insiders from outsiders of the group [21]. Through participation in Karen cultural celebrations and the performance of Karen dance, the Karen differentiate themselves from the Burmese and from all other ethnic groups. The unique style of their dance emphasizes the boundaries that separate the Karen from all others, reinforcing a sense of unity among those who are culturally and ethnically Karen [22]. MacLachlan, an ethnomusicologist who studies the music of Burmese populations, has described the Karen Don Dance as, "one way in which they are creating their community, a community that is no longer limited to a village or a region, but is now conceived of as a nation—a nation, however, without land, or more specifically, without land on which they can live together safely" [22] (p. 3).

Throughout the interviews, participants expressed a desire to make a direct connection to their Karen heritage, embodying this heritage and sense of being Karen through the performance of dance. Each of the subthemes connect back to their desire to understand who they are, as Karen people, within the context of a society where they are a distinct minority, where the vast majority of people

have no knowledge of who the Karen are or what has been happening to them in recent decades in Burma and the refugee camps in Thailand. The subthemes demonstrate a desire to learn about the history of their people and that historical context is a significant component of individual and community identity. They have the desire to experience and express a sense of what it is to be ethnically Karen, to pass on their traditions and ethnic identity to future generations, and to teach outsiders about their community. Through the performance of dance, they have the opportunity to share their pride and joy in being Karen, in being who they are.

#### 4.2. *Culture = History, History = Culture*

Several participants talked at length about their need to learn their cultural tradition of dance and how the dances teach them about the history of their people and the struggles they have been through over many decades. Their sense of culture was inseparably linked to history.

“They say it [dance] came from like the history, how like in the old day our ancestors don’t really write down things, because, like, even if they keep track, write out stuff, they can’t keep it because all the [indiscernible] or they would like fire, burn down their house, or wouldn’t keep track of it so they wrote it in songs and dance through like story. They tell story through sound and dance movement, so that, like, for our new generation we understand how our ancestors show our history, tell the story about Karen culture of history.” Moo Eh Htoo

“I learn a new dance move too and sometimes we learn the Karen history was told by the dance like the song that we dance so I feel like I learn more about my history too.” Paw Say Wah

“If we don’t know our culture, we don’t know where we are from and we don’t know what our parents been through [indiscernible] history . . . I feel like our culture is very . . . linked to our history. So, knowing the culture you know the history so you understand how hard the journey that our ancestors or our parents bring through and to help us be successful today.” Garroe Wah

Participants made it clear that the history of their people, their struggles to maintain their land and their culture in Burma, and their continued struggles to survive in refugee camps, are an integral part of what it is to be Karen, as no outsider can fully comprehend what these experiences have been like for them and how they contribute to their self-identity. One local Karen woman who was not a part of this study shared with me her knowledge of how the Burmese burned any books they found owned by the Karen. Therefore, the history of the Karen could not be taught to future generations through the use of literature. Instead, dance and song were used to maintain this knowledge and share it with younger generations (Personal Communication, 1 January 2018).

#### 4.3. *“It’s the Thing That Makes You Who You Are”*

It was difficult for most of the participants to answer questions about what it is to be Karen. It appeared that they are so immersed in their own culture, it is hard for them to define the invisible characteristics, but many identified external signifiers of their culture such as their clothing, the Karen language, Karen dance, and the Karen flag. These signifiers are important to them as they provide an anchor to their heritage and to identity. After living in the U.S. for many years, the youth frequently wear their traditional clothing to school and in other public settings. They often speak to each other in Karen. Four of the youth and one adult expressed their perception of the meaning of this activity and its relation to individual and collective identity construction. Examples include:

“ . . . the way we wear clothes, the way we act around elders and stuff. The way we speak is very different . . . me feeling like I’m Karen is just, like, oh I’m Karen.” Taw Nay Moo

“It’s very important because your culture, you know, you want to know who you are and, you know, where you came from.” Julie Paw

“I work with the Karen dance group because we’re in the United States and it’s important for us to have a sense of who we are and to know our identity and the traditional culture of the dances are part of our identity.” Hay Soe

Over the years I have attended numerous Karen cultural celebrations. Several hundred Karen attend these events which consistently include speeches in the Karen language; most who attend are wearing traditional clothing; the Karen flag is on display; Karen food is served; and the dance group performs to Karen songs. As active members of the dance group the dancers have the opportunity to be immersed in this performance act anchoring themselves within the community of the Karen and reinforcing their internal sense of “Karenness”. Traditional dance is used both as a means to reinforce group identity within the broader American culture and as a vehicle for individual internalization of that ethnic identity.

Karen migration to Western countries has been brought on by the experience of forced migration but their desire to maintain their cultural heritage is not entirely unlike that of many economic migrants. Dancer and choreographer Shay has studied the folkdance practices of a variety of ethnic groups who came to the United States as immigrants [23]. Unlike refugees who have been forced from their homelands violently and crossed international borders to find safety, the immigrants Shay studied emigrated primarily for economic reasons. Nevertheless, the motivations for maintenance of ethnic traditions and creation of ethnic dance representations in the United States that Shay describes are similar to that of the Karen.

#### 4.4. *“So the Karen Won’t Be Perished”*

The Karen have been fighting with the Burmese military for decades in an attempt to preserve their land and their culture. Preserving their land can seem like a losing battle with so many Karen now living outside of Burma. They do, however, have the power to preserve their culture no matter where they live and gain strength from knowing that Karen people around the world are also holding onto their cultural traditions.

“Now we are here. We don’t have to fight by gun or, you know, knife or something like that but we have to fight by our culture to show who we are.” Naye Soe

“Feels great to help the younger generation to pursue their family culture like participating in dance and—and in celebrations and so the younger generation maybe later in 100 years they will know, oh, that’s, you know, that’s Karen. Yeah.” Julie Paw

In the refugee camps in Thailand young people are taught Karen dance by their elders with the intent to have younger generations share the tradition with generations to come [22]. In February of 2017, I, along with Ellen Bromberg, a screendance artist, had the opportunity to watch and film 24 elderly women in Umpiem Camp in Thailand perform Karen dance. This dance group is one of three in the camp. The three groups were described as one for younger people, one for those who are middle aged, and one for the old people. Afterwards, they told us that the dances and songs do not remain exactly the same each year, but they provide a record of their history in Burma and of their struggles against the Burmese government. One woman told us that the reason they continue to dance is to teach the next generation and to continue their culture. They would like to maintain their culture because, “If there is peace will try to go back.” We asked them if they would like us to give any message to the dancers in Utah. One woman said, “Keep moving, keep dancing, don’t forget.”

As in the camps, teenagers and adults in Salt Lake City are highly invested in making sure the culture of being Karen is everlasting no matter where they are physically located.

#### 4.5. *Social Inclusion/Uniting as Karen*

Almost all of the participants talked about the enjoyment they experience being with each other and teaching people outside their community about their culture. Being a part of the dance group

has helped them to make new friends and feel socially connected to their own Karen community. Their comments also suggest a sense of internal strength they acquire through recognition of the value of their heritage that helps them to navigate more confidently in their external environment.

“Being part of the community is amazing—it’s ... honestly ... it’s ... it just make me happy, ya know.” Moe Win

“The dances have helped me make new friends. Like, it’s always been hard to me to like get out of my comfort zone and make new friends but with the dance it just naturally flows.” Hay Soe

“I decided I wanted to meet new Karen people knowing their struggles and stuff ... ” Taw Nay Moo

“ ... When non-Karen people ask about Karen it’s like I feel good when I tell them and they like start to know more about Karen people whose ... life was difficult for them when they lived in Burma or Thailand and I feel proud that I can share my culture with other people.” Moo Eh Htoo

Karen traditions, including traditional dance, are not static practices but are dynamic and change, in some respects, based on contemporary circumstances and external forces. Aspects of Karen dance, including the Don Dance, and the songs that go with them have varied over time due to the loss of peace in their villages, flight across international borders, captivity in refugee camps, and relocation to Western countries. The messages being portrayed have varied from village or regional pride to a construction of a unified Karen nation, even if it is a landless one [22]. In the refugee camps the formations the dancers make may spell out the initials of a supportive group such as the Karen Women’s Organization (KWO) that deals with issues of domestic abuse and provides entrepreneurial opportunities for women through their offices in all nine camps. In Salt Lake City, the formation might spell out KCU which represents the Karen Community of Utah (Poe Wah, Personal Communication, 1 August 2018). In personal conversations in 2017 with a Karen master teacher in Burma and Karen youth in Utah, I was told that the movements of their bodies, particular positions of the hands and feet for example, are unique to Karen dance and remain consistent across generations of dancers. The songs, however, vary and youth in America make use of a faster tempo and more contemporary language. Variations of some aspects occur over time and space but what remains consistent is that these dances create an opportunity for the Karen to come together, to be together, and to strengthen and reaffirm their identity as culturally and ethnically Karen with a sense of solidarity among Karen people around the world.

## 5. Discussion

The history of the Karen and their continued struggle to maintain their land and culture in Burma have had a profound effect on the perceived value of participation in traditional cultural activities and within-group community engagement for this group of Karen youth and the adults who support them. Mosselson, a scholar in the study of refugee experience, came to a similar conclusion while conducting research with female adolescent refugees from Bosnia, and pointed out the “centrality of refugeeness on identity” [13] (p. 21) and the strong connections between identity construction and coping mechanisms used to deal with personal and community traumatic histories and contemporary situations. As one former dancer shared with me:

“All the Karen people I know never resist or hide the fact that they were/are refugees. I don’t mind being called a refugee as it is a part of my identity. Even to these days I still introduce myself as a refugee whenever I say I’m from Thailand because I don’t want people to mix up my identity. For me, if I were to resist being called a refugee then it is like I want

to pretend that the horrible things the Karen people and I went through has never happened. If I were to resist being labeled a refugee, then it is the same as I'm trying to erase part of my history. I don't want that." (Sayro Paw, Personal Communication, 27 July 2018).

The Burmese government has been waging a war in an attempt to not only force the Karen from their land but to eliminate the Karen culture itself. The result is an overwhelming commitment to maintain their culture and all of its components including their traditional dance. They do not want the Karen culture to disappear and active participation in dance is key as a means to ensure this does not happen. Statements made by the Karen dancers support Christiansen's [10] observation of the association between "doing" and identity construction within particular social groups and demonstrate the value of engagement in occupations with people who have lived through similar experiences: "[I]dentity has no existence outside of interpersonal relationships. Our views of our goals, our behaviors, and ourselves are inextricably tied to our relationships with others" [10] (p. 550).

Mosselson has also discussed how the identity constructions of former refugees may be shaped by their attitudes toward their country of origin and their relationships with those in their diasporic community, in this case not just within the U.S. but across several Western countries, and less influenced by their relationships with U.S. society [13]. This certainly seems to be the case, at least to some degree, with this group of dancers. In addition, their behavior demonstrates a hybridity of identity construction, as they are heavily influenced by access to today's technology options and typical behaviors of teenagers in their American schools and neighborhoods. This was noted during rehearsals when they were taking breaks and every dancer in the room was actively involved in use of their cell phones texting or listening to music. When asked what music they listen to, some said they were listening to Karen music from Thailand. They have a desire to participate in traditional Karen activities, to speak the Karen language, to wear traditional hand-woven clothing during everyday activities, but they also participate in typical activities of U.S. children, speak English when not with Karen, and often wear jeans and t-shirts and other non-Karen clothing.

The families of the dancers have been, as Lacroix has stated, uprooted from their lives in Burma, but their children who were born in the camps have had a different experience. Unlike the subjects in social worker and scholar Lacroix's study of adult Canadian refugees, the participants in this study were too young to have set the groundwork for a productive and successful adult life in their homeland [24]. Their journey into adulthood had not even started. The experience of being relocated has been easier for them as far as how it has affected their transition toward adulthood in American society. Due to a lack of English literacy when they arrived, they struggled in school and had difficulty making friends outside their own Karen community, but they are now bilingual and actively engaged in high school, are working, or are in college with friends both inside and outside of the Karen community. They have learned to access available technology and have developed plans for their futures. They have not experienced the "profound sense of rupture" that Lacroix's participants spoke of [24] (p. 157) and there is no indication that they are resisting the label of "refugee", trying to separate themselves from the concept of refugeeness as part of their identity. Nevertheless, they still need to remain socially connected to traditional Karen activities and identify themselves as Karen as well as American. Resistance has been a motivation for some refugees to participate in theatrical productions in refugee camps. Wickstrom, a professor of theatre, found this to be the case in Palestinian camps [25]. The Karen, however, have not emphasized this in any of my conversations with them. Although the songs are described as providing a history of the Karen, the dancers did not speak of resistance to being viewed as a refugee or resistance to Burmese government leadership. They spoke only of unity and togetherness of Karen and the need to preserve their culture across generations. This in itself is resistance since the Burmese government has been trying to destroy the Karen culture for decades, but resistance was never mentioned as a primary reason for the production of dance in the U.S.

Not all Karen youth take an interest in cultural maintenance and the attitudes and opinions of youth not involved in Karen dance were not explored in this study. However, the information provided by the dancers who were interviewed demonstrates the potential significant and positive impact of



participation in traditional cultural occupations on identity construction and maintenance and the benefits of a strong cultural identity for both in-group and external social inclusion. Internal personal strength and confidence can be enhanced through participation in culturally relevant occupations. Interviews revealed how participation in the activity of dance within their U.S. context encouraged identity construction and maintenance, supporting the idea that, “People develop and reinforce their identities by habitually performing through occupation, within particular social contexts” [26] (p. 74). Participants expressed how important it was for them to make social connections with people in their own ethnic group. Occupational scientist Huot and social geographer Veronis also found this to be the case with French speaking immigrants and refugees in Canada who “stressed the importance of getting together with people from one’s own culture and country of origin, to share experiences and support the integration of newcomers through help from the more established community network” [27] (p. 8).

The results of this study make it clear that those forced to migrate to a foreign country may face challenges to their sense of identity and belonging when immersed in a society that is unfamiliar to them. Organizations and agencies that provide support to incoming refugees can play an important role in the difficult process of adaptation refugees face by facilitating access to participation in meaningful activities that provide in-group social connections and opportunities to participate in familiar culturally relevant activities.

## 6. Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could look into the attitudes and opinions of Karen youth who are not involved in traditional Karen occupations and could be expanded to other states in the United States as well as to different countries that have become home to Karen people forced to relocate from Burma to see if there are similar motivations for participation in Karen dance. It will be interesting to see how sustainable this activity is as time passes. Will the next generation of Karen in the U.S. continue this tradition with the same passion or will participation decline with increased acculturation into U.S. society?

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