My research agenda broadly examines refugee resettlement policy and refugee organizations, focusing on labor equity, participative community practice, and policy and social contexts, as dimensions that foreground refugee well-being and socioeconomic integration. Given the heightened salience of refugee resettlement in our post-911 era and contested public imaginaries about the refugee, all the more warranted are serious and critical interrogations of social policies on refugees and current understanding of refugee communities. In social work specifically, inroads have been made in examining refugee health and mental health outcomes and local integration. The complexity of the refugee experience calls for meaningful examination of other dimensions that intersect with refugee well-being and integration, such as those related to employment, participatory approaches to service provision, and the social and policy contexts that foreground the refugee experience. My program of research, including my dissertation project funded by the New York Community Trust Fund for Research in the Human Services, aims to contribute to moving forward the field of social work with refugees, as well as refugee studies more broadly, with new insights and novel approaches. In addition to doctoral academic training and research experience, I draw upon years of engagement with refugee communities, diverse work experience and social work practice, as well as my personal path as 1.5-generation immigrant, to inform and motivate my research, pedagogy and practice.

Research training and experience

Through doctoral training and research collaborations, I gained skills and experience in both qualitative and quantitative analyses, policy analysis, and community-based primary data collection and research. In addition to my dissertation on refugee issues, I participated in research in related areas: low-income immigrant workers, immigrant neighborhood disadvantage and place-based research. First, as part of the UW Minimum Wage Study, I conducted qualitative data analysis by coding and examining interviews with low-income workers, many of whom are immigrants. Our research team is collaborating with the Seattle city government and other institutional partners to understand the impact of recent policy changes on daily lives of workers and their families. Second, in my research practicum with the UW Social Development Research Group, I conducted quantitative analysis of a large data set that examines neighborhood disadvantage among Asian American immigrants from childhood in 1990 to adulthood in 2005. Third, I developed interdisciplinary and place-based approaches as core dimensions of my research, as one of six doctoral students in cross-disciplinary urbanism research team, the Northlake Collective of UW Lake Union Collaborative. Under the mentorship of Dr. Susan Kemp and other faculty mentors, our Collective used innovative methodologies and digital humanities to approach the complexity of the ‘city’ in research and then self-reflect upon transdisciplinary research. Our paper, currently in press with the journal Cities, proposes a new theoretical framework for urban research via transdisciplinary, born-digital research structures.
Dissertation

Resettlement policy, as anti-poverty program for refugees, forwards the goal of socioeconomic integration through appropriate geographic placement and service provision by resettlement agencies. However, refugees and their communities, naturally, very much also determine their own resettlement, via self-placement and refugee-based services. My research examines (a) refugees’ self-placement or internal migration patterns and (b) services and goals by refugee-ran community organizations, and the ways in which those patterns, services and goals mis/align with policy. Empirically, I use quantitative and qualitative methods to examine data from several sources, partnered with several refugee organizations for primary data collection, participant recruitment and analyses, and apply a case study approach, focusing on Bhutanese refugees. The nationwide scope of my research design and quantitative analysis complements existing studies that are mostly case studies focused on two or three locations.

First, I lay the national landscape of arrival placement patterns vis-a-vis internal migration patterns and visually compare resettlement patterns in maps, using the Geographic Information Systems software ARCGIS. I then conduct multivariate analyses using the statistical package STATA to examine city-level factors (using data from the US Census, US Office of Refugee Resettlement and community knowledge) that explain in/out-migration of refugees into new locations across the US. Findings indicate precarious employment and local immigrant policies as relevant factors for refugees’ movement away from traditional immigrant gateways and into new destinations in the midwest and southwest, mimicking domestic paths of economic migrants, including undocumented immigrants.

Second, I describe refugee community organizations’ activities and goals, and then examine congruence with federal policy and implementing organizations. Qualitatively, I use 40 semi-structured interviews and four focus groups with refugee leaders of Bhutanese refugee organizations in 30 cities across the US, using the coding software ATLAS.ti. I identify themes and patterns in the data and posit a typology of activities, and then examine goal congruence between federal policy and refugee organizations. Findings indicate that refugee community organizations fill in gaps in service to complement official service provision and federal policy goals, but are also self-determining in other ways.

Theoretical dimension

I am keenly interested in pursuing theoretical work in refugee studies, aiming to link social welfare scholarship and community-based perspectives with intellectual work in geography, political science and citizenship theory. I frame my own theoretical grounding in a tripartition: (a) place-based approaches out of geography and migration theory; (b) critical inquiry of state practice pertaining to migrants and refugees based on political theory and citizenship theory; (c) practice- and community-informed perspectives and social justice orientation of social welfare scholarship. Social work perspectives, too often missing in theoretical conversations about refugees, can offer fresh, paramount insights about how we think about and engage with refugees and migrants in new communities. One theoretical project written with Dr Yoosun Park of Smith College illustrates how precarious non-citizenship of elderly monoglot refugees augments the notion ‘state of exception,’ as political theory applied to refugee studies. A second


theoretical research project examines human rights discourse in refugee resettlement policy, in collaboration with Dr David Androff of Arizona State University. A third project, my manuscript recently published in Social Service Review (September issue), examines refugee policy and poses theoretical insight on the nexus between state, market and citizenship. Finally, the concluding theoretical contribution of my dissertation project formulates a discussion about refugee resettlement that considers participatory approaches and labor equity as part of socioeconomic integration processes of refugees, as contextualized by locality and policy.

**Future directions**

I envision four broad future research directions. First, I plan to leverage my dissertation research with Bhutanese refugees to pursue similar inquiries with other refugee groups. Earliest phases of resettlement of groups of Syrian and Congolese refugees are appropriate for community-based research. I will work closely with governmental and community partners, targeting specific policy problems and gaps in knowledge. This research agenda fits within the priorities of US Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), the recently-created White House Task Force on New Americans, and state and city governments and non-profit entities. At National Refugee Health Conference in June 2016, I established communication about my research with ORR policymakers, and I am eager to follow those opportunities. Second, I will pursue research related to refugee service provision in mental health and health that incorporate participatory approaches. I intend to seek funding from the National Institute of Mental Health, National Institute of Health and other health institutions focusing on immigrant health, in collaboration with colleagues. Third, I intend to pursue avenues in global social work research and pedagogy. I am part of a team with 12 educator-scholars in Palestine and other countries in the Middle East that examined challenges in social work education in that region, and I am eager to pursue that line of work. Finally, I will continue theoretical work with refugee and social work scholars. I plan to participate in refugee studies international conferences and collaborations, for example, the United Nations’ High Commissioner for Refugees, Oslo Peace Research Institute, and the University of Bergen in Norway, institutions with which I have previously engaged.