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This ethnographic research explores the concepts of religion and acculturation, and possible relationships between them, in the Greensboro, North Carolina Montagnard community. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and observations. A range of acculturative and religious experiences were found. Gender, time in the United States, age at arrival in the United States, generation of arrival in the United States, and other factors contributed to the experience of acculturation for each participant. Implications and possibilities for further research are discussed.

RELIGION AND ACCULTURATION IN THE MONTAGNARD COMMUNITY OF

GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

by

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Boomer: *Let's go home.*

Battlestar Galactica, "The Farm", Written by Carla Robinson

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The United States has a large immigrant population, and is a nation where immigration is a continual process. The United States is a society founded by immigrants and a nation populated by immigrants; immigration is a fact of social life in the United States. People of many varied ethnicities and demographic backgrounds constantly join the fabric of social life in the United States. In 2003, over 33 million residents in the U.S. were either naturalized citizens or non-citizens; in 2008, they made up 12.1 percent of the population (U.S. Census Bureau 2004). Of those 33 million, almost three times as many entered the country in the 1990s as did in the 1970s. Immigration rates continue to increase; it is estimated that between now and 2050, over eighty percent of population growth will be from immigrants and their descendants (Passel & Cohn 2008).

However, the face of immigrants to the United States continues to change along with their numbers. Most immigrants entering the U.S. before 1965 were of European origin, but since 1965, numbers of non-Europeans have increased (Cavalcanti & Schleef 2005; Hirschman 2004; Peek 2005). This change in the immigrants' countries of origin affects the demographic and cultural make-up of the United States.

Furthermore, the composition of immigrant communities in the United States is also changing. At pre-1965 immigration rates, ethnic communities had steady growth rates and were not always dominated by recent immigrants, giving the community as a whole greater incentive to assimilate. As immigration has increased, ethnic communities

have been renewed with more first and second generation immigrants. These people might maintain stronger cultural ties to their countries of origin than previous groups of immigrants (Alba & Nee 1997). Thus, they have greater opportunity to resist assimilation and to develop and maintain a culture with ties to both their country of origin and to the United States.

The cultural changes brought about by immigration have made it a field of interest to social scientists from a variety of disciplines. Social scientists work towards an understanding of the immigrant experience and how immigration affects the fabric of social life in the United States.

One specific element of the immigration and assimilation process is acculturation. Acculturation is "culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems" (Trimble 2003:5). Human culture is learned from other people (Stark & Brainbridge 1987); when cultural systems come into contact, information and customs are exchanged and learned. This happens abruptly and intensely when people move to a new country. A refugee or immigrant's home culture may be in stark contrast to the culture of their adopted land; negotiating a new cultural identity, as well as determining how and how much to acculturate is part of the work of settling in a new country. This work may especially be difficult for refugees, who find are fleeing persecution, war, or other troubles in their native countries.

As immigration to the United States changes, we are reevaluating classical views on immigration, assimilation, and acculturation. Assimilation theory, though perhaps still useful in some aspects, has been revised and updated to reflect the present circumstances

(Alba & Nee 1997). One part of this theory is acculturation theory, and the current research contributes to this reevaluation of the process of acculturation.

Many factors influence acculturation; religion may be one factor for immigrants and refuges in the United States (Herberg 1960). To examine religion and acculturation, the question of religion and culture must be addressed. Researchers disagree as to whether religion is part of culture, or whether religion and culture are separate. This research positions religion as part of culture, and investigates possible relationships between religion and culture in one specific refugee community, the Greensboro Montagnard community. Refugees from the Vietnamese highlands, the Montagnards are Christians who have faced religious and political persecution in their native Vietnam. The overriding question for this research asks, what is the relationship between religion and acculturation in the Montagnard community?

This research works within the Greensboro, North Carolina Montagnard community, employing semi-structured interviews and participant observations to address the research question. The Montagnard community was ideal for this sort of exploratory, ethnographic work for two reasons. The first is that North Carolina is home to the largest number of Montagnards in one area outside of Vietnam, and most Montagnards in North Carolina reside in Greensboro (Bailey 2004). Also, with several waves of Montagnard immigration to the area, the Greensboro Montagnard community includes persons of many ages and backgrounds (Bailey 2004). These conditions provided for an interesting cross-section of people, which provides for better research conditions.

What I found was a variety of acculturative experiences, in which religious denomination, faith, time in the United States, gender, generation of arrival in the United States, language, and a host of other factors all intersected to create a unique lived experience for each person interviewed. Religion seems to be a mediating factor for acculturation that closely interacts with other aspects of each participant's life, especially generation and time in the United States.

These results may inform future work about religion and acculturation in the Montagnard community, and immigrant and refugee communities in general. Furthermore, a picture of refugee life in one community in Greensboro has been drawn. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge about changes in immigration to the United States in the last several decades. By showing that not every person in the community has had the same acculturative experience, this research reinforces the growing conviction that acculturative theory cannot look alike for every community, or even for every person in a single community. This research reflects the changes brought about by shifts in immigration to the United States in the last forty years. This research also contributes to knowledge about how to do ethnographic work in immigrant and refugee communities.

Scholarship about immigration to the United States (of which research about acculturation is one small part) is vital to understanding the social fabric of the United States. With the growing number of immigrants to the United States, and with immigration no longer a monolithic institution, research on immigrant groups and how they adjust to life in the United States is critical to building a society that benefits

everyone living in the United States, no matter their national origins.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Montagnard History and Community Background

According to the Montagnards themselves, they are the native people of the Vietnamese highlands (Montagnard Foundation, Inc. 2004). Ethnically, they are not Vietnamese, but a separate people with their own religion, languages, and cultural identity (Hickey 1982; Rotich 2004). Originally, they practiced a nature-based religion (Bailey 2004; Hickey 1982); however, French and American missionaries brought Christianity, both Catholicism and Protestantism, to the Montagnard people. Catholicism came considerably earlier, in the nineteenth century; Protestantism was a twentieth century development (Hickey 1982).

The Montagnards were persecuted in Vietnam for being an ethnic minority and for desiring political autonomy from the Vietnamese.   In South Vietnam, efforts were made by the government to subsume them into mainstream Vietnamese culture, erasing their ethnic diversity (STMP, Inc. 2004; Hickey 1982). In particular, the use of the Vietnamese language was enforced (Rotich 2004). However, alliances between Americans and Montagnards, including Montagnards fighting alongside Americans during the Vietnamese War caused persecution to continue (Rotich 2004; Buchanan 2007). Despite this, the Montagnards did not join mass Vietnamese emigration from

Vietnam to the United States in the mid-1970s, as only ethnic Vietnamese were allowed to flee to the United States at that time (Bailey 2004; Zhou 2002). Persecution of the Montagnards continued for political and religious reasons, and Montagnard immigration to the United States began in the mid-1980s (Rotich 2004; Bailey 2004). The first large group consisted of 200 Montagnards, mostly men. Most of this group was settled in North Carolina in 1986. Another large group of 900 was settled in 2002. Additional immigration in smaller groups occurred due to family reunification and the Orderly Departure Program (Bailey 2004). There are currently nearly 4000 Montagnards in North Carolina, most in Greensboro. It should also be noted that there are many other immigrant and refugee communities in Greensboro. The Montagnard community in Greensboro exists not only as part of the greater Greensboro community, but as part of the refugee and immigrant community in Greensboro.

Most Montagnards, like other Southeast Asian refugees, lived subsistence lives before moving to the United States (Zhou 2002; Hickey 1982). Many were rice farmers or had other agrarian occupations, including growing coffee.[1] Other Montagnards had retreated to the jungle while fleeing persecution and avoiding imprisonment; many others had been detained in prison camps, for years in some cases. Many Southeast Asian refugees, including the Montagnards, come from a culture that doesn't emphasize material accumulation. Their culture emphasizes kinship and family ties (Zhou 2002; Hickey 1982). With their agrarian lifestyle, some of them had never held a pencil before.

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[1] In the ESOL class that I am assisting with, one lesson asked about their occupations in Vietnam. Every person answered that they were a rice farmer (which, incidentally, created much mirth in the classroom.)

Literacy levels upon coming to the United States are generally low for most first generation Montagnard refugees, though some have attended school in Vietnam. The move to a postindustrial lifestyle in the U.S. is a radical change for them (Zhou 2002:46). Despite the differences in culture, many people in the Montagnard community have adjusted well to life in the U.S., and have become politically and socially connected.

Defining Religion

How does society define religion? There have been many attempts to answer this question. Durkheim felt that religion allows people, through belief and practice, to set aside what is sacred – what is "apart and forbidden." He thought that those beliefs and practices build a community for their followers (Durkheim, 1995[1912]:44). While Marx agreed that religion is a tool used to make sense of the world, he also cast religion as a tool for self-deception. For Marx, religion was a way of building false consciousness about who we are (Marx 2002:171). Weber also agreed that religion is a tool for making sense of the world: for Weber, as quoted by Menjivar (2003), religion "creates a meaningful cosmos of a world experienced as specifically senseless" (24). Geertz described religion as "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men" that are then used to organize the world into a "general order of existence" (Geertz 1973:91, 94, 98). Stark and Brainbridge take a view that is more pragmatic than this, seeing religion as a system of intangible substitutes for immediate, worldly rewards, a system based on "supernatural assumptions" (1987:39; Simpson 2001). Religion makes sense of death and loss, and

provides solace for those who experience death and loss (Hirschman 2004:1207).

Religion can structure social systems and social networks for participants. Finally, religion can be one important component of building self-identity and part of our "drive for meaning" (Gallagher 2005:71), especially because identity is often based on group membership (Peek 2005).

When defining religion, the question of religion and culture must be addressed. Whether religion is a part of culture or something separate is a question about which researchers disagree, often vehemently. Culture can be seen as belief, law, custom, and knowledge (Masuzawa 1998). Also, culture is "that which humans learn from each other" and "the total complex of explanations exchanged by humans" (Stark & Bainbridge 1987:18). From this standpoint, religion is surely part of culture: religion involves ritual, belief, custom, and explanations. Even when religion is considered separately from culture, there is still a strong relationship between the two (Masuzawa 1998:70). The terms *religion* and *culture* are both "historically specific", meaning that they are constructs which have meant different things at different times and places (Masuzawa 1998:70). Whether religion can be considered part of culture or as a separate structure depends on where and when we are (Masuzawa 1998:70). In this research, religion will be positioned as part of culture. However, religion is a large part of culture that must be considered on its own merits (just as other part of culture, such as language). Religion is also a social structure that can have great influence on other parts of culture.

We see from these wide and varied descriptions that there are quite likely as many definitions and theoretical frames for religion as there are religions. It would be easy for a researcher to get lost in the chaos of competing explanations. However, there are some commonalities in these views of religion, even as they disagree drastically in their details. Commonalities include viewing religion as a tool for world-building, as well as part of identity and social order creation. Religion creates normative structure in the world, and institutionalizes norms and beliefs. Religion offers promises that people are willing to trade time, energy, and social standing for. All of these functions of religion may be important in immigrant and refugee communities. It seems sensible that religion may affect the experiences of immigrants as they adjust to a new culture.

Two theoretical frames make the most sense for the present research. Stark and Bainbridge's rational choice theory of religion frames faith as it is expressed in the community. At the same time, religion can also be framed in the Montagnard community as an institution for community building and maintenance.

Stark and Bainbridge's model fits well when explaining faith in the Montagnard community. The model approaches religion at the individual level and in utilitarian fashion. Stark and Bainbridge examine "an economy of costs and rewards," tying that economy to religious choices (Simpson 1990:368; Bader & Demaris 1996). Traditional exchange theory deals directly in tangible rewards. However, Stark and Bainbridge extend that theory to the intangibles of religion (Simpson 1990). Their model states that individuals seek rewards – "anything humans will incur costs to obtain", where a cost is

"whatever humans attempt to avoid" (Stark & Bainbridge 1987:27). However, rewards are not always immediately obtainable. In that case, individuals are willing to accept explanations that promise the possibility of future rewards, sometimes even in the distant future, instead of immediate rewards (Stark & Bainbridge 1987). These explanations are referred to as compensators, or "postulations of reward according to explanations that are not readily susceptible to unambiguous explanation" (Stark & Bainbridge 1987:36). People are willing to accept these compensators as rewards when necessary. A general compensator is a substitute for groups of rewards, or highly-valued rewards (Stark & Bainbridge 1987).

Another way of thinking about compensators and religion is that human beings use religion to "get what they cannot have" (Buckser 1995:1). Life changes such as illness or the death of loved ones can cause people to seek reassurance that they cannot obtain on earth. In this case, people will choose to turn to religion (Miller 1995). In general, people prefer immediate rewards, but there are times when a reward simply doesn't exist or isn't obtainable. In that case, a compensator (such as that which religion can provide) is an acceptable substitute. Examples of these sorts of compensators include promises about eternal life, the idea of meaning in the universe, and heavenly rewards (Buckser 1995). These are the kinds of compensators which "can only be supported by supernatural explanations" and which address questions of "ultimate meaning" (Stark & Bainbridge 1987:39).

This is where religious organizations come in. Stark and Bainbridge find religious organizations to be "social enterprises whose primary purpose is to create, maintain, and exchange supernaturally-based general compensators" (Stark & Bainbridge 1987:42). People are willing to incur costs to obtain these compensators.

However, religious organizations also offer immediately accessible rewards, including church membership and attendance at worship services, social and community standing, and socialization and participation in a community (Stark & Bainbridge 1987:46). There are "positive benefits" to religious participation, and these positive benefits make it more likely that a person will be a religious participant (Peek 2005). Religion can offer "spiritual certainty" in populations that have faced turmoil and strife, such as war and governmental upheaval (Yang 2005:424). For those at the bottom of a stratification system, religion offers promises of heavenly rewards for suffering on earth (Bader & Demaris 1996). Thus, religious organizations offer both rewards and compensators. Individuals seeking rewards and compensators may make the rational decision that religious organizations offer that which they are willing to incur costs for.

Application of Rational Choice to the Montagnard Community

What does this mean for the Montagnards? A group of people already being persecuted relentlessly for their politics were offered a religion by missionaries that promised heavenly rewards and eternal life (compensators) for the troubles that they were encountering here on earth. Those compensators would be worth the costs (increased

persecution) that the converts would incur. Thus, accepting Christianity was the rational choice for Montagnard converts.

However, organized religion is not just about faith, and often is not about faith at all. When participants in this study spoke about their religious life, they were frequently very careful to separate church life from descriptions of faith and spirituality. For the Montagnard community and many other ethnic communities, churches are places to meet people, to build community, and to interact and organize over politics (Mattis 2001). Religious associations provide social organization and cohesion, and structure for social life (Mattis 2001). Churches in the Montagnard community provide social services and translation services, support to community members and contact with co-ethnics. Kinship and friendship systems and co-ethnic relations (which help to alleviate social isolation) are important for refugee communities (Min 2002; Peek 2005). This experience of church as community is a common one in Asian-American immigrant communities (Min 2002). Ethnic churches aren't just a center of religion, but a center for culture. A priest in a Vietnamese Catholic church illustrated this point: "We have the Vietnamese church to preserve Vietnamese culture and to pass on the language. If it wasn't for that, we could just assimilate into other churches for religion" (Min 2002:50-21). Churches and other religious centers are a way for refugees and immigrants to build community, maintain culture, and form identity. Community members, in taking a place in their local religious community, may transition from being "sojourners to citizens" (Kurien 1998:37). Churches and other places of worship become "center[s] for cultural identity" (Min 2002:63). The importance of places of worship as community in a refugee

or immigrant community cannot be overemphasized. Thus, religion for the Montagnards is a matter of community, and faith is a matter of rational choice.

Measuring Religiosity

Defining religion is only half the difficulty in studying religion. We must also consider how we measure religiosity. Religiosity refers to religious beliefs and actions. Operationalizing and conceptualizing religiosity is a notoriously difficult task. One way of thinking about religiosity is as "the scope and intensity of one's religious beliefs, incorporating… the relationship between personal actions and religious beliefs, religious effort" (Glover 1996:427). However, religiosity also involves practices: "those deeds motivated by belief" (Lopez 1998:21). Religiosity is not a flat construct that can only be measured on one or two dimensions. However, we can also see a problem with this proposed definition. How do we distinguish between faith and religion? Religiosity and faith must be considered separately, and faith especially seems to be best considered in a person's own words.

Two measures of religiosity are common: denominational labels and a social identification schema. This approach asks respondents to identify with labels such as "fundamentalist," evangelical," "mainline," "theologically liberal," "charismatic," or "Pentecostal", as Alwin, Felson, Walker, and Tufis discussed (2006:582). Alwin et al compared these two common approaches using General Social Survey (GSS) data from 1996, 1998, and 2000, and found difficulties with both approaches. Denominational labels are not as accurate an indicator of social attitudes as they once were, due to

growing heterogeneity in denominations. This can especially be seen in the Montagnard community – the great majority of the Montagnard community identifies as either evangelical Protestant or Roman Catholic. However, there is still quite a range of religious and faith experiences in the community. This range is not illustrated with participants' identification with labels such as "evangelical" and "Protestant." On the other hand, asking respondents to respond to fixed social identification categories is also problematic. They may view categories such as *evangelical* and *liberal* differently than the researcher, and without further inquiry, we shouldn't know why they chose those categories and how they think of those categories. In the end, denominational and the categorical identification approaches to religious identification capture different and often conflicting information, and might not capture what we really want to know about religiosity (Alwin et al 2006:548). While these measures can be useful, they should be approached with caution and cross-referenced with other information about the respondent.

There are other measures of religiosity that might be more applicable. Religious commitment, including attendance at religious services, the amount and type of religious activities in one's daily life, and the self-reported importance of religion to the subject is also important. So is the importance of religion in the respondent's daily life (Glover 1996). This sort of information has been included in religiosity scales used in previous research, and captures many different dimensions of religiosity. Many types of information should be considered in the question of how to measure religiosity. A

measure of religiosity must be multi-dimensional to be effective (Gladding et al 1981; Williams 1994).

However, this sort of multi-dimensional information can be difficult to capture with the sorts of survey methods privileged by Alvin and others. In an ethnographic situation, survey questions might not be effective, nor appropriate. They may prove awkward, or unreliable. Ethnographic research might be more applicable for getting how our "worlds are configured" (Coco 2007), through participant observations and open-ended interviews. In this case, having the participant describe the importance of faith and religion in their lives may be the best way to measure religiosity.

Acculturation

Acculturation occurs as a person or group of people take on cultural characteristics – patterns, symbols, and rituals that human beings give meaning – that are not part of their native culture, through contact with other cultures (Berry *et al* 2006). Acculturation is not a single occurrence in time but a process for both individuals and groups which "occurs across several domains: psychological, functioning, language use, cognitive style, personality, identity, attitudes, and stress" (Bauman 2005:426). As with religiosity, many dimensions of acculturation must be considered to accurately conceptualize it, in both socio-cultural and psychological domains (Ouarasse 2005; Berry *et al* 2006). In addition, we cannot assume that acculturation always happens in the direction of the host culture. Early canonical models imagined acculturation as a singular process with one endpoint – acculturation to White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture (Alba

16

& Nee 1997). However, those early models do not accurately reflect the complicated

reality of acculturation in today's world. Two current models of acculturation present

more varying possibilities.

A uni-dimensional structure for acculturation suggests two possible outcomes.

One is complete acculturation to the host culture. The other is a bicultural outcome,

where the subject adheres to their native culture and the host culture equally (Ouarasse

2005; Cachelin *et al* 2006). On the other hand, the bi-dimensional scheme states that

acculturation is never a one-way process. It holds that the eventual outcome is never

complete acculturation to the host culture nor completely keeping one's native culture.

Terms used in this model include *integration* (identifying with both one's native culture

and one's host culture), *assimilation* (strong identification with the host culture),

separation (strong identification with one's native culture) and *marginalization*

(identification with neither culture) (Devos 2006:382).   All of these processes represent

different endpoints in the acculturative journey of the immigrant. Considering today's

variance in the kinds of immigrants and refugees that come to the United States, all of

these models can apply to different groups.

No matter which model of acculturation is used, research requires a yardstick for

the measurement of acculturation. Potential yardsticks are plentiful. Still, just as with

religiosity, there is no perfect measure suitable for all immigrant and refugee

communities. It is tempting to judge acculturation solely on the basis of quantifiable,

visible measures (for example, language and clothing choices). However, these measures

do not give a complete picture of acculturation (Alba & Nee 1997).

Yardsticks that have been employed to measure acculturation are many and

varied. In one study, Devos (2006) used Implicit Association Tests to ask participants to

classify cultural icons (ranging from "Thanksgiving" to "bull fighting") as part of either

Mexican or American culture. Participants were then asked how they themselves

identified with those icons. In another study, Ouarasse (2005) asked Moroccan

immigrants to the Netherlands to respond to 68 questions concerning how much they

liked parts of Moroccan culture and Dutch culture, from food to home decorating

schemes. Teichman and Contreras-Grau (2006) used language acculturation, "value

acculturation" (examples: "How much are American values part of your life?" and "How

important is it to you to celebrate holidays in the American way?"), and a "demographic

index of exposure to the European American culture" to look at Puerto Ricans in the

United States (89-90). These examples show that there are many possible indicators –

including food and media preferences, self identification, language, and values – of

acculturation.

Transnationalism

When thinking about acculturation, it is important to keep the idea of

transnationalism in mind. As stated, acculturation was formerly seen as a one-way

process with one endpoint. Immigrants naturally uprooted themselves from their old

cultures and completely immersed themselves in their new culture. Former models of

acculturation stated that either immigrants maintained no native identity or cultural ties with their former home, or that they were merely sojourners, living in a country without making any effort to settle in that country.

However, today's immigrants often keep cultural ties with both their homeland and develop cultural ties with their new country. This is especially applicable for refugees, who might have had to leave home suddenly and without time for extensive preparation (Glick-Schiller et al 1995; Riccio 2001; Vertovec 2001). Models which explore these ideas fall under the umbrella of transnationalism.

There are many definitions and conceptions of transnationalism. Glick-Schiller and Fouron found that Haitian immigrants viewed themselves as having "two homelands"; they resisted American efforts to subsume them into African-American culture, and yet, claimed their new homeland, working to "[build] a community in the United States that would embrace and include Haiti" (1990:341). Also, transnational communities "do not break their ties to their country of origin. They create a multiplicity of ties in different areas of social action that transcend national barriers" (Itzigsohn & Saucedo 2002:766). Immigrant and refugee communities participate in the cultural, business, and political life of both their countries of origin and countries of settlement (Itzigsohn & Saucedo 2002). Transnationalism involves "multi-stranded social relations that link together… societies of origins and settlement" (Min 2002:27). Transnationalism also involves building social spaces linking countries of origin and countries of settlement (Light 2002). Some scholars hold that transnationalism requires "shuttling"

between both countries (Light 2002). The present research holds that for some ethnic groups, this sort of travel may be impossible, though the maintenance of these dual cultural ties is still important.

Transnational immigrants and refugees settle in their new home, but maintain cultural and other ties with their homeland. Transnationals grow roots in their new country, while maintaining "multiple linkages" to their country of origin (Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995:48). Cultural acquisition is no longer a one-way, static process with a beginning point and an ending point, but a "continuously ongoing process" (Hannerz 1997:9). Transnationalism involves kinship groups, business networks, and solidarity based on "ethnicity, religion, nationality, or place or origin" (Itzigsohn & Saucedo 2002:769). This last can manifest itself in symbolic events, cultural and social clubs, and other community events (Itzigsohn & Saucedo 2002). Transnationalism involves identity. Identity can be thought of as "ways in which people conceive of themselves and are characterized by others" (Vertovec 2001:573). Identity also engages our "sense of self, group affiliations, structural positions, and ascribed and achieved statuses" (Peek 2005:216-217). It is becoming increasingly clear that the ways in which immigrants and refugees think of themselves can be based upon more than one national or cultural foundation.

Present Research on Religion and Acculturation

What has previous research discovered about religion and acculturation? The most important information that one can take from previous research is that we cannot

20

make monolithic statements about how religion and acculturation interact for immigrants and refugees in the United States. These two variables might once have interacted in the same sorts of ways for most immigrants, but that was during an era when most immigrants were from European countries with the same flavors of European-style Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. Post-1965 immigration has brought growth in the religious diversity of the United States; in particular the proportion of Latinos and Asians has grown considerably. The American religious landscape looks very different than it did 40 years ago (Calvalcanti & Schleef 2005; Hirschman 2004; Peek 2005). With these changes, the ways in which acculturation and religion act together has also changed. This is borne out in literature on the subject – while there is a general acknowledgment that religion is "central in promoting both psychological and economic adjustment", it is also acknowledged that we see "differential outcomes" in acculturation without being entirely sure why we see those differential outcomes for different groups (Zhou *et al* 2002:47). Zhou *et al* (2002) speculate that the differential outcomes seen in regards to religion and acculturation can depend on religious practices in the refugee's native lands, the conditions of exit from their home country, how they are incorporated into their new country, and how they are received (Zhou *et al* 2002:47). Also, differential outcomes might result from differing relations between religion and ethnicity, depending on the community (Peek 2005).

Religion was theorized to have been very important to the acculturation process for immigration before 1965: "Religion provided immigrants with a familiar space in a host society where they could hold onto their ethnic identity even as they and their

21

children became part of the larger American culture" (Calvalcanti & Schleef 2005:473). Even with the changes to immigration since 1965, religion is still important to immigrants and refugees; Herberg's ideal that "religion is a fundamental category of identity and association in society through which immigrants can find a place in American life" still holds (Menjivar 2003:22). Immigrants who need an anchor in their new world, and who are beginning the adjustment process to their new life, may very well turn to a place of worship (Menjivar 2003; Peek 2005). Furthermore, many immigrants join places of worship as part of community-building even if they are not be terribly attached to organized religion – churches and other places of worship serve as both places for worship and also for centers of "ethnic continuity" (Calvalcanti & Schleef 2005:473-474; Hirschman 2004; Allitt 2003:259).

Nonetheless, there is no single religious experience for immigrants in the United States, a point we must bear in mind when considering religion and acculturation in the United States today. Post-1965, "the variety of transplanted faiths filter the U.S. experience in radically different ways... Recent groups must negotiate a valid space for their faiths in the United States while coping with the demands of a new culture" (Calvalcanti & Schleef 2005:473). Religion is no longer a monolithic institution for immigrants. Religion is important to many immigrants and may be influential in the acculturation process; however, how religion looks and how the immigrants look has changed considerably over this century. Thus, one must look at different religious and ethnic groups individually.

Thus, it is not surprising that results have varied greatly depending on the immigrant group and their religious and social circumstances. Cavalcanti and Schleef (2005) studied a sample of Latinos in Richmond, Virginia. They found that being religious and occupational statuses were inversely related, as were religiousness and language assimilation scores (2005). Participants with no religious affiliation were "the most likely to use English in a variety of contexts" (2005:480). Cavalcanti and Schleef found that immigrants were more likely to declare no religious affiliation the longer they were in the United States, and that succeeding generations were also more likely to not be actively religious. In their research, the presence of religion in an immigrant's life and acculturation into American life and culture were found to be negatively associated.

Similarly, Ghorpade, Lackritz, and Singh (2004) found an explicitly negative association between being religious and acculturation. They examined a sample of 320 students at a large American university who were from a variety of ethnic and religious groups. They hypothesized that ethnic minorities who were Christian would show higher levels of acculturation than those who were religious but non-Christian. However, those who presented as most acculturated on the psychological acculturation scale used were those with no religious preference. Those students with no religious preference were also statistically most like each other. This research also found that first-generation immigrants were less acculturated than those who were children of immigrants (Ghorpade *et al* 2004).

Cheah (2002) also found a negative relationship between religion and acculturation, showing that the relationship between monks and lay people at Burmese Buddhist temples helped to "preserve a sense of Burmeseness (*bamahsan chin*), especially among the first-generation Burmese American Buddhists" (416). Along with religious activities, social and cultural activities helped teach American-raised and American-born Burmese youth about their "native" culture (417). The temple inhibits the Americanization of not just their religion, but of the "immigrants themselves to the American context" (417). Cheah found that "Burmese immigrants do not become Euro-Americans; they become Burmese Americans," a process requiring "strategies of religious adaptation" with both "resistance and accommodation" of American culture (417). While there was some acculturation to American culture for the Burmese in this study, they were not actively encouraged to do so by their religious organization. Here, religion and acculturation were in opposition. In this situation we see the development of a transnational identity, with immigrants incorporating cultural elements of both their native culture and the United States into their lives.

Cheah was not the only researcher to find immigrants who had negotiated a shared identity between cultures. Mira and Lorentzen (2002) found that the Pentecostal churches in San Francisco assists new immigrants (mostly from Latin America) with adjusting to daily life in the United States, including with needs such as childcare and job hunting. At the same time, immigrants were exhorted not to become too attached to materialistic American culture. Immigrants are encouraged to be to live exemplary lives so that they will be seen in a positive light in the United States, particularly by law

makers (Mira & Lorentzen 2002). In this case, churches encourage immigrant acculturation to some parts of American culture, promoting prosperity and supporting social order. However, at the same time, churches preach a message at odds with "consumerism and materialism" (Mira & Lorentzen 2002:422). Pentecostal churches in this study appear to encourage immigrants to be just acculturated enough to get along in the United States. Like the Burmese studied by Cheah, these Pentecostal immigrants have grown a culture somewhere between their home culture and stereotypical American culture. Mira and Lorentzen, as well as Cheah, demonstrate that a transnational framework of acculturation might make the most sense for some immigrant groups. Both the Burmese immigrants and the Pentecostal immigrants studied have negotiated an identity that spans both their native and American qualities, instead of relying on one culture or the other for their identity. Religiosity and religious identity both promoted and held back acculturation for the groups studied.

In other research, Wang and Yang (2006) studied Chinese Christian converts belonging to both ethnic and non-ethnic congregations in two university settings. One reason students at the ethnic congregations joined was a desire to connect to a traditional Chinese culture, including religion as cultural practice (unlike the contemporary Chinese culture that students came from). It is possible that students belonging to an ethnic congregation were inclined to keep closer ties to their native culture; in other words, perhaps their religious choices reinforced a personal inclination that was already present. Some students also mentioned feeling that China was going through a period of crisis and moral corruption (2006); this might indicate that some students had deeper and longer

lasting cultural ties to their home country than to the United States. Causal order is difficult to determine in this case. Which comes first, closer cultural connections to home and limited acculturation to life in the United States, or an ethnic religious experience that reinforces close cultural connections? Wang and Yang were undecided on this issue. However, they also found that community pressures influenced religious choices. In the community studied which contained ethnic churches, Chinese students were heavily recruited. Newcomers were picked up at airports when they arrived into town, offered assistance with "settling in," and encouraged to attend social events (Wang & Yang 2006:187). Community pressure was brought upon students who might not otherwise have been inclined to either join a church at all or a specifically ethnic church. In the end, Wang and Yang found that religion and acculturation weren't necessarily negatively associated, but that the type of religion mattered; those who joined the ethnic ministries were less acculturated (2006). The social situation of the respondents was more complicated than a simple causal effect between religion and acculturation.

Sodowsky and Plake (1992) also found complicated interactions between religion and acculturation. Their main research question examined whether people from different continents are different in their acculturation, investigating whether religion had a moderating affect on acculturation. Their sample included international students, permanent residents and naturalized citizens from a university setting. Respondents were asked to respond to questions on perceived prejudice, acculturation, and language use. Sodowsky and Plake found that Muslims had a higher perceived prejudice than Protestants and Catholics, but found no significant differences between Buddhist-Hindus

and Catholics or Protestants. They also discovered that Muslims were less acculturated than other groups, and Catholics were less acculturated than Protestants. Finally, they found that people who belonged to no organized religion used English less than other groups. However, Muslims were similar to persons with no organized religion in regards to English use, while Catholics used English less than Protestants. Here, there were differences in acculturation depending on the specific religion, and the patterns found were not as simple as a religious/not-religious dichotomy.

Other research has also found community social pressures at work in interactions between religion and acculturation. Kim (2004) scrutinized members of second generation Korean-American evangelical organizations on college campuses. Students reported joining ethnic ministries due to desires to belong to organizations where they were the majority and to be around other Korean students, as well as to feel a connection to those that they are similar to. They did not always join for religious reasons (Kim 2004). Also, Kim found that students who might have been inclined to join a multi-ethnic ministry often felt pressured by forces both within and without the Korean community to join a Korean ministry. Thus, students who might have been inclined to acculturate more fully were encouraged and even pressured by members of their ethnic community to maintain their cultural ties to that community through Korean campus ministries (Kim 2004). Like the Chinese students in Wang and Yang's study, here the choice of ethnic ministry did not seem to be as much personal choice but the result of community pressures.

Some previous research reflects less on connections between religion and acculturation, but on the nature of acculturation and how we conceptualize acculturation in the United States. Bazan and Harris (2002) explored the work of Pentecostal and other churches to intervene with Salvadoran youth who had become gang members, with the goal of providing an alternative to gang involvement. Many immigrant youth in this community had turned to gangs in order to obtain a feeling of home and family that they had not had in El Salvador, nor found in the U.S. after arrival. For some of these youth, churches provide "alternate social networks" to gangs (Bazan & Harris 2004:382). Again, research found community pressures changing their members social choices; in this case, religious groups because instrumental in the social development of immigrants and in developing in the immigrants a certain set of American cultural attitudes. This research raises an interesting question: in researching acculturation, how do we decide what set of social circumstances constitutes being more or less acculturated? Some could argue that in becoming involved with gangs, that the El Salvadoran youth had successfully acculturated because gang involvement was normative in their new environment. Obviously, the Pentecostal ministries disagreed; however, is one set of social circumstances or another "more acculturated" for these youth, or were they just differently acculturated? Such research must make us question how we conceptualize acculturation.

Conclusion

In short, current research shows a wide variety of results regarding the question of a relationship between religion and acculturation. Results depend on the particular

religion studied, the immigrant group involved, and their social circumstances. More than anything else, current research shows that there is no "one size fits all" answer to the question of religion and acculturation. While originally, social scientists described a monolithic relationship between religion and acculturation, the landscape of religion and immigration in the United States has changed from when these subjects were first studied.

However, current research also raises other questions. We must reconsider what being acculturated looks like and means. We must also consider questions of identity and identity development, and consider the possibility of transnationalism. Rather than identity being a static construct, persons might be able to successfully maintain more than one identity, or else a cultural identity that is neither solely American nor solely of their country of origin. Acculturation in the United States is not a simple process to describe, and the situation calls for ethnographic research that will continue to redraw our image of acculturation and tell the story of immigration in the United States today. This research will work from a framework that views religious faith as a rational choice, as outlined by Stark and Bainbridge, and religious life as a community based entity. Acculturation will be viewed through a transnational point of view.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The guiding question for this research was, "What is the relationship between religion and acculturation in the Montagnard community?" However, this was too broad a research question to be answered in one project. A number of subtopics were explored as part of this broader question. Questions addressed by this project include:

- What does acculturation look like in the local Montagnard community?
- What does religion look like in the Montagnard community?
- What is the range of acculturative and religious experiences in the Montagnard community?
- What are patterns of religious and acculturative experiences do we see in the Montagnard community?
- How do religion and acculturation interact in the Montagnard community? Do these variables interact at all in the community?

Methods

Ethnography looks for patterns and meaning in social settings, and investigates happenings in social settings through applied research. Ethnography works in the social setting being researched, before assigning meaning to findings (Schensul et al 1999). Ethnographic, exploratory research was appropriate for this project, because we are still learning about the Montagnard community in general. While the Montagnard community has been the subject of much attention on the part of governmental and new agencies, social science research on the community is still developing. This research also provides descriptive information about Montagnard refugee lived experiences. This ethnographic

project might set the stage for future hypothesis-driven research (Schensul et al 1999).

In the preliminary stages of this project, observations were employed to gain familiarity with the community and to allow myself to become a more familiar face in the community, as well as to see the community functioning in its natural settings. Finally, observations contributed to developing a cultural vocabulary used in discussions with members of a community; this helped to build a rapport with participants (Schensul et al 1999; Fry 1973). For this project, three observations were conducted at church services: one Catholic mass, one Evangelical Protestant Sunday service, and one multi-denominational Protestant Christmas service at a different church.

However, the bulk of the information obtained for the study gathered was collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews combine flexible open-ended questions and more structured survey questions (Schensul *et al* 1999). As I already had some information on the community and ideas of what I hoped to investigate further, a semi-structured interview was appropriate (Schober & Conrad 1997). Questions were prepared beforehand, but the interview protocol allowed for flexibility as needed (see Appendix A)

Subjects were recruited through snowball sampling. This technique is useful in communities where there is no particular sampling frame available to researchers (Schensul *et al* 1999). Initial participants were met through contacts at FaithAction International House and my personal contacts. Referrals were then used to gather subsequent participants. A total of ten in-person interviews were conducted.

Interview transcripts were analyzed with a grounded theory approach. This

approach allows for patterns to emerge from the data, rather than boxing data into pre-assigned categories of information. In an interview with open-ended questions, a participant can respond with any answer. Thus, the ethnographer is left with "mountains of data" to sort and organize and to make sense of, in pursuit of what "patterns their data can reveal and what stories their data tell" (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999:147-149). Grounded theory offers a way to discover these patterns and stories. By using a ground theory process with qualitative research, the data speaks for itself: instead of letting preconceived notions of what the data should say drive data coding, the data does so (Strauss & Corbin 1998).

Limitations

Limitations included the English fluency of participants, the limitations of snowball sampling, research fatigue on the part of the community, and lack of entrée into the community. The biggest difficulty was language. Six tribal languages and Vietnamese are in use in the Montagnard community, including Jarai and Rhade, two languages most commonly in use in the community (Bailey 2002). Based on an estimate from one community leader, about eighty percent of the local community does not speak English. Many people with limited English fluency (for example, enough to communicate with doctors or an employer) do not speak English well enough to be interviewed in detail in English.[2] Interpreters that work with the community are expensive. Using family members or community leaders as interpreters was discussed,

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[2] Interviews with John and April, the two participants with the least English ability, were difficult; abstract concepts were very tricky to convey.

but ultimately, it was decided that would present ethical issues: would participants speak freely in front of their friends and families about their experiences? There were also logistical issues: paid or volunteer, interpreters would have had to have human subjects training and sign confidentiality agreements.

There was another language issue, concerning informed consent. Some community members that could speak English couldn't read English, which would have necessitated both oral and written consent forms, thus presenting the quandary of which language would be best for consent forms. Some Montagnard languages do not have written forms – in those cases, would a verbal translation of an English form suffice? None of these problems were insurmountable, but they required more resources to solve than were available for this project. Future researchers working with this community should be aware of these issues. In the end, interviews were conducted in English only. Interviewing English-speakers means interviewing the most acculturated people (as became rapidly clear from interviews with people of less English ability). Another unanticipated side effect of the language limitation was that the pool of potential interviewees was much smaller than the community. In a community where only twenty percent of people might speak English, this severely limited the pool of available participants.

Language issues not only limited who could be interviewed, but also in how they could be interviewed and what questions could be asked. The original interview schedule (Appendix A) was quickly modified. The more quantitatively oriented questions were incomprehensible. For those participants who did understand the questions, there was a

different problem: common responses included "Oh, I like everyone! I am right in the middle. I like everything!" The question involving scales were fairly quickly removed from the interview schedule; interviews focused on the more open-ended questions.

Language issues were not the only difficulty encountered in this research. Gaining entrance to the community was a problem. Field work began during December of 2007. This was a very busy time for the community due to the Christmas holiday, and the process of gaining entrance into the community was slow. The timing for field work in a very religious community was not considered as carefully as it should have been.

Furthermore, for many community members, as this is an overly-studied community, research fatigue is setting in. While social science research with the Montagnards may still be developing, media and government attention has been extensive. When studying a community such as the Montagnards, one is initially going to be referred to a few key community leaders, who are very busy, often interviewed, and have endless responsibilities. One email from a local social service agency to potential contacts started out with "I know you get a lot of these requests, but..." An additional telling moment came as field work was wrapping up. Another researcher hoping to distribute a survey in various Greensboro ethnic communities spoke with a community contact about the possibility of distributing surveys to Montagnards. The answer was no: they had told the last researcher that they were tired of being studied.

This theme also seems to be reflected in the reluctance of people to make referrals for interviews: while those interviewed seemed interested enough in the project, some of them were very reluctant to make referrals. Interestingly, two of the people that did make

active referrals were fairly acculturated. Others seemed willing to make referrals, providing their cell phone number and instructions to call and check back in after a few days, but persistent phone calls went unreturned. This avoidance may have been a way of saying no without saying no. To study the Montagnard community, researchers must cultivate contacts with people beyond the gatekeepers. These community members do not have as much contact with people outside of the Montagnard community. An additional pool of possibilities would be those people who are Montagnard but not part of the community (and thus, not often tapped for research).

Moreover, a level of trust had not been built up between the researcher and the community. As stated, requests for referrals were met with reluctance. This is a natural reaction in an immigrant community, even one with legal refugee status. Timing issues, trust issues, and gatekeeper issues meant that the snowball sample never worked properly.

Ultimately, six men and four women were interviewed. With one exception, the men were all over the age of 50; with one exception, the women were all under the age of 40. Also, all but one of the men were community leaders and organizers. Clearly, this sample is missing young men and older women, and people who weren't activists. This is not an unavoidable problem, especially with the younger men. Building a relationship with local churches would probably be the best way to tap into this group of younger men. Older women would be more difficult – by all reports, many, if not most, of them do not speak English. However, if the language issues can be conquered, and rapport built with younger Montagnards, then older women should become accessible.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Participants

Ten interviews were conducted. Four women were interviewed: one who was first generation and three who were generation 1.5 (people who immigrate to a new country as children or young teenagers). The first generation woman – April – is 37, and came to the United States mid-summer of 2007. June, came to the U.S. at age 15 and is now 20; the other two (Mary and Cindy) came to the U.S. in their late teens and are 27 and 32. They have all pursued educational options in the United States. April is currently enrolled in English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) classes. June graduated from an American high school and has an associates degree that allows her to work as a certified nurse's assistant, which she currently does. Mary is employed as a nail technician while she pursues her associates degree in nursing. Cindy has an associates degree in nursing, though she has also worked as a job development counselor for a local social service agency as well as in home health care before settling into her present occupation as an insurance agent. April completed high school in Vietnam. Cindy was removed from school in Vietnam because of her father, but attended private school to learn some English. June attended some school in Vietnam before having to flee because of her father. Mary was allowed to go to school in Vietnam, though it was much more difficult because of her father. Cindy and April are Catholic; Mary and June

are Protestant.

Six men were interviewed. John has been in the United States about a year and a half, and is 37 years old. The other men – James, Sam, Fred, John, and Timothy – range in age from 50 to 70, and have been in the United States between 8 and 23 years. John works in a textile factory; the other men are involved in the community as social service workers, community leaders, interpreters, and religious leaders. All of the men are still working. Fred is Catholic; the other men are Protestant. The men have also pursued educational options in the United States. John is currently enrolled in ESOL classes; the other men range from having earned a GED to currently pursuing a PhD. James and Sam attended but did not complete high school in Vietnam, due to the war. Timothy attended Bible school in Vietnam. Fred completed high school and university in Vietnam.

Nature of Exit

All of the men left because of personal persecution in Vietnam. Bob and James were incarcerated and tortured. Cindy, Mary, and June left Vietnam due to their father's political and religious activities, which had led to government persecution of their fathers. April came to the U.S. to live with her father. None of the women were jailed, though June's father had been. All of the participants knew people who had been incarcerated and tortured. A common situation was discussed by Mary:

> Um, the reason why my family come to the United States is because, um, back then during the war, my dad worked with the American force… he was the interpreter and also, uh, in a medical field, to be interpreting …

um, and after, after the war, um, the American soldiers came back to the
United States, and they make it harder for the family that works for the
Americans solider. So my dad would never be in peace, you know? They
would always be like, questioning and all that stuff. So, my dad decided to
come here, you know, to bring all of us, cause, like, my sister and I and all
of us, it's harder for us to go to school because of that reason. You know,
because of that, because my dad has worked with American…

Timothy also reported about the situation for Montagnards in Vietnam: "Because if you
Christian you cannot go higher in school, you cannot get job, after you graduate doctorate
degree engineer, because your family, your parent are Christians, you know, that, that,
that is, not valued at all, that is why we are, this country, that we practice all respect."

This was is not a community of immigrants who chose to leave their country of
origin and settle in a new country for reasons of personal fulfillment, political beliefs, or
seek a better life and economic success, though those subjects certainly came up in
conversation with them. This was a community who was forced to flee their native
country out of fear for their well-being and the well-being of their families. Their
experiences were influenced by this refugee status. Their identities were wrapped up
with having escaped persecution; their personal narratives, especially those of the men,
were intimately based on this history.

Presentation of Faith and Religion; Range of Religious Experiences

All of the participants were Christian, and all presented their faith as very
important in their lives. June said "I feel better when I go to church." Several
participants told me their conversion stories, and how they came to have their faith. It
was not unusual to have converted to Christianity during times of dire trouble in

Vietnam. All participants emphasized that what they believe is very important to them.

For example, Bob described his new-found faith to be like rain on a dry season.

> And, I know, when I was incarcerated, in North Vietnam… They try to brainwash us, you know? But I hate that ... you know, when I was young, I hate, I don't want to read the Bible... I didn't want to read the Bible… only thing I read about is, you know, many different things, like you know, sex, stuff like that only. You see?
>
> … But, I don't know, there's something very, very strange, you know, eh, because we were, a bunch of us were incarcerated together, Buddhist monk, you know, the the the Catholic fathers, and uh, uh, a number of Protestants, you know, uh, like reverends, were in jail with us… But, you know, the Communists burn all the documents, including any Bible, any books, any stuff like that. A couple of us stack by… the next day, one of our inmate had to get all that dump them out with shovels, but that Bible didn't get burned out, I don't know why. [laughing] Just a little New Testament, but in English!
>
> So that guy … found that little little New testament, did not get burned out. … [laughing] He didn't know, what what what is it, what it was, you know... and uh, he give that new Testament to a preacher, you know, that were incarcerated with us... and he opened it up, and it's in English! Nobody be able to read English there in! So I was... I was underneath of him because they had two levels... So he said, hey, Bob, can you please come up? I said okay, so I walk up, because... we, we were scared because you know, so many have to report to Communist agent, so I get up, so I opened, and it was John, chapter 11... uh, I said, It says John Chapter 11, I'm the life and resurrection, you believe in me, even though you die, you will be alive. That what it says here… So since then, I started, you know, I got nothing to read, but I don't know, just like dry season, I get water, so I started to read translated, for 8 years like that!

Despite strong faith on the part of many community members, they interacted

with their church in a variety of manners. Church and faith were considered to be

different by participants, and in fact, religion and faith were often carefully separated by

those interviewed. As Sam, a community leader, said: "But the main point of my faith is

concentrate what I believe in my heart, that's more important than the church." This was echoed by James: "But I still believe in God. I believe in God. But that doesn't mean you go to worship." A strong faith does not always mean weekly attendance at church. This was made evident by an offhand comment by Cindy regarding her church attendance, "I go to church. Every Sunday. ... No, not every Sunday. Sometimes." At this point, she grinned largely. "Probably skip once a month. [laughing]."

Given this separation, what roles do religion and church play in the community? For Sam, organized religion is a way of monitoring and perhaps controlling the community:

> … I go to church to, uh, all the Montagnard church. One week over here, one week over there, I just go around…. I not belong to one church…. Well, when we first came here, like, um, because we were Christian, even though we lived in the jungle, we still practiced Christian, we worshiped God in the jungle, and when we first came here the first church we set up, I myself set up that church, like, uh, Montagnard Bible Church, International Bible church. And then, right now, more and more and more Montagnard came here, and then we have more dialect, and then they start to create new, each group, different dialect, they go to their church, now we have too many church, more than 20 churches… And I don't know which church I belong to, I just go to this church next week, and then next week go over there, just to observe and study, I want to see how my people go up, [unintelligible], monitor activity. I learn from them.

Sam also described church as an important center of the community: "Well… it is important for me, but uh, church is like, the, more like the place to meet people, to mobilize, or to social a little bit, beside worship God." This thought was echoed by Mary, who said "I think church is also, is important to my life, because you know you got, uh, to be, you know where you're at, and you know where you're group are at, you

40

know, so, being in church is important. That's… it's like you know that you're going to be there on Sunday, and that you're going to see your people in the Sunday. You know that you need to see all, everybody in community on Sunday."

However, this experience of community is not universally shared, even by people who attend the same church. John is a part of the same Protestant congregation as Mary:

> **Joyce**: Um, do you have friends at church?
> **John**: No.
> **Joyce**: No? Do you just go to church, then come home?
> **John**: Yeah. [laugh]

This is consistent with my observations of a Sunday service at that church; socialization, if it was going to occur, happened before church; after church, everyone left immediately.

It was interesting that two people belonging to the same congregation would have such different experiences. These two people differed based on gender and on time in the United States. Mary had been in the U.S. for half of her life, in contrast to John's year and a half. Also, Mary came to the United States as a teenager; John came as an adult. It would seem that these two issues together were the differentiating factors for them. This has not been an uncommon finding (Baer & Schmitz 2007; Harley & Eskenazi 2006).

Mary found church to be a center of community; John seemed indifferent to issues of church and community. However, in contrast to both Mary and John's experiences, some people found that church was an issue that divides the community.

> **James**: But I'm not happy, the way our community acting, break apart...
> We break apart, everything, like different group, different party... we get
> angry at each other…

41

> **Joyce**: That makes sense. So it's not just one community anymore.
> **James**: You know... which one I go? Because we have two different party, different church, it doesn't make sense. Right? We supposed to be one… I don't blame with the Catholic. Catholic, they have their own church, and then Protestant…There's a lot of different Protestant. A lot of different groups, a lot of different... and then you know how to create by yourself, be a pastor, and now that you have a pastor, you created a new church. [sounding agitated] And how much you are here? And now, that church only about 10, that church about 15, that church about 20. And for me, I don't know where I'm going. And I just stay home… I don't know where I'm going. Too much the Montagnard, too much the Montagnard church now.... I don't want to go there.

James felt that the community was too splintered and too split apart (though he is quick to state that he doesn't blame the Montagnard Catholic community for this split; they have their own faith and own needs.) The Protestants interviewed all attend Montagnard churches, and there are several Montagnard Protestant churches in Greensboro. James feels that there are too many churches for the community to hold. Two of these Protestant congregations were observed for this project.

One large congregation holds services in Rhade. This church, the one attended by Mary and John, was observed during a regular Sunday service, and both John and Mary's points of view were evident: before the service, there was visiting among friends, mostly between women and children. Most of the congregants observed gender segregation, though a few young men chose to sit with their families. After the service, everyone promptly got into their vehicles and left. Only Montagnards were in attendance.

The other Protestant church that was observed during a special multi-denominational Christmas service, included a cross-section of the Montagnard community, with attendees ranging in age, dress, language, and apparent economic

position. Except for a handful of visitors, all attendees were Montagnard. This church serves a cross-section of the Montagnard community even during normal circumstances; services are conducted in five tribal languages and English. In doing so, the church works not only to make their services understandable to the entire community, but to preserve their language. Of the church, Timothy said "Yea... that is you know, kind of United Montagnard church, is mean all come together, all join together only one. Tried to get, let everybody seated that is the fairest, what we practice here." While in Vietnam, tribes that lived together would have spoken the same language and practiced their religion together (Bailey 2002); here, accommodations are being made to construct a united community. The face of the church in the community and a space for different groups in that church has had to be renegotiated in the United States (Calvalcanti & Schleef 2005). Moreover, this is not just a religious space, but a community space – the visitors to this service were people outside of the community who are important to the community, such as ESOL teachers and other volunteers. At the end of the service, these visitors were acknowledged for the contributions to the community and gifts distributed to them. Interestingly, the children's choir at this service wore Santa hats and sang Jingle Bells. This church seems to be negotiating a unique religious and cultural space in Greensboro. While James' point that there are too many churches for the community to hold might be valid, there also seems to be an effort by the churches observed to hold the community together.

The Greensboro Montagnard Catholic community, on the other hand, is not big enough to support its own congregation; instead, they attend a local Catholic church

43

which hosts two English services as well as Spanish and Vietnamese masses every Sunday. The early service is a pan-ethnic service that is conducted in English. Montagnard, Vietnamese, African-American, and Caucasian worshippers were present. A Vietnamese priest led the service, with a Montagnard deacon assisting, a Caucasian reader, and an African-American acolyte. Members of the congregation sat in the sanctuary and visited between services. This church is, by all appearances, a social community as well as a religious community, and one that is racially and ethnically diverse. The church was a place to meet people and socialize. However, the church offered social services to the community as well. For example, Fred stated that this Catholic church offers translation and transportation services, as well as after-school tutoring for children. Translation services include dealing with the court system and police if a community member finds themselves in legal trouble. These services are offered in part through the Catholic Extension Society. Here, the church fills the same social service role that Mira and Lorentzen (2002) found in the Pentecostal church in San Francisco filing.

In sum, faith was expressed as very important to the participants. Church was also important to many participants, though faith and organized religion were considered separately by all participants. Church was a center for community, though some participants were concerned that this might not continue to be the case in the future (as seen in James' concerns about the growth and splintering of the community.)

Presentation of Acculturation and Range of Acculturative Experiences

Acculturation was operationalized in this study through a variety of indicators. These included language use, food, media use, clothing, and general feelings about the United States.

<u>Language</u>

Language use ranged widely, even within a group of people who all speak English to some extent. The level of English the participant had depended on how I was introduced to them. Participants referred to me by people from outside the community were likely to have higher levels of English (the person who referred June commented that she was the only Montagnard he knew who spoke English). Participants referred from within the community were likely to have lower English skills.

John and April, who are currently enrolled in ESOL classes, were the least fluent in English. John was willing to speak in English but used very simple sentences. In class, he switched to his native language at every opportunity. April had only been attending classes for about six months, but was much more fluent. She attended class four days a week and attended an evening class twice a week as well. She did not have a job and was able to spend more time studying than John, who had a full-time job. However, even with her extra study time, her English (while more proficient than John's), was still very straightforward, and more complex concepts were difficult to communicate during the interview.

In the middle range of language usage were the older men. They all spoke English well, though with some misused words, and with fairly heavy accents. During

interviews, I often had to ask for clarification on a word or two, or hope that the word would become apparent from context while transcribing.

The younger women were the most fluent in English. June, who had been in the United States the shortest amount of time, reported that at home, they speak "Sometimes, English, sometimes Jarai and Rhade[3]" (June 2008). Mary, who was fluent, but spoke with an accent, said, "I speak English and of course, Rhade and sometimes Jarai, my husband, he's Jarai."

Finally there was Cindy, who spoke English fluently and with only a slight accent. On the phone, I would have thought she was a native speaker. She also spoke Spanish fluently. However, on the subject of language at home, she said:

> … I, we speak English here, you know at work. And people, especially [supervisor's name redacted], he can't understand speaking in my language, and I have lots of people who come back and forth, different people, Spanish, English, and uh, Montagnard, Dega, and uh, Vietnamese people come over. Every day, I have to deal with the language.
>
> But when we are at home, pretty much at home, we speak Vietnamese and Montagnard, because the kids are speak Vietnamese because their daddy is Vietnamese and English, and um, I speak Montagnard, that's my language. So I have to keep the language, but pretty much, a lot, you know all the kid, it when they got home, when they by themselves, we ask them in our language, but they answer always English. [sounds amused]

Thus, even Cindy (who was very comfortable speaking English) tried to speak her native languages at home, though this effort meets with mixed success with her children.

Respondents uniformly reported that their children and grandchildren preferred to speak English, and would actively speak English at home, even when their parents and

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[3] Jerai and Rhade belong to the same language family (Bailey 2002).

grandparents request that their native languages be spoken.   The older men especially

reported asking their children and grandchildren to use their native languages while at

home. How children used language was also observed at church services attended:

parents and other adults spoke in a mix of native languages, with some English (generally

when directed at myself or other visitors); however, children uniformly spoke in English,

even when addressed in a non-English language.

<div align="center">Food</div>

Food was another interesting topic with those interviewed. All but two

respondents reported enjoying eating and cooking native foods (rice, vegetables, fish, and

some chicken) more than American foods. As Bob put it, "Well, quite frankly, you know

I… American food I don't like as much."

On the other end of the spectrum, Cindy was eating Taco Bell for lunch when I

arrived for the interview.   Cindy states that she ate a variety of food in general. On

cooking at home and her children, Cindy reported that the food she made at home for her

family is a mix of her native cuisine and American food. She stated that her children like

American-style foods such as macaroni and cheese, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches,

and fast food. James was the other participant who reported eating mostly American

food. He cited a lack of time as the cause for his food choices.   "For me, I eat all

American food. [laughing]… Yeah... sometime junk food. Well, you know, I live by

myself, I have no time to cook, sometime I cook, I don't like to eat it. You know…. I go

out there, I go to K&W, I go to the McDonald's, I mean whatever, I get pizza, I eat it."

Mary, June and Fred reported that their children and grandchildren wanted to eat

all American food. Fred expanded on this theme:

> **Joyce**: What kind of food do you guys eat, is it American, or is
> it… ?
> **Fred**: Anything.
> **Joyce**: Anything?
> **Fred**: Anything. But they [his grandchildren, Cindy's children] pizza,
> pizza and hamburgers and …
> **Joyce**: Hot dogs and hamburgers…
> **Fred**: [agreeing noises] But they eat also what grandma cook.
> **Joyce**: Oh, okay. So they do eat what grandma cook, but they like the
> pizza and the hamburgers and the hot dogs…
> **Fred**: Right. And if there is something like that, they'll grab for it.

In sum, those interviewed mostly preferred their native food (with the exception of James

and Cindy, to an extent); however, they report that this is not the case for their children

and grandchildren, who have been born in the United States and grown used to eating

American food, even if their parents fix their native food at home. Children and

grandchildren eat American food at friends' homes and at school.

Television

On the subject of media consumption, responses were varied. Bob reported a

focus on educational programming for himself – the military channel and the Discovery

channel, as well as the health channel. However, he stated that his grandson wanted to

watch the Cartoon Network. This was echoed by Cindy:

> **Cindy**: They watch a lot, um, cartoons? The Disney channel. All kind
> of... you know, Disney Channel have different kind of culture there... and
> uh, they love getting to computer for YouTube.
> **Joyce**: [laughing] Yeah, I like YouTube myself, so I can understand that.
> What about you, what do you like to watch? Do you watch TV, do you
> have time for it?

> **Cindy**: Um, I like to watch uh, pretty much, Yeah, the channel 73, like, uh, Disney channel, and news like weather news, and um, read some magazine, Vietnamese, or you know, different uh, out there magazine. Whatever the world talking about. And, uh, watching movie, Asian movie, yah, especially with the Chinese fighting. Martial arts. And um, pretty much... and uh, listen and uh read, the book about my, um, uh... business. You know. That's all.

To summarize, Cindy also focused much more on educational programming than her children, who enjoyed cartoons and the variety of media available at YouTube. This interest in American popular culture by children was also expressed by James. James reported that his daughter enjoyed watching Hannah Montana, an interest that James did not pretend to understand.

Interestingly, Mary reported that she enjoyed consuming media in English more than in other languages. June, the youngest of the young women, reported enjoying cartoons, explaining that they helped her with her English.

<div align="center">Clothing</div>

Clothing is one measure of acculturation, culture, and cultural identity used in many studies (Jain & Belsky 1997; Chuang 2006; Bhui *et al* 2004). Bhui *et al* (2004) used clothing choices as part of a schema to assign cultural identity. In the Greensboro Montagnard community, clothing and appearance are, perhaps, indicative of levels of acculturation. Older men who came across as generally less acculturated were dressed in many, non-matching layers and seemed to be less concerned with American fashion. James, one of the more acculturated of the older men, was an exception to this statement. He was neatly dressed in American style clothes – slacks, button down shirt, and ball cap, all coordinated – both during the interview and in other subsequent interactions with him.

He was interviewed in his work setting, as were other male participants, and he was the best dressed of the men. The women interviewed uniformly dressed in American-style clothing. In casual situations, this included khakis, jeans, sweaters, t-shirts, and blazers; in more dressy situations or at church services, this included long skirts, cardigans, flat shoe or flip-flops, and pullover tops. Younger women observed at church dressed in typical American clothing. Older women observed in the ESOL classes and at church services were visually identifiable as immigrants or refugees: they were dressed in long, colorful skirts and dresses (almost never in pants), and in many layers, almost never matching.[4]

April was perhaps the most acculturated participant in terms of clothes, appearance, and general personal presentation. I interviewed her at work, where she is an insurance agent. After the tape had stopped rolling, she offered her business card. Neither her first nor last name make her identifiable as a person of foreign origin. She chose a first name that wouldn't be identifiable as ethnic and that would be easily pronounceable; presumably she had her ex-husband's English last name. She also had a very nice, professional quality picture on her business card. When I complimented her on it, she stated that she felt that one needs to look nice in order to sell goods and services, and that you sell more when you're attractive. That day, she was dressed in American business casual during the interview – slacks and a turtleneck sweater, and she had her hair pinned up. She was wearing discrete make up. April had not only adopted

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[4] I am told that Vietnam, especially the jungle areas inhabited by Montagnards, has a much more tropical climate than North Carolina. This partially explains the multiple layers, even during warm weather. Most of the Montagnards I interact with on a regular basis are always cold.

American dress, but internalized American standards of beauty and the idea that beauty can be important to American business.

<center>Feelings about Living in the United States</center>

Perhaps more vague but still interesting are findings about general feelings about living in the United States. Reactions to living in an adopted homeland can often be mixed; the combination of adjustment to their adopted land, relief at the freedom and economic prospects in their adopted land, and the maintenance of both symbolic and actual ties to their homeland may combine to create a double consciousness for immigrants and refugees. They are at once both living in the United States and participating in social life here, but may also still "reference [their homeland] as home" (Gibau 2005:534).

This sort of mixed reaction to living in the United States was seen among the participants in this research. Most of the older men were happy about their life in the United States, and grateful for their lives in the United States, but reported missing their home in Vietnam very much. As Sam said: "Why we have refugee? … it's not for, like people want to come to United States. My people, we don't want to come to United States, definitely. We want to have our own country, we want to have our own government." He echoed this sentiment again later on:

> We want to be able to have like a country like any other country in the world. So we rule our own people, we control our own people, it's much better, than a strangers come to our, to your country, you know, to rule you. We don't Vietnamese law, most Montagnard don't know how to speak Vietnamese, and that totally different. We are not Vietnamese.

<center>51</center>

> That's what the best of free life over here. However, even though we like the United States, like temporary place for us, but our… our mind is still in, into the people back home.

Bob also said "I will go home whenever no more Communists. I mean, no more Communist regime out there." This desire to return home is not unusual for persons who have been displaced from their homeland (Gibau 2005).

On the other hand, Fred had a different story than some of the other participants: "Really, I, I, I, visit two times. And then, I miss my, uh, my old way of life, probably… When you're, you're staying this place, then I miss this place, I don't know why, everywhere I go back to Vietnam, and uh, just wait until I come back here." James also thinks of the United States as home: "But over here, this is my last country… I will die here. That's it."

June reported enjoying life in the United States, but missing family in Vietnam, as did April. When asked about what she thought becoming American meant, June replied: "I'm not an American. I'm a refugee." Cindy felt completely the opposite of Sam: "And I um talking about the culture, um, I like it here... the culture you know you keep what you gotta keep but you know um, I'm pretty much like, I grew up here. Here in United States, and um, I like the way I live right now." Clearly, conceptions of home were different for different respondents, depending on a host of factors, such as their social circumstances, why they left Vietnam, and how old they were when they arrived.

Overwhelmingly, the respondents reported that the freedom and opportunity of the United States were the best parts of living in the United States. When I asked John

what he liked about living in the United States, he emphatically responded, "Freedom."

However, along with freedom comes greater economic needs and responsibility than there were in Vietnam: Recall that many Montagnards lived subsistence-style lives in Vietnam, growing their own foods, building their own homes, and not relying on outside employment (Zhou 2002; Hickey 1982). Having to leave home suddenly combined with time spent in refugee camps may mean that Montagnards and other refugees come with less in the way of personal and financial assets than other immigrants (Zouh 2002). Combine their life in Vietnam with a lack of English and job skills in the United States, and several participants understandably expressed concern about the economic responsibilities and pressures of living in the United States. Fred said "What's best? Freedom, of course. And then you pay tax" and Bob stated "Well, you know, life's a lot easier than back in Vietnam. As long as you get money."

In sum, participants enjoyed living in the United States. Conceptions of home varied – some participants, mostly younger, think of the United States as home, and some older participants wish to return home to Vietnam. Concerns about economic needs tempered enthusiasm about the freedom and opportunity to be found in the U.S.

Patterns of Acculturative Experiences

<u>Generational Differences</u>

Regardless of the exact experiences reported by each respondent, there were generational differences reported. All participants reported conflict with their children over food, language, clothing, media consumption, school, and manners. Of course, some of this conflict is generated by normal generational tensions. For example, Fred

53

complains that his children and grandchildren abuse his hospitality:

> Uh, every day, before and after, because the parents go to work by 6 something, and then come back by 4, some of them still there, and then I … if they, they work for manicure, and they go back home by 9. So what can you say, they are there all day, they are to stay… they use all our facility there, they use our electricity, they use our house, they use our food, when their parents come they eat our food, and then when they come home they sleep. That's all they do. What can I say? Nothing. I'm the grandfather, you know?

However, when one throws cultural differences into the mix, normal conflicts between generations can become more complicated and difficult to deal with easily (Manoogian, Walker, and Richards 2007). There are several tensions at work here. Parents want their children to learn about and remember their cultural roots. However, children often desire to fit into the dominant culture of their adopted homeland. Parents feel pressure from children to not push the acculturation issue. Also, parents want their children to be successful in their new homeland while remembering their cultural roots. Finally, as parents begin to acculturate, their ability to pass on their cultural heritage may fade. Altogether, the situation may become difficult. Manoogian, Walker, and Richards (2007), in research about Armenian immigrant families, found that conflicting feelings on heritage and culture could create difficult situations: "Even though I resented [my mother] for some things, I guess. I don't know. You got those damn mixed feelings!" said one respondent (584). Other researchers found much the same situation (Shams 2006; Koning 2005).

Even when there were not generational tensions, there were generational

differences, as a story from Bob illustrated.

> **Bob**: Well, you know, we, we don't want our children, I mean you know, to lose our own culture, because if they don't remember who they are, they think that they are - but we want to keep that culture too, especially with my grandchild at home, in my house now, I said now look, you must speak Montagnard, cuz you are, original is Montagnard. You don't really keep Montagnard, your own culture, your own dialect, but in school, but you must speak English totally, you learn anything you want to learn in school. You know, he's learned Spanish! And only the family speak Montagnard. And in the morning, you know, because I have my satellite radio, I mean TV, that that that teaching Vietnamese for Vietnamese comedy in California, he stare at that, "No, I don't like that!" [laughing] "I can't understand that!" But you must learn. Cuz, you know, just uh last year, I sent him back, he went back to see the family in Vietnam, and he just like ugly duckling! [laughing]
> **Joyce**: Oh, no. Poor kid.
> **Bob**: He he he saw all VCs around him, communist agent you know, uh, of course Vietnamese authority, the VC all over in Vietnam. He called me, he said to his mom, I want to talk to Grandpa, call him. You know, a lot of people come, I said hey, grandpa, so, many VC around me. [dies laughing]
> **Joyce**: He was what, 6 then, if he's 7 now?
> **Bob**: I said, you want to stay there? He said, No, I want to get back home!

There is much to be seen about conflicts between generations in this account. First is Bob's commitment to preserving his native culture for his grandson. However, the grandson is resistant to this idea. Finally, there are competing ideas of home at work – in Bob's mind, he was sending his grandson home to see the family; however, for his grandson, the United States is home.

Some members of the community work hard to preserve their native culture for their children and grandchildren. It addition to efforts at home to enforce the use of cultural artifacts such as native language and food, other, larger efforts are being made.

> **Sam**: Well, we try to keep our own culture to be alive. That's why we have like, the, a cultural center in Asheboro. I built that and I work on that on every Saturday. My schedule, Monday to Friday I work at [the] office, Saturday I go to Asheboro, that's our schedule, regularly. Sunday in the morning, worship God, go to the church, afternoon, I gather all my member, planning, or have a small meeting, to discuss what going on in community. We have 104 acre over there, we try to put [unintelligible] right now, to show to our children, um, how our ancestor live in Vietnam.

This community is working to build cultural spaces connecting the culture of their homeland to their adopted land. Every year, there are two large celebrations at the cultural center in Asheboro. Persons outside of but close to the community are invited to attend.[5] The community is working to share its cultural heritage with both their children and their friends in the United States, and to create social spaces where that can occur (a mark of transnational communities.)

Gender

Another possible pattern which was not explored in depth was gender. In the general population in Vietnam gender roles are becoming more "modern." The age at first marriage is rising and incidence of arranged marriage is falling, though family structures in general may be staying the same (Williams and Phillipguest 2005; Hirschman & Nguyen 2002). However, informants report that this is not the case in the Montagnard community, and that gender roles are more traditional among Montagnards in Vietnam. For example, if resources are only available to send one child to school, male children will be sent over female children.

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[5] I was invited to the 2008 Memorial Day picnic but was unable to attend.

Here in the United States, it appears that younger women are rapidly equalizing gender roles in the community in Greensboro. Younger women drive, work and attend school. In general, the younger women interviewed seemed to be very independent. The independence shown by these young women was perhaps best illustrated by June. In many households, an older man (usually the father of the family) was the first who came to the United States. He would set up house, and then send for his family as fast as he could afford to and get the paperwork approved for them. In many households in the community, children and grandchildren still live with their parents. However, June preceded her father to the United States. I interviewed June when she had come to pick up her father from work, as she drives but he does not. I asked about living arrangements and whether she lived with her dad. She replied, laughing, "My dad live with me!"

As for the other women, April lived with her father before he passed away, and now lives alone. She is learning to drive. She is eager to improve her English skills and to begin working. She is nervous about the possibilities of life in the United States on her own, but excited as well. She is also beginning to serve as a spokeswoman for the community.

Cindy is divorced from an American man and lives with her children. She has a job, has completed school, drives, and in all other ways seems to function as an independent American adult, as does Mary, who lives with her husband and three children. Mary and June are both married to Montagnard men. None of the women interviewed live with their parents currently.

These changes in gender roles are not unusual among immigrants and refugees to

the United States and similar countries, such as Canada. One study found that "migration has partly released the Vietnamese woman from the former familial world of housework by virtue of her participation in the Canadian labor force" (Bun & Dorais 1998:302). However, these differences for women are the result of many factors: changes in the status of women often rely on economic status (Bun & Dorais 1998), which in turn relies on English skills, education, and job skills. Three women interviewed – Mary, Cindy, and June – are relatively young, came here at a young age, and finished their education here. They speak English and are able to work. April, on the other hand, does not speak English well enough to work, and so, despite her independent attitude, is not able to be self-sufficient yet. Moreover, older women in the ESOL classes that I assist with who do not speak English generally do not work, and describe a traditional family life – they cook, clean, and take of their children and grandchildren while their husbands work. Fred described this sort of situation when speaking of his wife: "She doesn't go to work and [she] take[s] care of the babysitting of the grandkids." Gender roles may be changing, and the question bears more investigation.

Interactions Between Religion and Acculturation

Interactions between religion and acculturation were not consistent for community members, even those who attended the same church. John and Mary, who attend the same church, have had very different experiences. Mary came to the United States as a child and has been here for more than half her life. On the other hand, John has been here for less than two years. Mary holds an important place in the lay

leadership of the church, as does her father; John appears to have few, if any, social connections at church. Mary refers to church as a place to see members of the community, not just as a place of worship. John refers to church only as a place to worship, then leave. Mary's length of time in the United States, her father's social connections, and the age at which she came to the United States are all converging to influence Mary's religious experience in the United States, as well as her acculturative experience. John, having been in the United States for far less time, is less socially connected. This lack of social connection is reflected in his religious experience. Cindy and her father Fred also attend the same church, and both are fairly acculturated; however, she is more acculturated than he is.

Religious environment may influence acculturation, and acculturation may affect religious participation, but it is difficult to describe a consistent pattern from this small sample. The Protestants in the sample all attend churches that are made up of only Montagnards. While most of the Protestants were more or less acculturated, the older men reported wanting to go home if it were possible. On the other hand, April, the most acculturated person of the participants, is Catholic, and as reported, the Catholic church Montagnards attend in Greensboro is multi-ethnic. Her father also attends the same Catholic church, and is fairly acculturated, though not as much as his daughter. Does attending a church that is pan-ethnic influence acculturation in this community, or is it simply an indicator of persons who are already more acculturated? The patterns in these interviews suggest that either might be the case. However, there are certainly other factors at work – April is more acculturated than her father, which is most certainly in

part a function of her age on arrival in the United States. This is also seen when

comparing the Protestant older men and younger women in the sample.

Fred speculated on the state of Montagnard Catholics in Vietnam. Fred fled

Vietnam, not due to religious persecution, but due to being involved politically in a

government that fell. He went on to say:

> The Catholic stay home, they don't… not many Catholic come here,
> because the church, the uh persecution, uh, the persecuted church is more
> the evangelical church, and the Catholic have a base, and we have the
> same Pope and the same Bishop as the Vietnamese bishop, they are more
> or less… they have their own, own uh, level of trust from up here, it's
> spread to our region, to our missionaries of some of these churches, but
> they have that, while the evangelico, is more home type of church, and
> anybody can become pastor, it looks like, you me and everyone, can
> become pastor, and then that is a threat to the Communism, right? If you,
> you stay in one place, they know they control you, you get your stuff,
> there, and now you have to go every family, and now [something] is a
> threat. And that's why we are less prosecuted. To *me*.

For Fred, the nature of his exit from Vietnam was different than most of the sample.

While most of the people in the sample were persecuted on religious and political

grounds, or had family who were, Fred fled strictly for political reasons. He speculates

that this may be the case for other Catholics. Nevertheless, this is only the experience of

one man and his family, which must be kept in mind. There is, unfortunately, a lack of

information about this question in the literature. Thus, this would be an interesting

question for further research, as the nature of exit from the homeland can influence

acculturation in an immigrant or refugee's adopted homeland.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

The guiding question for this research was, "What is the relationship between religion and acculturation in the Montagnard community?" Within this guiding question, the research at smaller questions, including how religion and acculturation are presented in the Montagnard community; what the range of acculturative and religious experiences in the Montagnard community are; what patterns of religious and acculturative experiences are seen in the community; and at whether and how religion and acculturation interact in the Montagnard community.

I found that the acculturative experience the Montagnard community in Greensboro, North Carolina is unique in many ways. This agrees with previous research on acculturation and religion, which found no single way in which these two variables were experienced by refugee and immigrant groups. Indeed, previous research, as done by Calvalcanti and Schleef (2005); Ghorpade, Lackritz, and Singh (2004); Cheah (2002); Mira and Lorentzen (2002); Wang and Yang (2006); Sodowsky and Plake (1992); Kim (2004); and Bazan and Harris (2002) found very different acculturative experiences, depending on the group studied and their social circumstances. This research is firmly aligned with the previous research; it describes a unique acculturative experience created by interactions between many factors. On a community level, this includes the nature of the Montagnards' exit from Vietnam as refugees and their religious faith.

This research also supports previous research that indicates that members within

61

the same ethnic group might not have the same acculturative experience. It is not enough to say that different immigrant groups have different experiences. Individual factors create unique acculturative experiences for each person in the Montagnard community. Wang and Yang (2006) found that Chinese immigrants had different experiences from each other depending on the kind of church they attended; Calvancanti and Schleef (2005) found that acculturative experiences within the same Latino community depended on religiousness. Similarly, I found that even within the Greensboro Montagnard community, there are a variety of acculturative experiences. These experiences were affected by time in the United States, religious denomination, age at arrival in the United States, language ability, and other factors. Factors influencing acculturation also influence each other (for example, time in the United States often influences English ability), further complicating efforts at description.

There are three main themes that developed during this research: acculturation and identity building, faith, and church. Acculturation and identity building are best explained through a transnational lens. All participants interviewed had worked to preserve some aspects of their native culture, while taking on aspects of American culture at the same time. Most seemed to be spanning both Montagnard and American culture, especially those with children – for example, they might enjoy American food and clothing, but speak their native language at home and encourage their children to do so. They might enjoy watching some television with their children but not enjoy all of their children's choices. Most maintained ties with home, communicating with family members that are still in Vietnam and either visiting or sending family members to visit.

They both "resisted and adopted" American culture, as needed (Cheah 2002:417). The

community is also working to create social spaces, both in their churches and at their

community center in Asheboro. These spaces connect the culture of their homeland with

the culture of the United States (for example, the wearing of Santa hats during the

Christmas service, and the invitation of outsiders to the Memorial Day celebration). This

research positioned transnationalism as maintaining dual sets of cultural ties, maintaining

kinship and social networks connecting homeland with adopted land, and the building of

social spaces linking countries of origin and countries of settlement (Light 2002;

Itzigsohn & Saucedo 2002; Min 2002). With this point of view in mind, the participants

had all developed, to some extent, a transnational identity. The people interviewed

conceive of themselves as American, Montagnard, and in one case, refugee, all at once.

For example, Bob was proud of being an American citizen; however, he also expressed a

desire to return home to Vietnam if he could. Cindy was working to keep her language

and Montagnard culture for her children, but at the same time said "I'm pretty much like,

I grew up here. Here in United States, and um, I like the way I live right now." Dual sets

of cultural ties – to their home culture in Vietnam and to their adopted land in America –

contribute to the development of a transnational identity for these participants.

However, I should note that that children and grandchildren born in the United

States of Montagnard parents seem to be becoming much more acculturated than their

parents and grandparents, despite efforts to the contrary. This is in line with the work of

Ghorpade *et al* (2004). Complaints by participants about children's language, clothing,

lack of interest in church, and lack of interest in their native culture were common. Older

members of the community seem unsure about how to deal with this (for example, Cindy commented "There's nothing I can do" when discussing her children and culture.) Second and third-generation Montagnards seem destined to look, act, and identify as more American than Montagnard. Despite this, a transnational framework best explains acculturation in the community currently.

Participants discussed their faith as well as their acculturative experiences. Faith in this community is best viewed through a rational choice lens, as outlined by Stark and Bainbridge (1987). Members of the Montagnard community (especially Protestant members) came to their faith during a time of great strife for their community, when they were being persecuted by the Vietnamese government for their political demands and associations. A community that was already political repressed by the majority government in their country was further oppressed due to their political ties with the American government during the Vietnam War. A religious choice that promises rewards for the strife experienced on earth was a rational choice for many community members. (Other members, of course, base their religious ties on their parents' faith.) A group of people who are already being persecuted relentlessly for their politics were offered a religion by American and French missionaries that promises compensators (heavenly rewards) for the troubles that they were encountering here on earth. I was offered many stories by the older men in this study of how they found their faith – Bob began going to church as a teenager because of the music and to see his friends, but it wasn't until he was in prison camp that he found his deep and revert faith in God and Jesus. In the midst of unimaginable turmoil, he was offered a means of coping with that

64

turmoil, and the rational choice was to take that means. Faith in the Montagnard

community is best modeled by Stark and Bainbridge's rational choice theory.

On the other hand, religion is best viewed as a community-building institution. It

was expected that acculturation would be affected by elements of religiosity and faith,

such as denomination, attendance of co-ethnic churches, and importance of faith in the

participant's life. In actuality, however, religion reflects the person's standing in the

community, social connections, and how acculturated they are in general, instead of

affecting acculturation directly. In other words, religion and the church in the

Montagnard community are social institutions. Many immigrants and refugees might

join places of worship as part of community building even if they are not be terribly

attached to organized religion. Churches and other places of worship serving as both

places for worship and also as centers of "ethnic continuity" (Calvalcanti & Schleef

2005:473-474; Hirschman 2004; Allitt 2003:259). The social services such as

translation, assistance with obtaining jobs, and tutoring offered by area churches speak to

the functions of the church as community centers as well as religious centers. Moreover,

the mentions of church as community, as places to meet people, and especially as places

to organize people by participants, place the church firmly in the realm of building

community and maintaining ethnic continuity among Montagnards in Greensboro. It

seems that the church in the Greensboro Montagnard population can be framed as a

center of community.

Conclusions and Future Research

Observations and semi-structured interviews were used to gather data pertaining

to the research questions. This research found exciting information about religion and acculturation in the Montagnard community. Time in the United States, English ability, social circumstances, gender, age at arrival in United States, generation, and other factors combine to produce unique acculturative experiences for the members of this community.

There are hints at many interesting possibilities for future research, provided that the practical issues that limited this research are dealt with. Among the more interesting possibilities are comparing Protestants that don't attend Montagnard churches with those that do, and investigating the nature of life for Catholics versus Protestants in Vietnam and how that affects life in the United States. The negotiation of gender roles in the community and how those gender roles have changed with moving to the United States also bears considerable investigation. In the end, how the Montagnard community negotiates its identity as an ethnic community and as a part of the United States informs not only our understanding of immigrant communities, but also of ourselves, as we negotiate cultural changes as a society.

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APPENDIX A: ORIGINAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Date:_____/_____/_____

Interview Protocol

Some of these questions will be presented as standardized interview questions, just as they are stated on the interview schedule. These sections will be marked as "[Standardized Questions]". Other questions may be more conversational in tone, and probes may be revised as needed to encourage elaboration on answers. In these sections, if a participant goes off topic, but is providing useful content, probing and follow-up will continue as needed then a redirect to original script may be used. If off topic conversation does not appear relevant, a casual redirect to original script will be made. These sections will be marked as "[Flexible Questions]". Questions are in bold type; possible prompts are bulleted under the questions. Alternate prompts, depending on the participant's circumstances, are indicated with an "OR".

The interview will be audio recorded. Notes of most salient points will be made during interview. Notes will be used to help guide the researcher when looking through transcripts for verbatim answers.

Statement of Purpose and Introduction

The participant will be informed that this project is for a masters thesis at UNCG, and that the interviewer is a graduate student at UNCG. The participant will be reminded that if they are uncomfortable answering any particular question, that they are free not to answer that question, and that they are free to stop the interview at any time if they need to. They will be told that questions can be repeated if need be, and that the aim is to have a conversation, rather than a more formal interview.

Consent

I will verbally ask permission to record the interview and explain that recordings will be used for research purposes only. Participants will be reminded that no identifying information will be associated with the recordings and associated transcripts or notes in order to protect their identity, and that they will be identified by pseudonym in my report.

BEGIN RECORDING

[Flexible Questions]

Background Information

Please tell me a little about yourself.

- How old are you?

- What languages do you speak?

- What kind of education do you have? What kind of school have you had? Did you go to school? Did you finish?

- Do you work? Where?

- Do you go to school now?

- Hobbies? Pets?

- Who do you live with? Are you married or partnered? Do you have children?

- What is your nationality? Are you a U.S. citizen or permanent resident? Do you have dual citizenship?

Please tell me a little about yourself and your family…

- Did you come to the United States yourself?

- [*If participant did not*] Did your parents or grandparents?

- How old were you when you came to the United States?

OR

How old were they when they came to the United States?

- Why did you [OR "your family"] come to the United States?

- Did anyone (people or an organization) help you come to the United States?

- Why did you choose Greensboro?

Culture

Now I am going to read you several questions about culture. Please answer each on a scale of 1 to 5. 1 is that you feel closer to Montagnard culture, 5 is that you feel closer to white American culture, and 3 is equally close to both. I can show you the questions if you would need to read a question to better understand it.

- Which group of people are you the most comfortable being around?

Montagnard
American

1   2   3   4
            5

- In which culture do you know how things are done? [examples: banking, taking the bus, voting, going to the doctor, getting social services]

Montagnard
American

1   2   3   4
            5

- In which culture do you know how to act in most situations? [examples: manners, dress, and customs]

Montagnard
American

1   2   3   4
            5

Now I'm going to read you several statements about language. Please tell me on a scale of 1 to 5 which language you prefer, where 1 is your native language and 5 is English and 3 is equally between the two. If your native language is English, please let me know now.

- I prefer to speak in…

Native language
English

1   2   3   4
          5

- I prefer to think in…

Native language
English

1   2   3   4
          5

- When I am at my home, I prefer to speak…

Native language
English

1   2   3   4
          5

- When I am with my friends, I speak…

Native language
English

1   2   3   4
          5

- When I am with my family, I speak…

Native language
English

1   2   3   4
          5

- I prefer to read books and magazines in…

Native language
English

1	2	3	4
	5		

- I prefer to listen to music in…

Native language
English

1	2	3	4
	5		

- I prefer to watch TV shows in…

Native language
English

1	2	3	4
	5		

- I prefer to watch movies in…

Native language
English

1	2	3	4
	5		

Now I'm going to read you several statements about culture. Please tell me on a scale of 1 to 5 which culture you prefer, where 1 Montagnard culture, 5 is American culture, and 3 is equally between the two.

- I prefer to eat food from…

Montagnard
American

1	2	3	4
	5		

- I prefer to use products from…

Montagnard
American

1	2	3	4

5

[Flexible Questions]

[If the person is themselves an immigrant]

Let's talk a little about life in the United States… do you feel that you have adjusted to life in the United States?

- Do you enjoy living in the United States?

    o Why OR Why not?

- Are you comfortable living in the United States?

- What do you like about living in the United States?

- What do you miss about living in your homeland, if anything?

- How have you kept your culture while living in the United States?

    o Is keeping your culture important to you?

    o Probe on food, language, dress, style, music, dance, dating, etc.

[If the person is not themselves an immigrant]

Let's talk a little about life in the United States… do you feel that your family has adjusted to life in the United States?

- Do you enjoy living in the United States?

    o Why OR why not?

- Are you comfortable living in the United States?

- What do you like about living in the United States? What do your parents or grandparents like?

- What do you think your parents/grandparents' miss about living in their homeland, if anything?

- How have you kept your parents or grandparents' and community's culture while living in the United States?

    o Is keeping their culture a concern for you?

    o Probe on food, language, dress, style, music, dance, dating, etc.

- What do you think your parents/grandparents' miss about living in their homeland, if anything?

Is "fitting in" in the United States a concern for you?

- How well do you feel that you "fit-in" in the United States?

    o In your own community? Among Americans?

- How does your community fit into life in America?

    o Is it a part of general life in the U.S., separate….?

- How much is American culture (music, movies, food, books, languages, slang) a part of your life?

- How does technology fit into your life? The media, TV, the internet? How does this compare to your [OR your parents'/your grandparents'] homeland?

What parts of U.S. culture have you adopted? Are there things you do here that you wouldn't do in your [OR your parents' / grandparents'] homeland?

- Probe on food, language, dress, style, music, dance, dating, etc.

How often are you in contact with family or friends who are not in the United States?

- Numbers of times per week/month/year?

- How do you contact them? Internet, phone, text message, mail, etc.?

Can you tell me about the friends you have in the United States? Are they mostly other Montagnards, immigrants from other countries, people born in the United States..?

- How did you meet your friends here? [OR, *if participant was born in the U.S.*, "How do you meet your friends?"]

- Which groups of people do you feel closest to?

    o Has whom you feel closest to changed during your time in the United States?

    o Did you start out closer to one group, and become closer to other groups over time?

    o [OR [*if participant was born in the United States*] "Has this changed as you've gotten older?" *[if participant is an immigrant themselves]*

What has been the hardest part of "becoming American" since you moved to the United States?

- What was the biggest barrier when you arrived here?

- Do you feel like an American?

- What do you think "being American" is?

[if participant is not an immigrant themselves] What has been the hardest part of "becoming American" for your family since they moved to the United States?

- What was the biggest barrier when they arrived here?

- Do you feel like an American?

- What do you think "being American" is?

Religion

[Standardized Questions]

Now I'm going to ask you some questions about religion.

Are you religious?   Yes   No   Don't know

Are you spiritual, but not religious?   Yes   No   Don't know

[*if reports spiritual or religious*] What is your religion or faith?

85

_____

Do you go to a [church/temple/synagogue/mosque]? *[specific term depends on response to previous question]*

[*if participant reports having a faith but not attending*] Why do you not attend a [church/temple/synagogue/mosque]?

[If participant does attend a place of worship] How often do you go?

[If participant does attend a place of worship] Are most of the people at your [church/temple/synagogue/mosque] Montagnard, white, black, Asian, a little bit of everything?

[If the participant has a religious faith] Do you engage in personal acts of worship on your own? How often?

- Bible study, reading other scriptures, prayer, mediation?

Please rate the following statements for me on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is disagree, 5 is agree, and 3 is neither agree nor disagree.

- I feel connected to a power greater than myself.
- My faith gives my life meaning and purpose.
- I consider my faith as part of daily decisions.
- My faith is an important part of my life.
- My [church/temple/synagogue/mosque] is a central part of my life.
- Religion is important to my family life.

[Flexible Questions]

I see that you do (OR do not) have a particular religion.

- *[If participant does not have a religious faith]* Do you find it difficult not having a religion, when many people in your community are religious?

- How do you think this has affected your life in the United States?

- Do you think it's been easier to adjust to life in the United States, not being religious?

OR

- *[If participant does have a religious faith]* Do you think life is easier for you as part of your community, being religious?

- What about in the United States outside of your community?

- Do you think it's been easier to adjust to life in the United States, because you're religious?

I see that you do (OR do not) attend a place of worship.

- *[If participant does not attend a place of worship]* Do you find it difficult not attending a place of worship, when many people in your community are strongly tied to a place of worship?

- How do you think not attending a place of worship has impacted your life in the United States?

- Do you think you've found it easier or harder to adjust to life in the United States than people you know who do attend a place of worship?

OR

- *[If participant attends a place of worship]* Do you think life is easier for you as part of your community, because you attend a place of worship?

- What about in the world outside of the community?

- Have you found it easier or harder to adjust to life in the United States than people who know who do not attend a place of worship?

- *[If participant does not attend a place of worship]*How has not attending a place of worship affected your social life and social standing in your community?

  o Do you find it easy to make friends or acquaintances? How do you make most of your social connections?

OR

- *[If participant attends a place of worship]* How does your place of worship fit into your social life and affect your social standing in the community?

    o   Are most of the people you know from your [church/temple/synagogue/mosque]?

    o   Are most of your friends from your [church/temple/synagogue/mosque]?

[If the person is not themselves an immigrant] Are your parents/grandparents religious?

- How do you think their religion [OR lack of religion] has affected their adjustment to life in the United States?

Concluding remarks

Is there anything you would like say about the things we've talked about?

Don't forget, if you have any questions about the study after we part today, the information to contact us is on your copy of the consent form. Thank you for your time and help!

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM

Project Title: Religion and Acculturation in the Montagnard Community of Greensboro,

North Carolina

Project Director: Dr. Stephen Sills

Participant's Name:

DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATION OF STUDY PROCEDURES:

This is a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part.
You are being asked to voluntarily take part in this study and to share information about
the role of religion in your life and your and your family's experiences in coming to the
United States. Please take your time to make your decision to participate. Please ask
questions about the study as you think of them.

If you do agree to participate, you will be interviewed for about 1 to 1.5 hours, answering
questions about your religion and culture, and your experiences in the United States. You
will be interviewed once. Any data collected about you will not have your name attached
to it; you will not be able to be identified from data collected from you. In the final
report, you will have a pseudonym.

CONSENT

Be sure to ask questions about anything you don't understand before agreeing to
participate. Again, participation is completely voluntary. You may decide not to
participate in the study at any time, including during the interview. You may choose not
to answer any question you do not want to answer.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:

You may find some of the questions during the interview disturbing or personal in nature.
If at any point during the interview, you are not comfortable, the interview will be
stopped until you are comfortable continuing. If you are not comfortable continuing, the
interview will be stopped completely.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

There are no direct benefits to you from this research. There is no payment to you. You will enjoy a sense of contributing to society's understanding of immigrants, which benefits society in general. Refusal to participate will not affect you in any way.

By signing this consent form, you agree:
- That you understand the research procedures.
- That you understand any risks and benefits involved in this research
- That you are free to ask questions about the study at any time.
- That you are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate in this research at any time without penalty or prejudice; your participation is entirely voluntary.
- That your privacy will be protected because you will not be identified by name as a participant in this project; any data collected about you will never be identified by your name. Neither recordings of the interviews nor notes taken by the interviewer will be identified by name at all during any point in the research.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research involving people follows federal regulations, has approved the research and this consent form.

Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this project can be answered by calling Mr. Eric Allen at (336) 256-1482.

Questions regarding the research itself will be answered by Stephen Sills or Joyce Clapp at 336-334-3696 or via email at sjsills@uncg.edu or jfclapp@uncg.edu.

Any new information that develops during the project will be provided to you if the information might affect your willingness to continue participation in the project.

By signing this form, you are agreeing to participate in the project described to you by Joyce Clapp.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature*   Date

_____   _____
Signature of person obtaining consent   Date