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JWAC Lesson Plan

Bhutan: A Case Study on Ethnic Cleansing

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Warm up: *Are you familiar with Bhutan? If so, what do you know about it?*

Fast Facts:

- The capital, Thimpu, is home to 104,000 people and is the only capital in the world (besides Pyongyang) without traffic lights
- Measures prosperity by Gross National Happiness, not Gross Domestic Product
- Main language: Dzongkha/Bhutanese is official, but used by only 24% of the population—others are Sharchhopka and Lhotshamkha

Discussion: A landlocked country in the Himalayas, Bhutan is not as well-known as its mountainous neighbor, Nepal. With a total population under a million (estimated to be 758,288) Bhutan slips under the radar. Yet the country has impressive environmental initiatives and has even banned the sale of tobacco as a measure to promote the health of its citizens. Bhutan has many positive features deriving from its efforts to maintain Gross National Happiness; however, its history is haunted by events that took place in the 1990s: a forced exodus of the country's Nepalese minority.

Case Study: The Lhotshampa Refugees

Background: A wave of illegal immigration of ethnic Nepalese in from 1950-1980 led to a very large Lhotshampa population, discovered by Bhutan in their first census in 1988. Alarmed by the size of the Nepalese minority, Bhutan implemented several measures to assimilate the population, including mandating Bhutanese cultural dress and forbidding the teaching of the Nepali language in schools. Those who protested these policies were imprisoned, subject to torture and denied a fair trial. Several protests turned violent and led to conflict between the Nepalese minority and the Bhutanese government security forces. Meanwhile, thousands of Lhotshampa were found to be living in Bhutan illegally and were forced out of the country. Many tried to settle in India but were not welcome and were thus displaced once again, and the majority ended up in Nepal, where refugee camp populations peaked at 107,000. Unwelcome back in Bhutan and with Nepal unwilling to absorb them, the refugees remained in limbo for years until the UN began to arrange for resettlement in third party countries.

Activity: *Watch the following video:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0IUuvm1KHA>



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Discuss: How did xenophobia play a role in Bhutan's ethnic cleansing? Do you think Nepal had a responsibility to shelter and grant citizenship to refugees, or do you think their refusal was valid?

Imagine life in a Nepali refugee camp. Go to this link:

<http://bhutaneserefugees.com/camps-tour>

Clicking on each photo will bring up a slideshow with more related photos. Glance through them. What might raising a child in a refugee camp be like?

Recap and Reaching Further: There are some people still living in the camps, waiting to be resettled over twenty years later. However, the majority of refugees have been successfully resettled, making the Lhostshampa resettlement one of the greatest success stories of UNHCR history. This does not negate the fact that the Lhostshampa were expelled from their homes in the first place, however, and the Bhutanese government is still hesitant to accept those who would like to return to Bhutan. *Should Bhutan face consequences for the ethnic cleansing, or would it be better to let the nearly-resolved issue settle on its own?* Many may never get to see their place of birth again, simply because of their ethnicity.

Sadly, Bhutan is certainly not the only country with a history of ethnic cleansing. Keeping in mind that ethnic cleansing does not necessarily mean a genocide, hundreds of minorities have been persecuted at the hands of governments or ethnic majorities throughout history. Ranging from the Native American genocide in the 1800s to the systemic ethnic cleansing during the Bosnian War, ethnic cleansings have taken on many forms. Currently, Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar are being arrested, killed, and forced to flee the country by the Buddhist majority military. Rohingya are being labeled as illegal immigrants and their homes are being destroyed, causing many to flee across the border to Bangladesh, which already struggles with poverty. The Rohingya crisis is eerily reminiscent of the expulsion of the Lhostshampa all but twenty years ago.

Call to Action: Thankfully, the vast majority of Lhostshampa have been resettled, many in the United States. However, this does not mean their struggle is over. Refugees continue to face challenges during resettlement, including learning English, finding work, and caring for children. Many volunteer opportunities to work with refugees are available around the DFW area. The following article has a very comprehensive list of opportunities in Dallas:

<https://www.dmagazine.com/frontburner/2017/02/where-to-help-refugees-and-immigrants-in-dallas/>



Works Cited

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